



A Discourse-Historical Analysis of Two Iranian Presidents’ Speeches at the UN General Assembly

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Abstract

The present study compared speeches by Iranian President Rouhani, following a moderate political ideology, and his predecessor Ahmadinejad, a seemingly conservative/principalist president, at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. The discourse-historical approach was employed to analyze the two corpora. Other discursual features such as the representation of self and identity were also incorporated into the analysis. The results showed that the two presidents took two different approaches and styles of speech both in the form of delivery and content of their talks. While Rouhani focused on current issues in Iran’s foreign policy, Ahmadinejad made references to the wrong-doings of world powers. Compared with Ahmadinejad, Rouhani followed a more moderate stance in his talk by employing several strategies like keeping use of the pronoun ‘I’ to a minimum and not identifying himself a radical Muslim and savior of mankind. Moreover, the two presidents differed in their employment of premises or ‘topoi’. Findings reveal the role of topoi in uncovering the ideologies of politicians in their public speeches.

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1. Introduction

Politicians are given different badges like extremist, moderate, reformist, and radical, or they are said to belong to one of the wings, left or right, with regard to their political ideologies (Michels, 1968). These various ideological orientations are expressed in their political discourse (van Dijk 1998, 2000). Iran's presidential elections held since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 have witnessed presidents from two main political orientations that is reformists and conservatives. The call for reform and democratic talk with other nations and governments was premiered by the former president Khatami, taking office in 1997 (Sahliyah, 2002).

The period of reform largely ceased when the conservatives came to power by the election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2005 and 2009, which also resulted in the formation of a conservative parliament (Campbell, 2008; Gheissari & Nasr, 2005; Hen-Tov, 2007). The second term of Ahmadinejad, which he won in a so-called controversial election challenged by two of the presidential candidates, led to Iran's Guardian Council's annulling of reformists' right for political activities, which increased political indifference among many people all over the country (Sahliyah, 2010). Ahmadinejad's campaign, marked by the two promises of 'fighting corruption' and 'eliminating income inequality', attracted a large number of people, especially those experiencing economic hardship (Hen-Tov, 2007). After Ahmadinejad's second term, the term of Iran's presidency was taken by Hassan Rouhani. He won the presidential election by a landslide victory in 2013. Unlike Ahmadinejad, Rouhani and his Cabinet are known for their pursuit of a moderate foreign policy throughout their term in the office (Przeczek, 2013). As seen from his electoral campaign, Rouhani is a moderate president (Erdrink, 2013), a point which is backed by his 1999 doctoral dissertation titled "The flexibility of Shariah (Islamic Law) ("GCU Congratulates", 2013) with reference to the Iranian experience" ("GCU Congratulates", 2013), though he was a dedicated supporter of the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Erdrink, 2013). Furthermore, Rouhani was the head of the 'international nuclear negotiations' up to the election of President Ahmadinejad, when he resigned

from his post ("Profile: Hassan Rouhani", 2013).

The political ideologies of these two presidents can be unraveled by drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA). As one of the methods for data analysis within CDA, Wodak's (2006) discourse-historical approach can function to explore the manipulative nature of political speeches and the identity reflected in these speeches in terms of premises or *topoi* which constitute the backbone of argumentation in political speeches. As there seem to be no studies using discourse historical approach (DHA) to analyze political discourse in the Iranian context, this provided the rationale to employ DHA to see if differences in ideological and political identities between the two Iranian Presidents would be observable in their UN speeches in view of the importance of the UN talks in shaping a country's domestic and foreign policies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Identity in Political Speeches

Identity is a complex phenomenon for at least two reasons. The first is that identity is always a construct of interacting social practices, contextually grounded in the actions of agents. Actions can never be analytically separated from human identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Before performing an action, especially in the political arena, building one's own identity in line with the action to be performed is of great importance. Although a large part of one's identity is not conscious, the speaker can do his/her part in projecting the desired identity to the audience. The second reason for the complexity of identity is analytical by nature. The discourses of identity construction lie at the complex intersections of socio-historical practices by which disciplines of psychology, political science, history, sociology, and anthropology are constituted. Identity as an analytical tool in psychology, where the main focus is largely on the behaviors and characteristics of individuals, is often a far cry from identity as an analytical tool in political science, where the main focus is on power and contestations within or between societies (Gumperz, 1982; Strauss, 1997).

There are two predominant assumptions adopted in the conceptualization of identity in

the current study. Identity, whether individual or collective, is always in a state of flux. However, this assumption about identity is not widely held by those researchers who “tend to neglect the internal inconsistencies, tensions and potential re-elaborations of national identity” (Wodak, 2009b, p. 76; for a critique of national identity, see Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 1999). The second assumption is based on the definition of social identity offered by Jenkins (1996), who suggests “minimally the expression [identity] refers to the way in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with [or from] other individuals and collectivities” (p. 4). Language is the primary means of identity construction in social settings and political speeches. As Fairclough (2001) put it, “the identity of a speaker is expressed in the linguistic forms and meanings she chooses” (p. 45). Furthermore, CDA perceives both written and spoken discourse as a form of social practice by which the language users engage in various actions, including identity construction (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 1996).

2.2. Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

As a political discourse research paradigm, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) was developed in a series of manuscripts in Vienna (Wodak, 1994; Wodak et al., 1990). One of the main goals of this approach is to connect and relate as many genres and discourses on a particular issue, along with the historical dimension of that issue.

Three dimensions are central to the discourse-historical method: the content of the data, the discursive strategies employed, and the linguistic realization of these contents and strategies. The researcher in the discourse-historical method starts with the first dimension that is the content of the data, which is mostly linguistic and explores the strategies employed during a certain period of time by certain agents. The final aim of the researcher is to capture and identify the linguistic forms pertaining to those strategies. The word “discursive” used before strategies pertains to the rambling nature of the strategies which may be flexible or fixed in different situations. The historical dimension of discursive acts is addressed in two ways in the discourse-historical method. The first is the

integration of all available information on the historical background and the original sources in which discursive “events” are embedded. The second is the exploration of the ways in which particular types and genres of discourse are subject to diachronic change, an issue also explored in a number of previous investigations (e.g., Wodak, 1994; Wodak et al., 1990).

DHA deals with three types of critiques (Wodak, 2006, p. 65): (1) Text or discourse immanent critique, which tries to discover internal or discourse related structures; (2) socio-diagnostic critique, which tries to uncover the persuasive and ‘manipulative’ nature of certain discursive practices; and (3) prognostic critique, which contributes to the improvement of communication. As Wodak (2006) puts it, to avoid bias in discourse analysis, analysts should follow the principle of triangulation. It follows that one of the prominent features of DHA is the flexibility to work with different multimethodical ‘approaches’ and using various empirical data and background information.

A key concept in DHA is *topos* (plural: *topoi*). There are several definitions and conceptualizations of *topoi* in the literature related to logic and reasoning, especially *argumentation theory*. The concept employed by Wodak (2006) in DHA is a narrow and adapted one. To realize the principle of triangulation, the researchers in DHA employ argumentation theory or, more specifically, *the theory of topoi*. Within argumentation theory, Wodak (2006) proposes that *topoi* or *loci* are the premises, either ‘explicit’ or ‘implicit’, which belong to the argument. She adds that the *topoi* are connected through “the content-related warrants or conclusion rules which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim” (p. 74).

A type of *topoi* in DHA is the intrinsic *topoi*. As argued by Bruxelles, Ducrot, and Raccach (1995), certain lexicons or lexical groups have the potential to evoke a number of *topoi*. In a seminal work, Baker et al. (2008) used key words to identify *topoi* by employing computational linguistics methods. They also used the words ‘topic’ and ‘topoi’ interchangeably. Intrinsic *topoi* are distinguished from the *topoi* which are provoked in the course of an argument (extrinsic *topoi*, dynamic *topoi*). Intrinsic *topoi* are related to

and in a dynamic fashion pave the way for the use of extrinsic topoi which are employed in the argument. Figure 1 portrays the

relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic topoi.

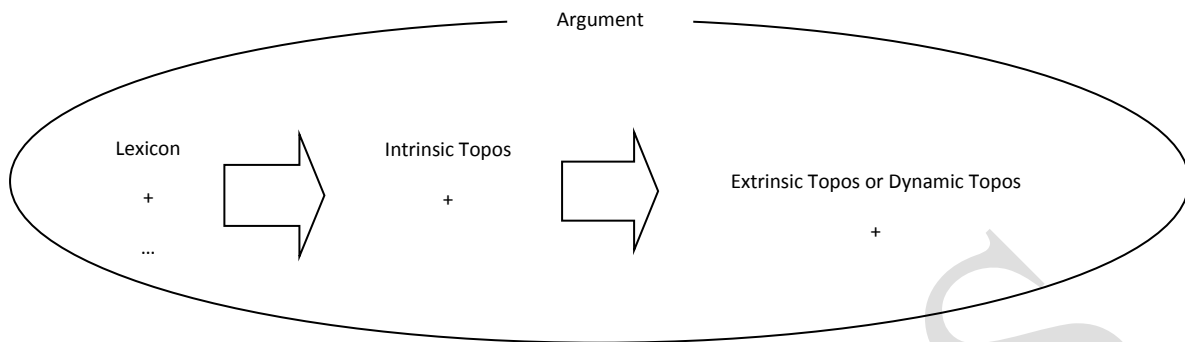


Figure 1

Argumentation Theory Proposed by Bruxelles, Ducrot, and Raccah (1995)

The model described in Figure 1 has two main flaws with regard to the purpose of this study. First of all, provided that an argument can take different forms, it can also be stated that arguments can have more than one participant and that they can be studied in a macro-scale. This view of arguments is very helpful in developing a model of analysis for public political speeches where most of the knowledge is shared by both the speaker and the audience (the public). In every political speech, the public try to get an impression, such as moderate, humble, dictatorial, or radical, from the speech they are given. On the other hand, political speakers try to identify with or distance themselves from certain political parties and orientations through the use of topoi. Thus, there is a purposeful dynamic argumentation going on in a political

speech. Speakers aim to achieve or provoke certain impressions using topoi (intrinsic and extrinsic) and, on the other end, the public employ the topoi to finish the arguments. This is an interactive model of argumentation theory which is not implied by the old argumentation theory.

In view of the above review of topoi, a definition of topoi that is applicable to any utterance can be proposed. Based on the new definition, topoi can be incorporated in a speech through a single word or a group of lexical phrases with several other topoi which together form a topical field (see Figure 2). Thus, as shown in Figure 2, topoi can be related to other topoi in a speech in the way that the argument demands.

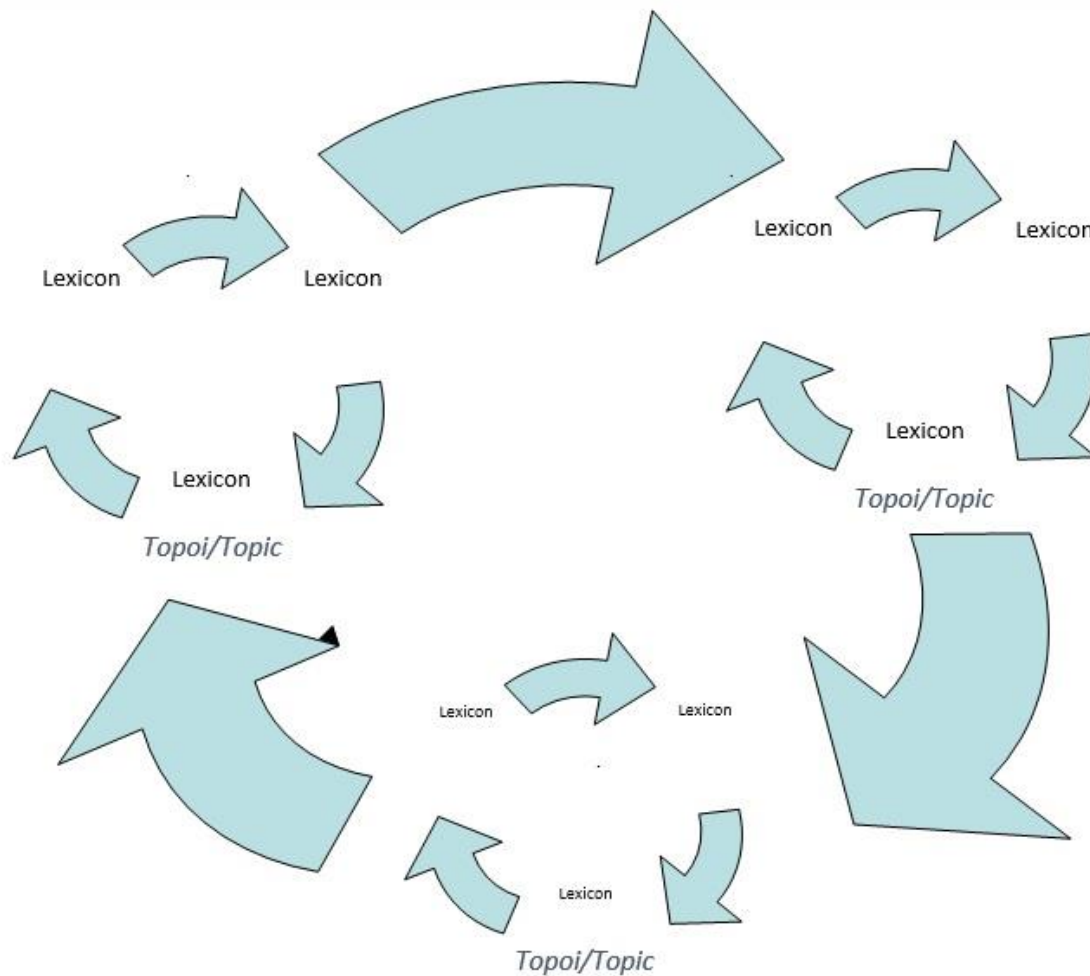


Figure 2

How Topoi/Topics May Be Interrelated in an Utterance

Note: A speech, being a collection of utterances, is full of topoi and the numerous connections that exist between them. Hence, this figure shows the role that lexicons and topics play in a speech.

This study pursued two main purposes. Since the UN General Assembly is the biggest international meeting with over 200 countries' assemblies where major political attitudes are expressed, the speeches delivered by the presidents are of utmost importance. The first purpose was to explore what these speeches could unfold about their presidential identities such as being moderate or radical. The second purpose of the study was to establish a framework for the analysis of political public speeches based on topoi in light DHA (Wodak et al., 1999) without considering the larger history of talks.

With regard to the particular issue under investigation, the present study sets out to

explore if Rouhani, the existing president of Islamic Republic of Iran, and Ahmadinejad are indeed different in the language they employ in their public speeches, the stance they take with regard to global and local issues, along with the social and international identities they build in their international speeches. Hence, this study addressed the following research questions:

- (1) How do Rouhani and Ahmadinejad identify themselves in the UN General Assembly speeches?
- (2) What topics/topoi regarding the world affairs feature in the UN General Assembly speeches by Rouhani and Ahmadinejad?

3. Method

3.1. Corpus

The corpus for this study consisted of the talks by two Iranian presidents, Rouhani and Ahmadinejad, at the UN General Assembly. In order to show the change in Iran's stance on political and international issues, Ahmadinejad's last and Rouhani's first talks delivered respectively on September 26, 2012 and September 24, 2013 were chosen for the study. Rouhani's last speech at the assembly was not selected since it was the beginning of his term of office and hence he had not delivered his last speech at the assembly at that time. Also, the selection of Ahmadinejad's last speech and Rouhani's first speech made it possible to compare speeches with a nearly short time lapse in between so that historical changes in political events would have the least effect on the two speeches.

Although the talks were originally made in Persian, the official translation of the talks in English was analyzed since the international audience was addressed through English. After cross-checking the translation of the talks and their original texts, it was assumed that the content of the talks remained intact through translation. The corpus included 6,636 words, of which 3,970 words constituted the speech by Ahmadinejad and 2,666 words made up Rouhani's speech.

3.2. Data Analysis Framework

The corpus in the study was checked against the audio version of the talks by Ahmadinejad and Rouhani to see if they were exact transcriptions of the talks. The main tool for the analysis was the concept of "topoi" as embedded in DHA. DHA is considered to be an appropriate method for the analysis of political discourse since it can help mediate between discourse and society (Wodak, 2001). Drawing on Wodak (2011), Graham (2003) argues that DHA integrates knowledge about the historical sources and the background of political fields in which discursive events are embedded. Placed at the heart of DHA, topoi are the implicit and explicit premises that the speakers employ to connect their arguments to conclusions. After doing a preliminary observation of the data, topoi were employed as the main tool to analyze the speeches by Rouhani and Ahmadinejad. Topoi helped

clarify the speakers' stance regarding the global and local issues and illustrate and describe the type of relations the speakers were aiming to make with world powers and agents. The coding of the data was cross-checked by two CDA experts to ensure the credibility of the topoi extracted from the corpus.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Identity Markers

The corpus was analyzed to compare the two presidents' talks with regard to the two types of identities: personal and national. In exploring identity pronoun usage, the narratives the speaker uses to make a point and the groups the speaker identifies himself are of key importance (Wodak, 2009). Two main personal identity pronouns were 'self-' and 'I'.

There are several arguments regarding the use of 'I', and whether it can be used to refer to the self in an institutional context. Although the exact role that the pronoun 'I' plays may be controversial, it has a great role in forming identity (Hutchby, 1996; Ten Have, 1991; Tracy & Kaspel, 2004). Taylor and Cooren (1997) argue that "in institutional and organizational speech in general, the first person pronoun may stand for the entire institution of which the speaker is an entitled member" (p. 1123).

The analysis of the two corpora showed how the two presidents opened their talks and how they identified themselves, defined their nations, and described their stances. For this purpose, the opening of the talks was important since the attempts to build identity in particular are primarily initiated in this phase of the talk (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Beasley, 2004; Edelman, 1977). As the analysis revealed, the lower frequency of the pronoun 'I' by Rouhani (Rouhani: 7 times; Ahmadinejad: 11 times) was a tool to lower imposition and enhance the collaborative and negotiating spirit of the talk. The way Rouhani and Ahmadinejad started their talk and the introductions they gave cannot be put in the same category. Introductions by the two presidents varied to a large extent in terms of length and wording. Rouhani gave a very short introduction in around 67 words, as shown in the excerpt below:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds. Blessing and peace be upon our prophet Mohammad, his kin and his companions.

Rouhani simply moved on after he addressed the recent elections in Iran and jumped to talk about global affairs. However, this was not the case with Ahmadinejad, who employed a longer introduction (about 115 words) where he grasped the opportunity to establish his religious position, making several references to the original Islam, as seen in the excerpt below:

All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the world, and may peace and blessings be upon the greatest and trustworthy prophet and his progeny. He has chosen companions and upon all the divine messengers. (inaudible) God hastens the emergence of your chosen beloved, grant him good health and victory, make us his best companions and all those who attest to his rightfulness.

After his quite long introduction compared with Rouhani's, Ahmadinejad continued his talk using a fixed structure, that is *I represent* as in (1) and (2) below, and then moved on to another fixed structure *I am here* as in (3) and (4). In all the instances, he attempted to build what is known as personal identity, which is not observed in Rouhani's talk. Rouhani never

used the pronoun "I," which can be considered a way to lower personalization and imposition (Alavi-Nia & Jalilifar, 2013; Bacon, 2012)

(1) *I represent a great and proud.....*

(2) *I represent a conscious*

(3) *I am now here for the eighth....*

(4) *I am here to voice the*

At the end of his introduction (extract 5), Ahmadinejad stated that in the past seven years he had talked about different issues in the world, both existing and past ones, and that he wanted to discuss the same global issues from a different perspective.

(5) *I have talked in the past 7 years about the current challenges, solutions and prospects of the future world. And today, I want to raise and discuss such issues from a different perspective.*

4.2. Frequent Topoi

At the second phase of the analysis, a list of the topoi used by the two presidents was extracted (Table 1). Table 1 shows the intrinsic topoi employed in the UN speeches of Rouhani and Ahmadinejad. The topoi presented here are all intrinsic since for all of them certain lexicons can be found in the talks and appear in the sequence that they were found in the speeches to provide a better picture of their progression.

Table 1

The Intrinsic Topoi Employed by Rouhani and Ahmadinejad in Their UN General Assembly Speeches

Rouhani	Ahmadinejad
1. World fears (of war , hostile regional, and global relations)	Unfulfilled dreams of mankind on the face of efforts made by righteous people
2. Recent elections (wise choice of people of Iran)	Egoism
3. Changing international relations Some stick to past	Distrust
4. Reliance on old means of superiority and domination	Malicious behavior and dictatorships
5. Militarism	Violating the rights of others
6. Recourse to violence	Humanitarian values are neglected and affluence and consumerism are on the vogue
7. Reservation of old superiorities	The dark age humanitarian values (Middle Ages)
8. Negation of peace, security, human dignity, and exalted human ideals	Period of slavery
9. Ignoring differences between societies	Wars of crusades
10. Globalizing western values	First and second world wars
11. Persistence of cold-war mentality	Wars in Korea, Vietnam, Latin America, and Balkans

12. Strategic violence	Occupation of Palestine
13. Containment policies	Imposition of a fake government
14. Regime change from outside	Displacement and genocide of millions of people
15. Redrawing of political borders and frontiers	Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran
16. Bias in international political discourse	Tragic incident of September 11 th
17. Propagandistic and unfounded phobia (e.g., faith-phobia, Islamo-phobia, Shia-phobia, Iran phobia ...)	Military actions against Afghanistan and Iraq
18. Inculcation of imaginary threats	Killing and execution of Ben-Laden
19. Iranian threat	Resort to terrorism and extremism to secure political goals
20. Arming of Saddam Hossein regime	Beating the drum of religious, ethnic, and racial conflict
21. Supporting Taliban and Al-Qaida	Differences as a way to advance political agendas
22. Violence in West Asia in the last three decades Military intervention in Afghanistan Saddam Hossein's imposed war on Iran Occupation of Kuwait Brutal repression of Palestinian people Assassination of people in Iran Terrorist bombings in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon	Imposition of wars Arms race and intimidation by nuclear weapons of mass destruction Threats by uncivilized Zionists to take military actions against Iran
23. Structural violence practices against people of Palestine Occupation of Palestine Violation of their rights (e.g., depriving them of their homeland and birthplace) Apartheid	Suppressing the criticism of World Zionism
24. Human tragedy in Syria Attempts to militarize Syria Iran's peaceful positioning	Increasing poverty Widening gap between the rich and the poor
25. Support of extremist groups	Rejection of morality as defunct and out dated
26. Terrorism (as a brutal scourge)	Irrelevance of ethics to political and social affairs
27. Unjust sanctions	Imposition of a lifestyle devoid of individual or social identity Organized disruption and damaging of identities Family has been weakened Women's sublime role and personality has been damaged and abused by the powerful and the wealthy Frustration, humiliation, and suppression of human soul Unilateralism and application of double standards Unequal treatment of nations and governments Mistrust in international relations Prevailing feeling of insecurity even in those countries which have a stockpile of atomic bombs Destruction and damaging of environments

Table 2 shows the extrinsic topoi employed and created by Rouhani and Ahmadinejad in their UN General Assembly talks. The intrinsic topoi along with the lexicons in the corpora were used to extract the extrinsic topoi argued by the Rouhani and Ahmadinejad, as shown in Table 2. Extrinsic topoi are those like 'women rights', 'Ati-Zionism' which, despite not being mentioned directly in the

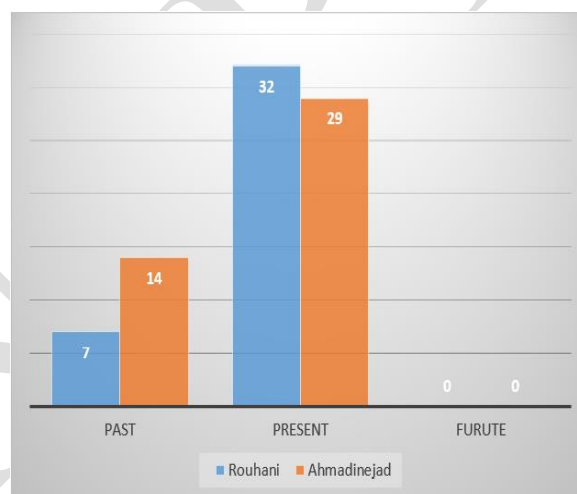
talks using lexicons, still exist. Ahmadinejad presented more extrinsic topoi than Rouhani, which was expected for two reasons. First of all, topoi are generally created, mingled, reshaped, and integrated historically. Second, it was Ahmadinejad's eighth speech at the UN General Assembly while Rouhani delivered his first speech.

Table 2*The Extrinsic Topoi Employed by Rouhani and Ahmadinejad in Their UN General Assembly Speeches*

Rouhani	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Humanitarian values -Military and political Interference -Means of global control -Intimidation and mind control -violence and terror -Atrocities by the USA
Ahmadinejad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Humanitarian values -Human's eternal search for good -Military and political Interference -Women's threatened role and it's causes -Atrocities by the USA -capitalism -consumerism and modern lifestyle -Israel-Palestine Conflict -International stance against Zionism -Ethical politics

The topoi were analyzed from a chronological perspective. They were classified into three time subcategories of past, present, and future (Figure 3). The analysis was done considering the nature of the problem and incident that each of the raised topoi referred to. As shown in Figure 3, Rouhani and Ahmadinejad

differed in the frequency of other topoi related to past and present. Ahmadinejad referred to the past events and issues, even those in the remote history, twice as many times as Rouhani did. Considering the number of topoi related to the present, Rouhani used them more frequently.

**Figure 3***The Frequency of Topoi Used to Refer to Past, Present, and Future by Rouhani and Ahmadinejad*

The topoi employed by the two presidents gave their speeches a certain orientation. Rouhani used general terminology to refer the world issues at the present and in the past. This can be considered a mitigating device and an avoidance strategy in order not to state anything that might threaten the face of a second party. By contrast, Ahmadinejad used a

different strategy by being more precise in naming the incidents (e.g., *September 11 incident in America, Wars in Vietnam, Balkans*). Despite the difference, both presidents avoided the directly attribution of the issues to any agents. Besides, as shown in Figure 3, Rouhani referred more to the current issues in Iran's foreign policy and avoided mentioning

the wrong-doings of world powers as Ahmadinejad did.

The two presidents employed different strategies to refer to the past and make a link between the past and the present actions of some countries. Ahmadinejad did this by citing examples while Rouhani kept referring to the past governments using the adjective "old" as in "*preservation of old means of superiorities*", and hence implying that a new age of international relations is required.

The concept of 'past', as reflected in the two talks, was given different meanings by the two presidents. For Ahmadinejad, 'past' started with the earliest ancestors of mankind on earth, Adam, as he explicitly referred to him when he cited the narrative of Creation in Islam and some other religions. He went on to refer to the rest of the world as the Children of Adam. By contrast, Rouhani began his talk with recent elections and went on to set the limit for the past in the occupation of 'Palestine'.

As to the topoi employed in the two talks, there are certain points of divergence between Rouhani and Ahmadinejad, including Humanitarian Values, Women Rights, Environmental Issues, World Zionism and the Occupation of Palestine, Recent Issues, and The Issue of 9/11. The divergences are described below:

(1) *Humanitarian Values*

One of the main points of difference was humanitarian values. Although one may not find the exact terminology in the talks, it is quite evident in Ahmadinejad's talk. With his special 'opening' in which he asked for permission from the 12th Imam for the talk and cited some verses from Quran, Ahmadinejad was playing the role of a savor for the rest of the world, as seen in (7) below:

(7) *In the name of God, the compassionate, all praise belong to Allah, the lord of the world, and may peace and blessings be upon the greatest and trustworthy prophet and his progeny. He has chosen companions and upon all the divine messengers. (inaudible) God hastens the emergence of your chosen beloved, grant him good health and victory, make us his best companions and all those who attest to his rightfulness.*

As extract (7) shows, he placed himself on the side of the good and "righteous" people, by which he may have meant the Prophets. Besides, Ahmadinejad is well-known for his radical religious ideas (Jones, 2009). Continuous reference to the 12th Imam by Ahmadinejad has been criticized even by the members of Iran's parliament when, according to Aftab News Agency, he said,

In the world, there are deviations from the right path: Christianity and Judaism. Dollars have been devoted to the propagation of these deviations. There are also false claims that these [religions] will save mankind. But Islam is the only religion that [can] save mankind ("Iran's President Threatens Crackdown on Christianity, CNN", 2013).

In view of this background, Ahmadinejad's reference to the 12th Imam sounds reasonable.

Ahadinejad employed a poetic style of speaking for a more rhetorical influence (see #8).

(8) *Despite all efforts made by righteous people and justice-seekers and the sufferings and pains endured by masses of people in the quest to achieve happiness and victory, the history of mankind, except in rare cases, is marked with unfulfilled dreams and failures.*

He pointed out that humanitarian values are neglected in the present world and that they are replaced by such values as affluence and consumerism. This was followed by reference to the historical eras in which humanitarian values were neglected, such as the Middle Ages and Slavery Era, as the dark age. Ahmadinejad used a particular discursive structure (e.g., *Imagine for a moment there had been no X*) as a rhetorical device to invite the audience to visualize the ideal pictures he portrayed (see #9 and #10).

(9) *Imagine for a moment had there been no egoism, distrust, malicious behavior, and dictatorships...*

(10) *Imagine how beautiful and pleasant our lives and how lovely the history of mankind would have been.*

This awakening strategy by Ahmadinejad in line with Ahmadinejad's orientations while at the office when he tries to depict the unseen

version of reality (Ansari, 2007). He tried to share his ideals with the whole world and the nations he frequently addressed throughout his talk.

Rouhani adopted a totally different stance and speech style on this issue. While at the beginning of the talk he referred to some of the world problems as presented in (11), he described the issues with a formal and informative-descriptive style of speaking (Maloney, 2013; Monshipouri & Dorraj, 2013). He immediately talked of solutions and stated that there were “new hopes” in the world to function against pessimism.

(11) Our world today is replete with fear and hope; fear of war and hostile regional and global relations; fear of deadly confrontation of religious, ethnic and national identities; fear of institutionalization of violence and extremism; fear of poverty and destructive discrimination; fear of decay and destruction of life-sustaining resources; fear of disregard for human dignity and rights; and fear of neglect of morality. Alongside these fears, however, there are new hopes; the hope of universal acceptance by the people and the elite all across the globe of "yes to peace and no to war"; and the hope of preference of dialogue over conflict, and moderation over extremism.

The topoi of *threat* and *solution* as used by Rouhani and far more by Ahmadinejad are among the most employed topoi in their speeches.

(2) Women Rights

Women rights was introduced for the first time since the 1379 revolution in Iran by the reformist candidates in their presidential campaigns in 2009. This affected Ahmadinejad's second term and raised public awareness regarding women rights among the religious and conservative population and politicians in Iran (Farhang, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Osanloo, 2006; Razavi, 2006; Shahidian, 2002; Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010).

The issues as related to women manifested themselves in Ahmadinejad's UN talk in 2012 when he repeatedly referred to women and to their sublime role being damaged and abused

by “the powerful”. By “the powerful” he meant the capitalist system and countries as well as people with *capital* as he immediately referred to as “the wealthy” (as evidenced in (12)). It should also be noted that his stance regarding women came from his religious background rather than his beliefs in the feminist movements. While feminist movements and global women rights campaigns advocate a free and independent role for women and seek gender equality in the society, Ahmadinejad clings to the religious role for women. This is obvious with his use of the modifier “sublime” when he talked about women's role (see #12). He also pointed to the role of family and asserted that the family institution is in danger. Regarding the topoi that Rouhani employed in his speech, he did not refer to women, their rights, and their roles. He rather tried to bring up what he really thought was needed for the occasion.

(12) Women's sublime role and personality as a heavenly being, a manifestation of the divine image and beauty and the main pillar of every society has been damaged and abused by the powerful and the wealthy.

(3) Environmental Issues

Two prominent destructive effects of capitalism and consumerism are the undermining of the world resource base and global warming (Foltz, 2002; Mashayekhi, 1990; Pak & Farajzadeh, 2007). Environmental issues in general and global warming in particular have gained drawn attention of several global associations and have risen to the vanguard of presidential campaigns (Sussman, 2004).

Rouhani did not refer to environmental issues in his speech at the UN speech. By contrast, Ahmadinejad, as reflected in (13), brought up several issues, including environmental issues, in line with his anti-capitalist ideology. After introducing the topo of “endangered environment”, Ahmadinejad introduced “the capitalists” as the agent and characterized them as “irresponsible” exploiters of natural resources. This further showed his radical anti-capitalist ideology, in line with his religious beliefs and high ideals as a “savior”.

(13) The environment, as a commonwealth and heritage of the entire humankind and

a constant guarantor of man's survival, has been seriously damaged and devastated as a result of irresponsible and excessive use of resources, particularly by capitalists across the world, a situation that has caused massive drought, flood, and pollutions and inflicting irrevocable damage and jeopardizing seriously human life on Earth.

(4) World Zionism and the Occupation of Palestine

Israel-Palestine conflict has formed the basis for Iran's foreign policy particularly in the Middle East since the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Cooley, 1979; Hooglund, 1995; Menashri, 2006; Raket, 2007; Sick, 2003). Ahmadinejad has frequently questioned Holocaust and predicted Israel's demise since taking office in 2005 (Sohrabi, 2006; Vick, 2005). This radical stance was reflected in Ahmadinejad's talk at the UN where he explicitly introduced Zionism as a world agent and also indirectly called it a "fake government" as reflected in (14). He had taken this stance in several other interviews and talks such as his interview with Larry King, the famous American Television and Radio host (Richter & Barnea, 2009). Ahmadinejad's over-emphasis on the issue of Palestine occupation faced objection both from outside and inside the country, especially those having a reformist orientation in the political arena in Iran (Monshipouri & Dorraj, 2013; Parsi, 2006).

(14) the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Africa, Latin America and in the Balkans not happened; and if instead of the occupation of Palestine and imposition of a fake government, displacement and genocide of millions of people around the globe.

Unlike Ahmadinejad, who reiterated his radical stance on the issue of Palestine, Rouhani, as expected from his campaign 'motto' of *taking the moderate path*, did not make direct reference to Zionism but rather condemned the occupation of Palestine in accordance with Iran's foreign policy.

(5) Recent Issues

In his talk, Rouhani referred to the past "three decades" (#15). He pointed to some of the recent regional challenges that had affected

Iran directly, all related to Iran's role in the region, such as *military intervention in Afghanistan* and *Saddam Hussein's regime*. He even referred to West Asia directly, which made his point even more specific. Rouhani prioritized the challenges and problems and focused on the most immediate issues. He focused on the most related challenges by remarking on the interventions in Syria and Iran's "peaceful" position against attempts by unknown agents to militarize this country.

(15) This propagandistic discourse has assumed dangerous proportions through portrayal and inculcation of presumed imaginary threats. One such imaginary threat is the so-called "Iranian threat" - which has been employed as an excuse to justify a long catalog of crimes and catastrophic practices over the past three decades. The arming of the Saddam Hussein regime with chemical weapons and supporting the Taliban and Al-Qaida are just two examples of such catastrophes.

Contrary to Rouhani, Ahmadinejad did not refer to the issues related to the current tension and political challenges in the region. He rather chose a different all-inclusive style, where he pictured a map of all the problems and issues of the world and all the "wrong" paths that humanity had taken since the dawn of time. In his definition, "wrong" was anything not backed by the "righteous people", who he identified himself as belonging to.

(6) The Issue of 9/11

On Tuesday September 11th 2001, four American airliners were hijacked by 19 terrorists and flied into four different spots. Two of them crashed into the Twin Towers of World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City. The third plane was crashed into Pentagon, leading to a slight collapse and damage to its western side. The fourth plane, which was believed to be targeted at Washington D.C., crashed into a field near Shanks Ville Pennsylvania. The incident took a toll of 3000, including the 227 people on board and the 19 hijackers. American official launched the 'war on terror' and occupied Afghanistan after they considered Bin-Laden responsible for the attacks (Cooley, 2002; Ryan, 2004).

One can observe a trace of this event, which happened in 2001, in Ahmadinejad's talk at the UN in 2012. This was expected in view of his previous seven speeches in which he had again tried to indicate the lack of sufficient investigation for 9/11 attacks as shown in (16).

(16) If the tragic incident of September 11 and the military actions against Afghanistan and Iraq that left millions killed and homeless had not happened....

Talking about 9/11, he first expressed his solidarity with the American people and the families of those affected by the event and then tried to argue against the legitimacy of US war against Afghanistan. The three topoi of "9/11," "Al-Qaeda," and "War in Afghanistan" are interrelated in his discourse on the issue of 9/11. The whole reference to 9/11 and its possible causes can be considered a marked difference between the two presidents' speeches at the UN General Assembly.

As evidenced in the present study, use of pronouns especially 'I' and 'We' can provide important insights into the expression and formation of identity in public political speeches. Ahmadinejad and Rouhani differed considerably in their use of first person singular and plural pronouns, namely, 'I' and 'we', in the speeches. Ahmadinejad made more use of 'I' in his speech compared with Rouhani (i.e., Ahmadinejad used 'I' 11 times while Rouhani made use of 'I' 7 times). The use of this pronoun forms a personal identity and carries along a higher level of imposition. Although ample use of 'I' has been adopted by most radical and dictatorial leaders, it has also been used as a rhetorical device in literature and most non-political speeches and writings (Bacon, 2012; Hyland, 2002). A look at most motivational and inspirational talks and writings shows that the use of single person pronouns has been the main device for connecting with and influencing the audience. This is also observed in academic writings (Hyland, 2002). Ahmadinejad's use of 'I' and certain generalized all-encompassing topoi is indeed a populist orientation in leadership coupled with certain rhetorical devices for more influence on the common people. As argued by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), this form of speech is a way of communication

mostly employed by right-wing radical populists.

Another important variable, as found in this study, is the timeline of the topoi employed by the two presidents. Ahmadinejad used topoi that were more related to the past than to the present time. This may be due to the historical background of Ahmadinejad's speech (i.e., he gave his eighth public speech at the UN assembly, which was his last speech on his second term of presidency), since topoi build through time (Wodak, 2009b).

The topoi that Rouhani employed were mostly related to the present time, which can be due to two underlying reasons: (1) to disassociate himself and his office from the chain of topoi employed by the former president in the context of previous UN talks which reflected radicalism and populism, and (2) to pave the way for a new political stance and political identity. Considering the UN public speech as a public event, any president can foreground certain issues in political discussion. Rouhani made a more internationally welcomed choice by embarking on solvable issues at hand than referring to the old historical discords (e.g., crusades, consumerism). This choice of topics implies a moderate political stance. In general, Rouhani's moderate voice runs counter to Ahmadinejad's robust and confrontational rhetoric, which brought about condemnation from the West and 'praise' from Middle Eastern working and lower classes (Ansari, 2007). The support from the working class also brought him to be known as a 'populist'. His radical ideas not only aroused mounting opposition from inside the country, as it did from the parliament members, but also resulted in tensions between Iran and most Western countries, which caused the imposition of the worst sanctions against Iran's Central Bank and an unprecedented inflation rate in the country (Fassihi, 2010). Furthermore, the present-time topoi that Rouhani employed seem to be more complicated and scholarly than the ordinary or outdated ones Ahmadinejad used to gain the support of the common people (Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015). Thus, it is logical that Rouhani sides more with the elite rather than with the larger non-elite population.

5. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of the study was to analyze and compare the speeches of Hassan Rouhani, the current Iranian president since 2013, and his predecessor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad through an investigation of the topoi they employed in their speech. This study set out to determine what topoi were used by Rouhani and Ahmadinejad and to explore how they identified themselves in their speeches. The study has shown that use of pronoun 'I' can be a way to project a personal identity by political activists and thus as a focal point to compare the extent to which different politicians attempt to construct personal identity. The findings suggest that topoi can be used as a tool to identify the ideological stance of speakers in a political context.

The variety of topics or topoi that occurs in a public speech definitely affects the impression it exerts on the audience. Rouhani used fewer topoi than Ahmadinejad in his speech. This can be termed as a higher level of focus during the talk. Although the choice of the topoi is important, the number of the topoi and their variety can be also considered as a factor affecting how the speech is perceived by the audience. With regard to the use of topoi, the study showed that they can be helpful in critical discourse analysis. Also, topoi can be looked at historically within the discourse related to a certain social event or issue. The variety of topics or topoi that occur in a public speech definitely affects the impression it exerts on the audience. With regard to the discourse-historical method, which is founded on the use of topoi, this study showed that they can be helpful in critical discourse analysis. Also, topoi can be looked at historically within the discourse related to a certain social event or issue.

DHA and studying the use of topoi, regardless of their illusive definition, can be a very promising approach to analyzing political discourses under the umbrella of CDA. Issues such as anti-Islam discourse, extremism, radical Islam, religious violence, minority rights, women rights, and political perspective changes. Also, for further research on the Middle East, identity struggle, and political hegemony can be studied through DHA.

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