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## **Representation of Ordinary People in Political Discourse: An Aggregate Critical Discourse Analysis**

**Hamid Allami<sup>1a</sup>, Najmeh Barzegar<sup>2b</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the representation of ordinary people in the inaugural speeches of two Iranian presidents and their underlying ideologies through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). An aggregate model integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional (1989), Van Dijk's socio-cognitive (1993), and Van Leeuwen's socio-semantic (1996) approaches to CDA was proposed and applied as the analytical tool. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were employed for the study design. In the quantitative part, statistically significant differences in the use of vocabulary items and structures were investigated based on the description stage of Fairclough's and van Leeuwen's frameworks. In the qualitative part of the study, attempts were made to justify the found similarities and differences based on the interpretation and explanation stages of Fairclough's and van Dijk's frameworks. The study showed that in spite of differences in the presentation of political self, both presidents design similar strategies in their political discourse to project the identity of common people within their sociocultural context.

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Email: [h.allami@modares.ac.ir](mailto:h.allami@modares.ac.ir) (Corresponding Author)

Tel: +98-21-82883661

<sup>2</sup> MA, Email: [barzegar323@gmail.com](mailto:barzegar323@gmail.com)

<sup>a</sup> Tarbiat Modares University, Iran

<sup>b</sup> Yazd University, Iran

## 1. Introduction

People use language to construct different identities for themselves in different contexts. At the same time, they build identities representing other people, using them to further position their own identity. Language users are creating different identities for their interlocutors as they speak or write, positioning them in a certain way or place. Speakers or writers can control people through their control of the meaning of words (Gee, 2011). Critical studies are often used to analyze political discourse, including public speeches, in which politicians naturalize and legitimize ideologies through language, and utilize the mediating functions of discourse to represent identities. One of the key elements to the politicians' success in achieving their objectives and securing the public concession is their ability to impress and persuade the audience. They adopt a variety of linguistic strategies and utilize discursive features in their speeches to connect with their audience.

Political discourse is characterized by its actors, people, and politicians. The study of identity construction of ordinary people not only highlights the persuasive nature of political speech, but also reveals the relation between discourse and power. According to Fairclough (2001), "discourse is ideological in so far as it contributes to sustaining particular relations of power and domination" (p. 126). Moreover, examining the kind of identity constructed for ordinary people by politicians facilitates the discovery of their underlying ideology and the way ideologies affect their language use. Much work has been done on the assessment of politicians' performance towards the public and the way they project their identities through the use of language, but less is known about how people as social actors are portrayed in the speech of politicians. To fill this gap, this research aims to examine the way ordinary people are represented in the speech of politicians and to detect their underlying ideologies through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a major branch of Discourse Analysis (DA), which concentrates on the relationship between means of thinking and means of talking in order to find the traces of ideological and cultural meaning in texts. An aggregate model of CDA was adopted in this

research as the analytical tool drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional, Van Leeuwen's socio-semantic, and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approaches to CDA. The inaugural speeches of two Iranian presidents were selected to be analyzed.

Having undergone massive changes, today a competitive atmosphere with two dominating political parties governs the political context of Iran. Reformists who seek to modernize the Islamic state and adjust it to the requirements of globalization, and Principalists who seek to minimize internal divisions by ousting the modernization supporters from power (Bashiriyeh, 2011). Mahmood Ahmadinejad and Hasan Rouhani are the two Iranian speakers whose lectures speeches are decided to be compared in this study. Two different political positions are held by them regarding the foreign policy of Iran. While president President Rouhani shows more flexibility in dealing with other countries and attempts to reach consensus with the westWest, president President Ahmadinejad believes in acting independently from the world powers. The former is similar to the perspective of the reformist Reformist party and the latter view is in line with the principalists' Principalists' attitude.

The present study aimed to find answers to the following questions:

1. What vocabulary items do Iranian presidents adopt to reflect the identity of ordinary people in their speeches?
2. What kinds of micro strategies do politicians employ to represent the identity of people as social actors in their speeches?
3. What kinds of macro strategies do politicians use to project the identity of ordinary people in their speeches treating them as "self" vs "others"?
4. Is there any difference or similarity between the speeches of two Iranian presidents in the use of these strategies and what are their underlying ideologies?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Various prominent scholars such as Fairclough (2013), Van Dijk (2006), and Van Leeuwen (2008) have proposed principles, methods, and tools for the critical analysis of discourse. Following a different and a critical approach,

CDA attempts to make hidden ideologies and power relationships explicit to the problem concerning the topic under investigation, then to apply the results which are of practical relevance. With regard to the role that political discourse plays in the power and domination enactment, it is not surprising that critical discourse studies are often applied in political texts and talks.

Fairclough (2013) stated that the critical tradition is transferred from social analysis into discourse analysis by CDA with an emphasis laid upon the relation between language and other social aspects such as power, identity, ideology, etc. Teun Van Dijk (2006) summarized some of the relationships between ideologies and discourses such as the polarization between in-groups vs out-groups, an outstanding feature of ideologies structured in ample texts and talks. Theo Van Leeuwen (2008) developed a socio-semantic inventory of the categories by which social actors can be represented sociologically and critically and the ways in which the proposed categories can be realized linguistically. He demonstrated how his inventory might be applied in CDA drawing examples from a text, namely *Race Odyssey*, published on May 12, 1990, in a conservative newspaper. He concluded that,

Representation of that group of social actors who oppose or worry about immigrants and immigration is formed by 'us', the Australian people 'as a whole'. This group is more sympathetically treated, less often backgrounded, less often referred to generically, and classified only as 'Australians', whereas immigrants as another group of social actors are referred to as 'them', and they are relatively often backgrounded and often referred to generically. (p. 54)

Among practical studies of DA, Van Dijk (2009) analyzed the British parliamentary debate about the Iraq war on March 18, considering some contextual dimensions and showed how factors such as the identity of speakers and recipients, participant power relations, contextual knowledge and rules, and political implicatures characterize the context model of discourse between members of parliament. KhosraviNik (2010) recommended a three-level analytical framework for DA,

with three domains of social actors, social actions, and argumentation to make various levels of text analysis explicit on the representation of social groups.

Providing deep insight into the manner in which language can be a tool in the hands of writers or speakers, a critical discourse study was carried out to explore dominant discursive structures in Obama's victory speech. It was reported that he used a lot of examples of euphemistic and derogatory terms in his speech with the purpose of affecting the audience (Unvar & Rahimi, 2013). Arceneaux and Johnson (2013) in a very innovative research design, challenged the hypothesized influence of partisan polarization on the general public. They suggested a new active audience theory and proposed a new model to explain the effect of media on the general public. In a comparative study, Reyes (2014) examined the stylistic differences in the speeches given by Barack Obama and George Bush on persuasive modes of Ethos (authority and command of the subject) and Pathos (rapport with the audience). Under the scope of CDA, Ethos was found to be the predominant mode in Obama's speech, while Bush's speech was mainly associated with the mode of Pathos.

Choi, Bull, and Reed (2016) investigated speaker-audience interaction in political discourse in three oratory contexts including acceptance speeches of political candidates for the presidential nomination, campaign speeches of the presidential election, and inauguration speeches of presidents. The findings suggested that oratory context is a determining factor in audience responses to political speech, the function of audience responses, and the speaker-audience relationship. Their responses had popularity function in support of the speaker in case of acceptance and election campaign speeches, while they had conformity function to social norms in the case of inauguration speeches.

Alemi, Tajeddin, and Rajabi Kondlaji (2018) carried out a critical discourse study comparing the speeches of two Iranian presidents at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. President Rouhani followed a less conservative political ideology compared to his predecessor President Ahmadinejad. They

found that the choice and the number of topics that emerge in public speech influences the way speakers impress the audience. It was reported that Rouhani employed fewer topics with a higher level of concentration in his talk than Ahmadinejad.

In a more recent study on the representation of ordinary people, Ge and Wang (2018) demonstrated how journalists represent ordinary people positively as advocates of government policy or negatively as violators of social rules in China's news reports through constructing superordinate identities for them. Asiru et al. (2018) studied linguistic tools that were employed for the ideological presentation of presidential aspirants as the main social actors in Nigerian newspaper reports. The results showed a biased representation of social actors. While President Jonathan was more positively portrayed, other social actors were excluded from the newspaper headlines. A DA of personal pronouns in Trump's inaugural speech was conducted by Wahyuningsih (2018). The findings of the study showed that Trump makes use of personal pronouns as a strategy to represent himself active and present in front of the population and to have good communications with them developing a dynamic interaction with the audience.

A contrastive CDA was done on the speeches of Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas regarding the Gaza War to the United Nations General Assembly based on the Van Dijk and Halliday's frameworks (Alaa & Hamdan, 2019). Both speakers were found to represent 'self' strong and honorable, depicting in-group as defiant in contrast to the 'other' as the agent of destruction, identifying out-group as a dire threat. Pablo Ribera (2019) analyzed the degree and type of populism in Spanish political parties suggesting part of the representation of two homogenous groups of the people and the elite. The findings revealed different levels of populism in the speech of all political parties of which two newcomer parties were the most populist in people representation.

To the best of our knowledge, so far, no study has been carried out on the way people are portrayed in the speech of politicians. From the CDA point of view, language is not a

neutral instrument for conveying message, rather it is a way of understanding the world both on the side of the producer (speaker or writer) and on the side of the consumer (audience or reader). The purpose of the current research is to probe into the way ordinary people are depicted in the speech of presidents employing an aggregate CDA. The multiple dimensions of identity construction are thus revealed integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional (1989), Van Dijk's socio-cognitive (1993), and Van Leeuwen's socio-semantic (1996) frameworks.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Corpus

The second inaugural speeches of current and previous presidents of Iran in their swearing ceremony constituted the data for the study. Mahmood Ahmadinejad and Hasan Rouhani were sworn on August, 5, 2009, and August 5, 2017, respectively, in an open session of parliament in Tehran, Iran. To establish a comparable set of data, the latest inaugural speech of both presidents was included in the corpus to capture their current political views towards the identity of the public audience. The English language version of their second inaugurations was downloaded from <https://www.c-span.org> website.

#### 3.2. Instrument

Gee (2011) argues that tools extracted from theories may work best for some kind and states that "anyone engaged in their own discourse analysis must adapt the tools they have taken from a given theory to the needs and demands of their own study" (p. 1). Since there was no unique instrument for the analysis of people's identity construction in the literature, a new model integrating Fairclough's (1989), Van Dijk's (1993), and Van Leeuwen's (1996) approaches to CDA was implemented considering the advantages and disadvantages of each adopted framework when working with the data. The following grounds were taken into account as the motives for selecting the proposed aggregate model.

First, there are three general interacting levels when engaging with identity representation

(Block, 2010): examining how what is said at the basic level of utterances (micro), positioning via the voice adoption in the utterances at the intermediate level (meso), and relating what is said to the broader social group identities in society (macro). The level of analysis refers to the discursive unit of analysis (individual, group, institution) methodologically. CDA bridges the gap between these micro and macro representations theoretically. These levels of analysis are conceptualized and rather operationalized via the aggregate CDA modeled in this study.

Second, CDA suggests paradigms to identify and interpret ideologies that underlie or function through texts and talks. Its main strong point is that it reveals the power relations as well as identities constructed through the use of language in society. Nonetheless, CDA practitioners have often been accused of using a subjective, unsystematic approach to analyzing discourses. Combining qualitative and quantitative techniques in this model can be one solution to reach a rather objective analysis.

Third, there is still a gap between the diverse approaches to critical studies from more socially-oriented views of DA, which lack a detailed analysis of texts and talks to more linguistically-oriented views of DA, in which critical concepts such as power and ideology are neglected. Combining different CDA approaches is, therefore, another possible solution to arrive at a satisfactory way of CDA. Aggregating these approaches provides a multilevel analysis of discourse in which a better picture of language can be approached.

### 3.3. Fairclough's Framework (1989)

Fairclough's three-dimensional model may be regarded as the foundation in the field of

CDA, since it is the first theoretical framework for the analysis of discourse which critically connects three surfaces of discourse including text, interaction, and social context. In his point of view, the duty of CDA is to discover the systematic properties of language for the purpose of displaying a clear configuration of texts, including talks, debates, speeches, agreements, interviews, etc., and to uncover the ideological and power patterns in them. His model includes a) Description, b) Interpretation, and c) Explanation.

The choice of this framework as a guide, not a blueprint, for the current study, is based on the possibilities it provides for the explication of meaning relating to issues of ideology, social identities, and the logic of the oppositions in political discourse expressing the relations in the society. Thus, in analyzing the data for this study, at the descriptive stage of analysis, attention is paid to the expressive values of linguistic choices in the speech of presidents. At the interpretive stage, speeches are connected to their social, institutional, and political context and finally, at the explanation stage of analysis, the broader ideological effects underlying their political discourse are analyzed.

### 3.4. Van Dijk's Framework (1993)

Teun Van Dijk in his theory of ideology explores the relationship between society, social cognition, and discourse. He proposed a paradigm representing the overall discursive strategies employed in texts and talks to describe social groups and their relations based on four maxims (See Table 1). In Van Dijk's framework, the ideological square is selected as the analytical device, since underlying political ideologies are typically expressed through such polarized division of people on the basis of their norms and values.

**Table 1**  
*Ideological Square* (Van Dijk, 1993)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Ingroup<br>Emphasizing good<br>thing    | Outgroup<br>De-emphasizing bad<br>things |
| Ingroup<br>De-emphasizing<br>bad things | Outgroup<br>Emphasizing bad<br>things    |

Emphasizing on the positive points about 'self'

De-emphasizing on the negative points about 'self'

Emphasizing on the negative points about 'others'

De-emphasizing on the positive points about 'others'



These macro-strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation divide people into ingroup vs outgroup categories, reflecting their attitudes and identity construction which may affect the interpretation of social practices or discourses that group members engage in (Van Dijk, 2006). The socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk operationalized the analytical taxonomy of 'in' vs 'out' group identities with a focus on the shared social norms and conventions of representations.

### 3.5. Van Leeuwen's Framework (1996)

Theo Van Leeuwen (1996) introduces an inventory of a set of discursive structures and their linguistic realization in which social actors are represented through language. From his framework, three morpho-syntactic categories with their subcategories that have the potential of extracting the identity of ordinary people as social actors have been selected. They include: a) *Inclusion/ exclusion pattern*, b) *Activation/ passivation pattern*, and c) *Genericization/ specification pattern*.

The rationale for selecting Van Leeuwen's inventory is that it can be a complement to the first stage of Fairclough's model since the network of choices is united in the concept of social actors, while the emphasis is on sociological rather than linguistic categories. In addition, selected patterns have their own way of mapping elements of social practices within a given context and can be used for comparative purposes.

The choice of inclusion/exclusion, activation/passivation, and genericisation/specification taxonomies provides an outline of social actor representation operationalizing the structures in which people as social actors can be linguistically realized with a rather sociological focus.

The inclusion/exclusion dichotomy is introduced as an important aspect in the analysis of identities. The intended social actors can be directly mentioned or included in the texts. Otherwise, they can be excluded radically or less radically from the texts. The former denies both actors and their actions leaving no trace in the representation which is called suppression. In the latter, namely

backgrounding, the excluded social actors may be indirectly mentioned in the text elsewhere.

The activation/passivation of people as social actors occurs in relation to their assigned role, depicting them either as the agent of the activity or as who are undergone the activity. Passivation divides into subcategories of subjection and beneficialisation. In the case of subjection, the social actor is treated as the object of representation. In the case of beneficialisation, the social actor is represented as someone who profits from the action.

The occurrence of genericisation/specification depends on whether people as social actors are referred to by a generic or specific reference. They may be addressed as individuals, by groups or through statistics, i.e., individualization, collectivization, or aggregation subdivisions of specification, respectively.

### 3.6. Procedure

The analysis was carried out at three levels. At the first level of analysis, attention was drawn to the formal features of language including words and structures. In order to have a better visualization of the used vocabulary, the most frequent keywords associated with the speech of American and Iranian politicians were compared using scatter text tool (Kessler, 2017) known from corpus linguistics. In addition to vocabulary at this level of inquiry, selected discursive patterns from Van Leeuwen's model of CDA were studied in the speech of each politician. The ordinary people or the public audience were common social actors considered as an anchor for the analysis, including synonyms and pronouns used to refer to them. Considering people as social actors, their representation was quantitatively analyzed through examining the frequency of these structures in the discourse of each politician. The raw frequencies were normalized to a value per 1000 words to develop a common criterion for comparing texts of different sizes. Then, the chi-square test was applied to see whether there is a significant difference among the speeches of two speakers in the use of any special category.

At the second level of analysis, the link between texts and their contexts was examined using Van Dijk's model of CDA. The



To make a better comparison, the scores of these words obtained from the scatter text analysis are shown in Table 2. It can be found that the vocabulary like *people*, *country*, and *Iran* were more associated with the speech of

President Rouhani, while the words *Iranian* and *nation* as well as the pronouns *they*, *we*, and *you* were more frequent in the speech of President Ahmadinejad.

**Table 2**

*Scattertext Scores of the Words Used by the Presidents to Address the Ordinary People*

| Word   | People | Country | They   | Iranian | Iran   | Nation | We     | You    |
|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Scores | -0.028 | -0.111  | +0.416 | +0.055  | -0.139 | +0.194 | +0.055 | +0.055 |

Another step related to the second research question, what kinds of micro strategies politicians employ to represent the identity of people as social actors in their speeches, was to analyze the way presidents project the identity of a public audience in their political discourse through examining the main categories of inclusion vs exclusion, activation vs passivation, genericization vs specification, and their subcategories.

Table 3 shows the overall use of inclusion/exclusion patterns by two Iranian presidents,

positioning the identity of people in their speeches. It can be seen from the data that common people, as social actors, are mainly included in the discourse of the two politicians. They were included with the frequency of 89 and 99 per 1000 words in the speech of Presidents Rouhani and Ahmadinejad, respectively. According to the result of the chi-square test, there was a statistically similar inclusion of the public in the language of two Iranian speakers ( $\chi^2 = 0.647$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > .05$ ), indicating the crucial role that people play in the country's affair.

**Table 3**

*The Inclusion/Exclusion of People in the Speeches of Iranian Presidents*

| President/People |                     | Included | Excluded   |              |
|------------------|---------------------|----------|------------|--------------|
|                  |                     |          | Suppressed | Backgrounded |
| Ahmadi           | N out of 2331 words | 232      | 15         | 2            |
|                  | F per 1000 words    | 99       | 6          | 1            |
|                  | %                   | 93.2     | 6          | 0.8          |
| Rouhani          | N out of 2768 words | 246      | 16         | 1            |
|                  | F per 1000 words    | 89       | 6          | 1            |
|                  | %                   | 93.5     | 6.1        | 0.4          |

Another point observed from the data is that although people were rarely excluded from the speakers' discourse, the number of times that they were suppressed is higher than the number of times that they were put in the background. This can be due to the fact that listeners readily infer that the possible excluded social actors must be 'the people'. In other words, these kinds of people exclusion are supposed to be innocent. As Van Leeuwen (2008) states, "some of the exclusions may be 'innocent', details which readers are assumed to know already, or which are deemed irrelevant to them" (p. 28). Examples from the

speeches of Rouhani and Ahmadinejad can be seen in the following.

- *111 years ago today, a new Iran **was born** out of a tumultuous situation, and a new epic **was created**.* (Rouhani, the second inauguration)
- *Our nation has great goals requiring that great decisions and great measures **become** a great action, strides **need to be taken**.* (Ahmadinejad, the second inauguration)

Another discursive structure through which politicians can project the identity of their audience is role allocation, giving participants



either an active or a passive voice. Table 4 illustrates the occurrence of an activation/passivation pattern in the discourse of each politician. As it is observable, the studied social actors were taken more with a more active, rather than passive force, in the speech of both presidents. Similarly, role allocated, the people of Iran were activated 43 and 36 times per 1000 words by Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, respectively (91% of the times that they were included). Some instances are seen below.

• *The people of Iran have always been active and have had a major role, a great role, and today, they are fully present on the scene and*

*they are actually giving rise to a humane government with divine characteristics* (Ahmadinejad, the second inauguration).

• *The Iranian people who are aware and wise to create an epic and participated en masse, one more time, they spoke to us clearly and conveyed a message expressly, what they had on their mind. They spoke by the language of their vote. They told us what they demand and what they do not want, and by giving the vote of confidence again, which was meaningful, they decided a path and approach that were being tested for four years* (Rouhani, the second inauguration).

**Table 4**

*The Activation/Passivation of People in the Speeches of Iranian Presidents*

| President/People | Activated           | Passivated |               |     |
|------------------|---------------------|------------|---------------|-----|
|                  |                     | Subjected  | Beneficiaries |     |
| Ahmadi           | N out of 2331 words | 101        | 4             | 6   |
|                  | F per 1000 words    | 43         | 2             | 2   |
|                  | %                   | 91         | 3.6           | 5.4 |
| Rouhani          | N out of 2768 words | 101        | 5             | 5   |
|                  | F per 1000 words    | 36         | 2             | 2   |
|                  | %                   | 91         | 4.5           | 4.5 |

The representation of the people with regard to their actions is closely related to the kind of action in which they are activated or passivated. People, for instance, were more activated in the speech of Iranian presidents in relation to activities such as participating in the presidential election, creating an epic, supporting the Islamic Revolution, and so forth. This can be inferred from the following speech of President Rouhani:

*Despite all the diversity and diverse opinions, when it comes to the major problems of the country and finding solutions for them, we can think together and act based on mechanisms existing in the establishment on the support of the instructions and guidelines of the Islamic revolution* (Rouhani, second inauguration).

While President Ahmadinejad claims that:

*The government has done the scientific and the expert work, it has made relative plans and*

*they need to be correctly implemented. That requires brave decisions made by you, the parliamentarians. I do trust your open-mindedness. I think we can solve the problem of unemployment and housing* (Ahmadinejad, the second inauguration).

The result of chi-square analysis on the normalized frequencies also confirmed that the total occurrence of activation does not vary significantly across the speeches of two politicians ( $\chi^2 = 0.620$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In terms of passivation, the groups of people were seldom beneficiaries or subjected to the discourse of Iranian presidents. Instances of subjection and beneficialization of ordinary people were chosen from the politicians' speeches.

• *The government is determined to use all its force and to serve the nation and to use all the*

*potentialities and activate them all* (Ahmadinejad, the second inauguration).

- *That's what brought for our people in government or the rights that the Iranian constitution recognizes for the people* (Rouhani, second inauguration).

The Iranian nation was subjected to the actions of being served and activated by the government in the first example and they benefited from the government's service and the Iranian Constitution in the second example, showing a culture in which people are strongly supported by their government.

The results of the final pattern, genericization/specification are summarized in Table 5. The findings indicate that people were totally specified rather than genericized in the speech of both Iranian politicians. The occurrence of specific/generic reference in the language of Iranian presidents referring to the Iranian audience had strong intra-cultural similarities (Table 4). Moreover, the chi-square statistic conducted on the normalized frequencies resulted in no significant difference in the use

of genericization between the speeches of the two presidents ( $\chi^2 = 0.670$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This may be explained by the fact that as in working-class oriented newspapers, Iranian speakers tend to treat people more sympathetically and less formally in their language. Theo Van Leeuwen (1996) has linked the concept of reality to social class and reported that:

In middle-class oriented newspapers government agents and experts tend to be referred to specifically, and 'ordinary people' generically: the point of identification, the world in which one's specifics exist, is here, not the world of the governed, but the world of the governors, the 'generals'. In working-class oriented newspapers, on the other hand, 'ordinary people' are frequently referred to specifically. (p. 47)

Grouping social actors through the use of first-person plural pronoun 'we', the terms such as the Iranian nation, the people of Iran, our people can be considered as instances of collectivization.

**Table 5**

*The Genericization/Specification of People in the Speeches of Iranian Presidents*

| President/People |                     | Genericized | Individualized | Specified     |            |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|------------|
|                  |                     |             |                | Assimilated   |            |
|                  |                     |             |                | Collectivized | Aggregated |
| Ahmadi           | N out of 2331 words | 18          | 5              | 57            | 26         |
|                  | F per 1000 words    | 8           | 2              | 24            | 11         |
|                  | %                   | 17          | 4.7            | 53.8          | 24.5       |
| Rouhani          | N out of 2768 words | 19          | 5              | 68            | 27         |
|                  | F per 1000 words    | 7           | 2              | 25            | 10         |
|                  | %                   | 16          | 4.2            | 57.1          | 22.7       |

However, the people of Iran were frequently inspired by both speakers to be distinct people reminding their religion and their ancient heroes through the use of phrases 'the Holy Prophet of Islam', 'distinguished and noble Iranian people', 'being of Arash & Rostam ancestry', 'protecting independence and dignity of the people', and so on.

Different cultures differ in their individualism and collectivism, and these differences can be

seen in a variety of domains, including religious, political, and economic systems or even people's attributions. As cited by Cohen (2016), people are encouraged to develop interdependent senses of self in collectivistic cultures, viewing selves as interconnected with others; whereas, they are encouraged to think of selves as independent, pretty distinct from others in individualist cultures. Accordingly, Iranian people seem to be represented in an individualist culture by their presidents. In

addition, the groups of people were less frequently aggregated by Iranian presidents, as some examples are given below.

- *The epic of 40 million votes and actually devoting 25 million votes to their elected person is another source of pride for the Iranian nation* (Ahmadinejad, the second inauguration).

- *The people who cast more than 41 million votes at the ballot box will never face a dead-end* (Rouhani, the second inauguration).

This kind of aggregation, treating participants as statistics, might be employed by Ahmadinejad and Rouhani to signal a culture in which formal democratic mechanisms are employed to arrive at decisions. Considering normalized frequencies, even though they do not differ among presidents for the use of people collectivization/individualization, it can be noticed that Rouhani and Ahmadinejad made use of people collectivization nearly half the time (57.1 and 53.8 percent, respectively). In general, people were assimilated rather than individualized in their political discourse, known as an indicator of representing a congruent community of people with common goals (Table 4).

Addressing the third research question, what kinds of macro strategies politicians use to project the identity of ordinary people in their speeches treating them as "self" vs "others, it was found that politicians employ different strategies in order to implicitly or explicitly represent in-group versus out-group identities. Here, the overall strategy of all ideologies appears to be positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Van Dijk, 1995). For instance, Ahmadinejad uses the term 'we' as a persuasive device for the purpose of justifying his foreign policy. Rouhani employs the inclusive terms 'we' and 'our' addressing the whole audience in order to represent them as his allies along with his intended foreign policy. The following examples show this strategy.

- *We will still continue with active foreign policy in this term and with the blessing of God, with more power and fresh plans and more effective plans, we will have an active role in all spheres.*

- *This government intends to be a government of moderation, so it will not be scared off by any kind of small move, and it will not get excited when situations stir. We think peaceable both in our domestic policy and foreign policy. We seek peace over war, and we prefer correction and ratification over the stalemate.*

Sometimes the principles of Van Dijk's ideological square were violated by Iranian speakers making reference to their own people by the use of the pronoun 'they' as in the following extracts. Ahmadinejad refers to both people and their enemies using the pronoun 'they', which is standing at the furthest edge of the Rees' general scale of pronominal distancing (Rees, 1983). Rouhani makes reference to the government by the use of the pronoun 'us' and addresses the people's trust employing possessive pronoun 'their'.

- *They (enemies) tried to depict a bleak prospect for the future of the Iranian nation. But people are vigilant and they are aware and they rely on god. They have shown their will and determination. They have exercised their power* (Ahmadinejad, the second inauguration).

- *From now on, it's us who need to be responsible to address the demands of people, the people who once again put their trust in the Islamic establishment and the government* (Rouhani, the second inauguration)

It is noticeable that some other non-linguistic factors also make a contribution to this type of strategy used by Iranian presidents as Wardhaugh (1998) believes "what we can be sure of is that speakers do use linguistic characteristics to achieve group identity with, and group differentiation from, other speakers, but they use other characteristics as well: social, cultural, political and ethnic, to name a few" (p. 120).

Regarding normalized frequencies of the personal pronouns used by each president shown in Table 5, no significant difference in the use of the plural pronoun 'we' was found in the speech of the two speakers. However, the results of the chi-square test showed that the plural pronoun 'they' occurred significantly more frequently in Ahmadinejad's

inaugural speech than Rouhani's ( $\chi^2 = 10.373$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It seems that Ahmadinejad makes use of different plural pronouns as a strategy to represent himself active and present in front of the population through a dynamic deployment of pronouns to have a better interaction with the audience. According to Kacewicz, Pennebaker, Davis, Jeon, and

Graesser (2014), "unlike content words, function words do not have consistent references across contexts. Instead, they can clarify the meaning within phrases and sentences and serve as conversational place holders of information shared by the interactants" (p. 2).

**Table 5**

*The Normalized Frequency of Personal Pronouns used to Address the Audience by Each President*

| President/Pronouns | We    | You  | They  |
|--------------------|-------|------|-------|
| Ahmadinejad        | 13.73 | 1.29 | 11.15 |
| Rouhani            | 11.92 | 0.72 | 4.33  |

Answering the fourth research question, possible differences or similarities between the speeches of two Iranian presidents in the use of micro and macro strategies and their underlying ideology, the socio-historical identity of the people was taken into account. The ideological effect intended by Iranian presidents was formed appropriately to conventions and norms for the construction of representations existing in Iranian culture. Heritage, language, and religion are influential dimensions that make Iranian identity complicated. The words 'Islamic' is among the frequent words in the speech of Iranian presidents, even as frequent as the words 'Iran' and 'Iranian' (Figure 1). This can be attributed to the importance of the religious aspect of Iranian culture emphasized by Iranian politicians. They rely on the Islamic Revolution as a pillar of strength to the nation so as to establish a coherent national identity, like in the following excerpts.

- *Maintaining independence and dignity of the people, as well as national unity, all these are demanded in this epic, where the stress was laid upon protecting the **Iranian and Islamic culture**, arts, and human resources* (Ahmadinejad, the second inauguration).

- *In order to safeguard the principles of freedom, the rule of law, national sovereignty, and holding elections, the people of Iran made great sacrifices, and at the end of the day, the **Islamic revolution** of Iran emerged victorious* (Rouhani, the second inauguration).

## 5. Discussion

The present study analyzes language use from a different perspective and contributes to the understanding of the public representation in political discourse. The superiority of the aggregate CDA approach used in this study over every single approach used in previous studies, lies in its affordances for providing a multilevel and more comprehensive analysis of discourse.

In response to the first research question, the most frequent words associated with the speech of politicians for addressing their audience were reported. Having some variations in their frequencies, terms such as *we*, *people*, *nation*, *Iran*, and *Iranians* were among the most occurring words in the speech of presidents when referring to the public.

Related to the second question, selected discursive strategies from Van Leeuwen's framework were delved into. As both speakers similarly included the general public as the main social actors in their speeches, people's role in making key decisions of the country becomes overt. In addition, people were given an active rather than a passive voice in the language of the two politicians. This active inclusion of the people is, in part, consistent with the active audience theory proposed by Arceneaux and Johnson (2013), who argue that "viewing public is comprised of active participants, whose decisions, regarding what they view and how they interpret it, mitigate the potential effect of media content" (p. 283).



Furthermore, the preference of specific rather than generic reference to the population and also the significant use of people collectivization were found in the discourse of both politicians. This kind of choice that people less often referred to generically suggests that politicians tend to maintain a close relationship with their audience. Furthermore, people were frequently collectivized by policymakers to show their integrity as a homogenous group in a society disposed to an individualist culture. This is in accordance with Barrington's (2012) statement that "in most Middle Eastern countries, the collectivism versus individualism aspect of political culture leans sharply towards collectivism. In Iran, the individualistic mindset is somewhat more in evidence and seems to be on the rise, particularly among the urban young" (p. 121).

Comparing normalized frequencies emerging from the overall data on Van Leeuwen's' inventory of micro-strategies led to some discoveries about the identity of participants that are worthy of note. The common people as social actors were rather included, activated, and individualized in the language of Ahmadinejad compared to Rouhani albeit insignificantly. This can be considered as evidence that Ahmadinejad attempts to shorten the distance between the audience and himself, consistent with the accommodation theory proposed by Giles and Powesland (1997), who believe that the process of speech accommodation operates on the principle that individuals may induce others to evaluate them more favorably by alleviating dissimilarities reflecting their desire for social agreement. Alemi et al. (2018) reported that the choice of present-time arguments by Rouhani and outdated topoi by Ahmadinejad showed the fact that Rouhani tried to pave the way for his new and different political identity at an international level, whereas Ahmadinejad sought to gain the support of common and lower-class people.

Another key finding addressing the third research question revealed that the polarized division of people as self vs other presentation seems to be context-sensitive. The application of Van Dijk's macro strategies by Iranian presidents had some inconsistencies. This can be justified regarding their context model of

discourse which varies according to factors such as power relation between social actors or participant identities (Van Dijk, 2009).

As the next important finding corresponds to the fourth research question, the explanation of underlying ideologies was offered with regard to the norms and conventions of identity construction. Iranian politicians laid particular stress on the religious aspect of Iranian identity since religion and politics are not considered separate from each other in Iranian culture.

In light of the proposed aggregate model, it is concluded that verbal interaction and language use play a general role in forming thoughts at the cultural level. At the same time, the relation between patterns of language use and formal thinking in cultural context becomes evident. These discursive practices will be more informative, provided that the power of their strategic employment is mastered. On comparison, the ideologies of both presidents converge to each other when constructing the identity of people from the broader cultural point of view.

Overall, strong intra-cultural similarities were found between the speeches of Iranian presidents in the use of discursive strategies. Despite small variations in the speaking style of presidents, there were weak intra-cultural differences in their political discourse when constructing the identity of people from a broader social and cultural point of view. Uncovering political discursive strategies is beneficial for both participant sides due to the dual role they play in raising people's awareness or improving politicians' knowledge about the use or misuse of these strategies.

What should be added here is that any attempt made to explain the ideologies in this study was affected by the researchers' impression and can be either possible or arguable. This research delved into the intra-cultural similarities and differences in positioning the identity of ordinary people. Further research can be conducted to compare and contrast how people of other countries are portrayed in the speech of politicians of other languages and other cultures. In this research, only a corpus of inaugural speeches was examined, while a diverse selection of discourses may have some



influences on the analysis. The interaction between these verbal and visual features of communication merits further investigation, prominently by analyzing their relative use for the co-construction of identities.

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