

Critical Discourse Analysis of Micro and Macro Structures in Talks by Two Iranian Presidents at the United Nations General Assembly: A Socio-cognitive Perspective

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Abstract

This study analyzes official public talks by two Iranian presidents—Hassan Rouhani and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—within the framework of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). The study focuses on discursive features in addresses of these presidents to the United Nations General Assembly at the micro-level (25 discursive devices) and the macro-level (positive self-representation and negative other-representation). The investigation attempts to determine whether significant differences existing in the micro and macro structures of these political discourses may be reflective of such factors as dissimilarities in political stance, world view and personal background. Combining quantitative and qualitative elements of analysis, the study demonstrates that *consensus*, *illustration*, *hyperbole* and *polarization* were used more frequently, whereas *lexicalization* and *vagueness* less frequently by Rouhani than by Ahmadinejad. At the semantic macro-level, Rouhani employed more *positive self-representations* and Ahmadinejad relied stronger on *negative other-representation*. Results are interpreted within the CDS framework of political discourse.

Keywords: Iranian political discourse, UNGA addresses, discourse devices, representations of Iran and “the others” in talks by Iranian presidents, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is a rapidly developing “nexus” of approaches and methodologies for “critical sociolinguistic thinking” (Stamou, 2018, p. 568). Earlier research has suggested that CDS can benefit from more focus on micro-level analysis (detailed scrutiny of linguistic devices) combined with a macro-level critical perspective (ideologies and worldviews reflected in and passed to others through discourse) (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Stamou, 2018) as well as from “tackling new discourses” (Krzyżanowski & Forchtner, 2016, p. 253). CDS, its predecessor Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and political discourse studies are dominated by research focusing on Western politicians (e.g., van Belle et al., 2014; Wang & Liu, 2018; Wilson, 2015). By contrast, very few studies address Iranian political discourse (e.g., Alemi et al., 2017; Allami & Barzegar, 2020; KhosraviNik, 2015a & b). This study diversifies CDS and political discourse studies by performing a quantitative and qualitative analysis of multiple public political speeches by two Iranian presidents at micro-and macro-levels following Van Dijk’s (2005, 2008, 2016) socio-cognitive framework.

1.1. Political Discourse

In political discourse, language and power are most closely connected, since political speeches and texts allow politicians to manipulate public opinion in order to ascend to positions of authority; to maintain control over economic, cultural and political resources, and decision-making processes; and to inculcate their intended socio-political norms, values and ideologies in society (Sajjad, 2015; Van Dijk, 2005). “It is largely through discourse that political ideologies are acquired, expressed, learned, propagated, and contested” (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 732). Political discourse is a verbal battlefield where “opposed groups, power, struggles, and interests” clash (Van Dijk, 2005, p 732).

Political discourse, therefore, requires close attention to choosing words, phrases and structures that will assist the goal of influencing people’s minds and votes by promoting the ideological superiority of a given political group, reinforcing in-group boundaries, and excluding and defaming rival out-groups (Chilton, 2004; Mumby, 2000). The effective employment of language can give one political party an advantage over another (Bello, 2013). Language is the fundamental medium and weapon of ideology and power (Post, 2009; Rudyk, 2007), as “political action itself is carried out through language” (Bello, 2013, p. 86). The relationship between ideology and power on the one hand, and language on the other, is reciprocal. Language is not only a tool but also a product of specific ideologies and political systems (Ghazani, 2016; Van Dijk, 2005).

Researchers may disagree on the identifying characteristics of political discourse. For example, according to Schaffner (1996), political discourse has to be functional (i.e., related to specific political events) and relevant to politics (i.e., dealing with topics related to politics). Van Dijk (2005) views political discourse as a set of genres within a social domain. For the sake of this analysis, political discourse is defined

as constituting all speeches and texts that politicians, or political institutions' representatives, make in enacting their political roles.

This paper examines speeches by two Iranian Presidents before the United Nations General Assembly (henceforth referred to as UNGA). World leaders' UNGA speeches constitute an individual genre of political discourse, as they have specific purposes and contexts (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). The UNGA talks allow participant nation-states to voice, defend, and promote their views and agendas; to secure support from allies; and to gain some cultural, sociopolitical and economic advantage (Alemi et al., 2017; Sardabi et al., 2014; Wahyudi, 2012). Employing an ineffective or undiplomatic linguistic strategy in the annual UNGA address could damage the country's reputation, and lead to sanctions, conflicts, or other negative consequences (Sardabi et al., 2014).

Despite the potential high impact of UNGA speeches, so far few research studies have addressed their discourse (e.g., Sardabi et al., 2014; Wahyudi, 2012). Only two earlier studies have examined representations of self and others in UNGA talks by Iranian leaders (Alemi et al., 2017; Sardabi et al., 2014). One additional study compared the use of the word "justice" in two addresses by one Iranian and one American president respectively (Sadeghi & Tabatabai, 2015). However, these studies were limited to one or two speeches and focused mainly on grammar or a few selected discursive devices. So far, to the best of our knowledge, no in-depth comparisons of multiple UNGA speeches by Iranian presidents Rouhani and Ahmadinejad have been conducted. Our comparison may help to shed light on the expression of political nuances since these two presidents belong to two ideologically-opposed political parties: the Reformists and the Principalists are known for their different platforms, while being somewhat united on the ground of Iranian external policies (Alemi et al., 2017; KhosraviNik, 2015 a & b).

Our study provides a quantitative and qualitative investigation of eight UNGA speeches by two Iranian presidents with a dual focus on micro-level linguistic analysis and macro-level analysis of discourse-embedded ideology conducted within the framework of Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis.

1.2. Critical Discourse Studies and Socio-cognitive Framework

"Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)" is an overarching term for a plethora of theories, methodologies, approaches and applications that focus on discourse as a social practice (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). CDS evolved from Critical Discourse Analysis, and like its predecessor, it is a method and a field of inquiry that borrows elements of linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology to study the use of language by individuals and groups for securing and maintaining power and ideological dominance in society (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2005; Wiggins, 2009). CDS also investigates socio-political context and its impact on patterns and structure of discourse (Van Dijk, 2016).

Multiple approaches within CDA and, subsequently, in CDS, include Social Semiotics, Discursive Social Psychology, Halliday's Systemic-functional linguistics, and Political Discourse analysis (e.g., Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Halliday, 1978; Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Shabani et al., 2019). However,

the three most influential CDS theories in current use include Norman Fairclough's socio-cultural framework (2016), Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (Wodak, 1995) and Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory (2005, 2016). This paper is grounded primarily in Van Dijk's (2005, 2016) socio-cognitive theory.

Van Dijk's (2005, 2016) socio-cognitive theory was developed for media and political discourses (texts and talks). Discourse is interpreted as "a complex communicative event that also embodies a social context featuring participants and their properties" (Van Dijk, 1988, p. 2). The framework enables three levels of analysis: discourse (micro-level), social (macro-level), and cognitive (the interface between the two) (Van Dijk, 2005). At the macro-level, the social analysis addresses representations of the power inequality between group members in society (Van Dijk, 1995, 2005). The distinctive attribute of the model is an "us versus them" dimension, i.e., presenting one's own group in positive terms ("*Positive self-representation*"), and other groups in negative terms ("*Negative other-representation*") (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 22).

Micro-level examination in CDA generally explores the use of syntax, local semantics, lexis, topics, and schematic structures. Van Dijk (2005) provides 25 specific discursive devices for micro-level examination (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 735-736) that this article employs:

actor description (meaning), authority (argumentation), burden (topos), categorization (meaning), comparison (meaning, argumentation), consensus (political strategy), counterfactuals (meaning, argumentation), disclaimers (meaning), euphemism (rhetoric, meaning), evidentiality (meaning, argumentation), example/illustration (argumentation), generalization (meaning, argumentation), hyperbole (rhetoric), implication (meaning), irony (meaning), lexicalization (style), metaphor (meaning, rhetoric), national self-glorification (meaning), norm expression (normalization), number game (rhetoric, argumentation), polarization, Us-Them categorization (meaning), populism (political strategy), presupposition (meaning), vagueness (meaning), and victimization (meaning).

Our analysis employs the above micro-level descriptors as well as macro-level positive self- and negative other-representations. This study intends to expand the scope of CDS by addressing micro- and macro-levels of political discourse by Iranian politicians whose platforms have both similarities and differences. The Western powers and Iran do not see eye-to-eye on a number of political matters, and have starkly contrasting ideologies (e.g., Featherman, 2015). However, very little research is available on the specific use of linguistic tools in contemporary political and non-political Iranian discourse. For example, one study of Persian and English media comments concerning Iran's nuclear talks found the purposes of these respective comments to differ significantly (Irajzad et al., 2017). Further, Iranian bank advertisements used specific devices such as the use of religious vocabulary, including holy names and religious holidays (Tahmasbi, 2013).

A few studies of political talks by Iranian presidents Mahmood Ahmadinejad and Hasan Rouhani have been conducted earlier (e.g., Allami & Barzegar, 2020; Alemi et al., 2017), but these studies highlight only political differences revealed in the respective leaders' platforms. President Rouhani is described as a

more moderate politician than his predecessor, former President Ahmadinejad (Alemi et al., 2017). Rouhani is known to seek collaboration and solidarity with Western powers, whereas Ahmadinejad is known for more radical policies and for challenging Western powers (Alemi et al., 2017; Gowhary et al., 2015; Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015). However, no clear picture has emerged so far regarding the transfer of these political differences to discursal strategies by both presidents.

Iranian president Rouhani was demonstrated to employ varied discursive devices and positive self-representation and negative other-presentation strategies in his political talks (Sardabi et al., 2014, p. 84). An earlier comparison of representations of ordinary people in the respective inaugural speeches of presidents Rouhani and Ahmadinejad conducted within an aggregated model of Critical Discourse Analysis (different from the framework employed in our study) showed significant differences in the presidents' vocabulary use and political self-projections; but their respective representations of common people employed similar discursal strategies (Allami & Barzegar, 2020).

The goal of this study was to compare UNGA speeches of the two Iranian presidents in order to identify similarities and differences in their preferred micro-level linguistic devices and macro-level ideology expression (positive self-/negative-other representations as they relate to the projections of Iran vis-à-vis other states at the international level). Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were undertaken in this study, as suggested in Boréus & Bergström (2017).

The research questions were:

1. What are the most commonly shared micro-level discursive devices in the UNGA speeches of the two presidents, and which devices are significantly different in their speeches?
2. What is the distribution of macro strategies of positive self-representation and negative other-representation in the presidents' UNGA talks, and are there differences in the use of these strategies by the two presidents?

2. Materials and Methods

The transcripts of a total of eight UNGA addresses delivered by two Iranian presidents, Hassan Rouhani (talks made in 2013-2016) and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2008), were analyzed according to the prevalence of Van Dijk's (2005) 25 above-described discursive devices at the micro-level and positive self/negative other representations at the macro level. English translations of the talks were used for the analysis since these were the print and audio versions available to the UN and worldwide audience. The fidelity of the translations was verified by the back-translation technique (Rosyidah & Afifah, 2017) with the help of two Farsi-English bilinguals.

The scripts of the addresses were retrieved from the official website of the UN (www.un.org/en/index.html). The script corpus included close to 9,000 words of speech by each president. The corpus was subjected to qualitative and quantitative analyses. For quantitative analysis at the micro-level, the instances of 25 Van Dijk's (2005) discursive devices were manually extracted from the transcripts

and their frequencies of use were entered on Microsoft Excel 2016 sheets. Van Dijk's (2005) definitions were closely followed to identify these instances. The instances of positive self- and negative-other representations in the speeches by each president have also been entered on Microsoft Excel 2016 sheets for macro-level analysis. A Chi-square test with R package 3.3.2. was applied to compare micro- and macro-analysis parameters across the presidents' speeches.

3. Results

3.1. Part 1. Micro-level Analysis

3.1.1. Micro-level Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data analyses at the micro-level (measuring the frequencies of the 25 discursive devices and the results of chi-square comparison of the use of each device by the two presidents) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency of Micro-level Discursive Devices in Rouhani's 2013-16 & Ahmadinejad's 2005-8 UNGA Talks

<i>Discursive Devices</i>	Rouhani		Ahmadinejad		Chi-square	p. value
	N	%	N	%		
Actor description	77	8.16%	91	10.39%	1.167	0.280
Authority	40	4.24%	29	3.31%	1.754	0.185
Burden	5	0.53%	5	0.57%	0	1
Categorization	10	1.06%	7	0.80%	0.529	0.467
Comparison	22	2.33%	12	1.37%	2.941	0.086
Consensus	9	0.95%	0	0.00%	9	0.003
Counterfactuals	18	1.91%	21	2.40%	0.231	0.631
Disclaimers	4	0.42%	8	0.91%	1.333	0.248
Euphemism	6	0.64%	3	0.34%	1	0.317
Evidentiality	39	4.13%	24	2.74%	3.571	0.059
Illustration	48	5.08%	28	3.20%	5.263	0.022
Generalization	27	2.86%	20	2.28%	1.043	0.307
Hyperbole	85	9.00%	40	4.57%	16.2	0.000
Implication	109	11.55%	98	11.19%	0.585	0.445
Irony	1	0.11%	3	0.34%	1	0.317
Lexicalization	164	17.37%	230	26.26%	11.056	0.001
Metaphor	16	1.69%	7	0.80%	3.522	0.061
National self-glorification	17	1.80%	9	1.03%	2.462	0.117
Norm expression	44	4.66%	40	4.57%	0.19	0.663
Number game	9	0.95%	15	1.71%	1.5	0.221
Polarization	40	4.24%	9	1.03%	19.612	0.000
Populism	16	1.69%	13	1.48%	0.31	0.577
Presupposition	108	11.44%	102	11.64%	0.171	0.679
Vagueness	10	1.06%	43	4.91%	20.547	0.000
Victimization	20	2.12%	19	2.17%	0.026	0.873
Total	944		876		102.615	0.000

As reflected in Table 1, out of a total of 944 instances of discursive devices used by President Rouhani, lexicalization is the most frequent (employed 164 times, representing 17.37% of the total discursive device occurrences). Other devices in Rouhani's UNGA speeches (in decreasing order of frequency) include implication (109 instances or 11.55%), presupposition (108=11.44%), hyperbole (85=9.00%), actor description (77=8.16%), illustration (48=5.08%), norm expression (used 44 times=4.66%), polarization (40=4.24%), authority (40=4.25%), evidentiality (39 times=4.13%), generalization (27 times=2.86%), comparison (22 instances=2.33%), victimization (20=2.12%), counterfactuals (18 times=1.91%), national self-glorification (17=1.80%), metaphor (16=1.69%), populism (16=1.69%), categorization (10=1.06%), vagueness (10 =1.06%), consensus (9=0.95%), number game (9=0.95%), euphemism (6=0.64%), burden (5=0.53%), disclaimers (4= 0.42%), and irony (1=0.11%).

President Ahmadinejad used discursive devices a total of 876 times. Similarly to Rouhani, his favorite choice was lexicalization (230 instances=26.26%). Other discursive devices in Ahmadinejad's UNGA addresses include presupposition (102=11.64%), implication (98=11.19%), actor description (91 times =10.39%), vagueness (43 times=4.91%), hyperbole (40 times=4.57%), norm expression (40=4.57%), authority (29=3.31%), illustration (28=3.20%), evidentiality (24=2.74%), counterfactuals (21 times= 2.40%), generalization (20 =2.28%), victimization (19 times=2.17%), number game (15 times=1.71%), populism (13=1.48%), comparison (12 times=1.37%), national self-glorification (9=1.03%), polarization (9=1.03%), disclaimers (8 times=0.91%), categorization (7=0.80%), metaphor (7=0.80%), burden (5=0.57%), euphemism (3=0.34%), and irony (3=0.34%).

Chi-square analysis (Ref. Table 1) revealed the existence of significant differences in the use of six (out of 25) devices by the two presidents. President Rouhani employed polarization ($\chi^2=19.612, p \leq 0.0001$), hyperbole ($\chi^2 = 16.2, p\text{-value} \leq 0.000$), consensus ($\chi^2=9, p\text{-value}=0.003$), and illustration ($\chi^2=5.263, p\text{-value}=0.022$) significantly more frequently than President Ahmadinejad. By contrast, Ahmadinejad relied on lexicalization ($\chi^2 = 11.056, p\text{-value} = 0.001$) and vagueness ($\chi^2=20.547, p \leq 0.000$) more than his successor. The difference in the total numbers of the discursive devices in Rouhani's addresses (944) vs. Ahmadinejad's addresses (876) was also significant ($\chi^2 = 102.615, p \leq 0.000$).

3.1.2. Micro-Level Qualitative Data Analysis

This section provides qualitative illustrations of the differences in the two presidents' use of discursive devices outlined in the quantitative data analysis above, i.e., in the employment of *consensus*, *illustration*, *hyperbole*, *polarization*, *lexicalization*, and *vagueness*.

Consensus

Consensus is mostly used by politicians to seek solidarity against a threat or to reach an accord with other parties involved in a dispute (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 736). Consensus was one of Rouhani's most frequently-used devices (9) (Example 1), whereas Ahmadinejad did not employ it at all (0).

Example 1

“we have engaged in the most transparent dialogue to build confidence regarding Iran’s peaceful nuclear program” (R 2014).

Here the “consensus” device (coupled with a hyperbole “the most transparent”) serves to show Iran’s willingness to reach an agreement about Iran’s controversial nuclear dossier.

Illustration

Illustrations are examples used to support claims or beliefs; they make a talk sound more authentic, natural, and convincing (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 737). Rouhani employed illustration more frequently than Ahmadinejad (48 vs 28). Examples 2 and 3 represent their respective uses of this device.

Example 2

Terrorist bombings in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon are examples of violence in this region in the last three decades.” (R 2013)

Example 3

“Unfortunately, humanity has witnessed that in all long wars, like the Korean and Vietnam wars, the war of the Zionists against the Palestinians and against Lebanon, the war of Saddam against the people of Iran and the ethnic wars of Europe and Africa, one of the members the Security Council was one of the belligerents or supported one party against the other, usually the aggressor...” (A 2007)

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an intentional use of exaggerated language which in political discourse often serves to highlight positive self-representation and negative other-representation (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 737). Both presidents widely employed this device, but it was twice as frequent in Rouhani’s talks than Ahmadinejad’s (85 vs 40). Examples 4 and 5 illustrate the presidents’ respective uses of hyperbole. The examples also suggest that the two presidents used this device for different purposes.

Example 4

“One such imaginary threat is the so-called “Iranian threat” -which has been employed as an excuse to justify a long catalogue of crimes and most catastrophic practices over the past three decades.” (R 2013)

Example 5

“Let’s support goodness and the majority of people who are good and the embodiment of absolute good...” (A 2008)

Rouhani employed **hyperbole** or **hyperbolic terms** for a wide range of topics. Example 4 demonstrates his use of hyperbole to argue that the threat of Iran has been exaggerated by Western politicians. Ahmadinejad mostly relied on hyperbole to promote his religious vision (Ref. Example 5).

Polarization

Polarization is a discursual device that assists in categorizing people into in-group and out-group members and then building positive and negative representations of the in-group and out-group respectively (Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Van Dijk, 2005, p. 738). Rouhani's used *polarization* about four times more frequently than did his predecessor (40 vs 9) (Ref. examples 6 and 7).

Example 6

"Those who harp on the so-called threat of Iran are either a threat against international peace and security themselves or promote such a threat. Iran poses absolutely no threat to the world or the region . . . My country has been a harbinger of just peace and comprehensive security." (R 2013)

Example 7

"Let's love the people of the world and respect their rights. This will benefit you and the human community. The Iranian people are prepared... to establish peace and prosperity." (A 2008)

As one can see from Examples 6 and 7, both presidents juxtapose Iran and "the rest of the world" to construct a perception of Iran as a force of peace, and the rest of the world as not quite so peaceful.

Lexicalization

Lexicalization denotes the specific use of the semantic properties of words and phrases to represent an entity positively or negatively (Van Dijk, 2005). Lexicalization allows reference to events in a way that attempts to normalize even the most disturbing events and to inculcate politicians' socio-political beliefs in the mind of the public (Van Dijk, 2005). This was the device used most frequently in both presidents' talks, but President Ahmadinejad employed lexicalization significantly more than Rouhani (230 vs 164) (Ref. examples 8 and 9).

Example 8

"Iran believes that it is necessary to revitalize the NPT and create the above-mentioned ad-hoc committee so that it can combat nuclear weapons and abolish the apartheid in peaceful nuclear technology." (A 2005)

Example 9

"At this sensitive juncture in the history of global relations, the age of zero-sum games is over, even though a few actors still tend to rely on archaic and deeply ineffective ways and means to preserve their old superiority and domination." (R 2013)

Both presidents applied lexicalization or lexicalized phrases to negatively represent external world powers by delegitimizing and condemning their actions. However, Ahmadinejad opposes nuclear threat accusations by using the word "apartheid" in Ex 8. Rouhani's use of lexicalization points at the hypocrisy and futility of the NATO states' continued attempts to dominate.

Vagueness

Vagueness refers to the use of language by a speaker to save face and sustain ambiguity when referring to sensitive or problematic topics. While vagueness can be attained through many lexical devices, adverbs or quantifiers like “some, certain, few, a few” and “a lot” are common (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 739). Vagueness is evident in the talks by both presidents (Ref examples 10 and 11), but it is more frequent in Ahmadinejad’s addresses than in Rouhani’s: 43 vs 10.

Example 10

*“Even more dangerous is that **certain parties** relying on their power and wealth try to impose a climate of intimidation and injustice over the world, while — through their huge media resources — they portray themselves as defenders of freedom, democracy and human rights.” (A 2005)*

Example 11

*“Regrettably, **some powers** have provided covert and overt support for these Takfiri groups or condoned their formation.” (R 2016)*

Examples 10 and 11 show that both presidents typically employed vagueness when they did not want to identify specific countries that displeased Iranian politicians.

3.2. Part 2. Macro-level Analysis

3.2.1. Macro-level Analysis: Quantitative Results

A comparison of Rouhani and Ahmadinejad’s respective uses of the dichotomy of positive self-representation and negative other-representation at the macro-level of analysis is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Positive/Negative Representations (Macro-Level) in the Addresses by the Two Presidents

Ideological dichotomy	Rouhani	Ahmadinejad	Chi-square	p. value
Positive self-representation	143 (56.5%)	108 (31%)	4.880	0.027
Negative other-representation	110 (43.5%)	231 (69%)	42.935	<0.0001
<i>Total</i>	253	339	36.084	<0.0001

Ahmadinejad took the lead in the total use of both positive and negative representations (339) as compared to Rouhani (253), and this difference is significant ($\chi^2=36.084$, $p \leq 0.0001$). There were more negative other-representations (231) than positive self-representations (108) in Ahmadinejad’s talks. Rouhani’s talks display a higher number of positive self-representations (143) than negative other-representations (110).

Negative other-representations were significantly more frequent in Ahmadinejad’s talks (231) than Rouhani’s (110) ($\chi^2=42.935$, $p \leq 0.000$). The number of positive self-representations was significantly higher in Rouhani’s talks than Ahmadinejad’s: 143 vs 108 ($\chi^2=4.880$, $p\text{-value} = 0.027$).

3.2.2. Macro-Level Analysis: Qualitative Results

As shown in the previous section, both Iranian presidents employed negative other-representations and positive self-representations. In this section we explore what entities are being “othered” by the two Iranian presidents, and what characteristics are being promoted as positive components of Iran’s image. We also explore an atypical case of positive other-representations.

Negative Other-Representation

Negative other-representation by both presidents focused on four major out-groups: a) NATO forces b) international terrorists, c) Zionists; and d) UN and Western states confronting Iran in connection with its nuclear program.

The negative other-representation of NATO member states by Ahmadinejad (Example 12) was achieved with the help of the micro-level devices of victimization, lexicalization, and illustration.

Example 12

“And innocent people are bombarded (victimization) on a daily basis in streets, markets, schools and wedding ceremonies (illustrations). The people of Afghanistan are the victims (victimization) of the willingness of NATO member states to dominate (lexicalization) the regions surrounding India, China, and South Asia.” (A 2008)

Victimization is a negative representation of one group (as the victims of injustice, cruelty, discrimination, etc.) and a positive representation of the other group placed in contrast to the first (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 739). People of Afghanistan are represented by President Ahmadinejad as victims of NATO forces, and his use of victimization puts the blame for destabilization of Afghanistan directly on NATO forces.

An illustration of a negative other-representation of “extremists” by President Rouhani is provided in Example 13.

Example 13

“Extremists (lexicalization, vagueness) threaten our neighbors (vagueness), resort to violence and shed blood (lexicalization)... they have come to the Middle East from around the world (generalization). They do however have a single ideology: “violence and extremism” (lexicalization). They also have a single goal: the destruction of civilization (hyperbole), giving rise to Islamophobia (lexicalization) and creating a fertile ground (lexicalization) for further intervention (lexicalization) of foreign forces in our region.” (R 2014)

As shown in Example 13, Rouhani creates a strong negative image of “extremists.” However, he does not specify exactly who the extremists are, why they want to “destroy civilization,” and which civilization is under threat. Neither does he name directly foreign forces located in the region; in addition to lexicalization,

hyperbole and generalization (attributing a feature of a smaller group to a larger group), he thus uses vagueness to build a negative other-representation. Generalization and vagueness make his negative other-representation less direct than those of Ahmadinejad (Example 12).

Zionism features as the third prominent “other” in the Iranian presidents’ discourses, as Example 14 illustrates.

Example 14

“What has been - and continues to be - practiced against the innocent people of Palestine (victimization) is nothing less than structural violence. Palestine is under occupation (lexicalization); the basic rights of the Palestinians are tragically violated (victimization), and they are deprived of the right of return and access to their homes, birthplace and homeland (actor description, illustration). Apartheid (lexicalization) as a concept can hardly describe the crimes (lexicalization) and the institutionalized aggression (lexicalization) against the innocent Palestinian people (victimization).” (R 2013)

As example 14 shows, the negative image of Israel is constructed with the help of multiple micro-level devices such as presupposition, victimization, and lexicalization. How they handle the topic of Palestine and Zionism has been considered a measure of Iranian politicians’ faithfulness to the ideals of 1979 Islamic Revolution (Huglund, 2002; Menashri, 2006). In light of this tradition, it is not unusual that the state of Israel and world Zionism appear as another significant “other” in Rouhani and Ahmadinejad’s UNGA addresses.

Finally, the UN and Western states are also portrayed as “other” with reference to their actions in confronting Iran regarding Iran’s nuclear program (Example 15). Iran has been involved in negotiations about the closure of its nuclear program with a few UN states since 2003.

Example 15

“Some powers proudly announce (actor description) their production of second and third generations of nuclear weapons. What do they need these weapons for? Is the development and stockpiling of these deadly weapons designed to promote peace and democracy? (irony) Or, are these weapons, in fact, instruments of coercion (lexicalization) and threat (lexicalization) against other peoples and governments?” (A 2006)

As Example 15 shows, Ahmadinejad questions the legitimacy of a monopoly on nuclear weapons held by a few nation states, and builds a negative image of them as “war-mongering”. He employs many micro-level devices, including actor description and irony, to achieve his macro-goal. Irony creates a deliberate contrast between the speaker’s expressed thoughts and his/her intended message (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 737), and actor description relates to providing in-depth information about someone or something and/or their roles (Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010).

Positive Self-representation

The presidents build positive self-representations drawing on imagery emphasizing that Iran is a) a developing democracy, b) not a nuclear threat, c) an agent of world peace, and d) a godly state. The construction of the image of Iran as a budding democracy is illustrated in Example 16 below.

Example 16

“The recent elections in Iran represent. . .the wise choice of hope, rationality and moderation (national self-glorification, lexicalization) by the great people of Iran (actor description). The realization of democracy consistent with religion and the peaceful transfer of executive power manifested that Iran is the anchor of stability (metaphor) in an ocean (metaphor) of regional instabilities (polarization).”(R 2013)

As example 16 illustrates, Rouhani supports a positive representation of Iran through a plethora of varied discursive devices including national self-glorification (positively representing a country by illuminating certain principles, history, traditions etc.), lexicalization, actor description, metaphor (a substitution of one word for another based on their perceived similarity) and polarization.

Example 17 illustrates Rohani’s construction of a positive image of Iran as an agent of peace.

Example 17

“Iran poses absolutely no threat to the world or the region (norm expression). In fact, in ideals as well as in actual practice, my country has been a harbinger of just peace and comprehensive security (lexicalization, actor description, national glorification).”(R 2013)

Multiple micro-devices (norm expression, lexicalization, national glorification) are employed to construct a positive image of Iran as a “harbinger of peace.”

Ahmadinejad’s strategy of dispelling the idea that Iranian is a nuclear threat is outlined in Example 18.

Example 18

“You are all aware (presupposition) that Iran is a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (illustration). . . All our nuclear activities have been completely peaceful and transparent (actor description).”(A 2007)

In Example 18, Ahmadinejad attempts to legitimize Iran’s use of nuclear power via a reference to its membership in an international agency directly tasked with a concern for nuclear matters; he presupposes that Iran’s membership is common knowledge and then describes Iran’s nuclear program as peaceful and transparent, implicitly connecting the two.

Finally, Iran is portrayed as a godly state, which the respective leaders achieve by referring to God, and his prophet and imams (Example 19). Ahmadinejad spends more time on these descriptions than does Rouhani.

Example 19

“Oh God, hasten the arrival of Imam Al-Mahdi and grant him good health and victory and make us his followers and those who attest to his rightfulness.” (A 2007)

Positive other-representation

Example 20 contains Rouhani’s use of positive other-representation, a representation unusual for politicians. This is one of six positive other-representations by Rouhani found in the corpus. No positive other-representations were found in the talks by Ahmadinejad.

Example 20

“I deem it necessary to recognize the role of all the negotiators, the leaders and the heads of state and government of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Germany, China and the Islamic Republic of Iran in achieving this agreement (consensus).” (R 2015)

The construction of positive other-representation in Example 20 is supported by consensus.

4. Discussion

At the macro-level, our comparison of the UNGA addresses by the two presidents demonstrated that they both used positive self- and negative other-representation. These results confirm the findings of many earlier studies of political discourse conducted in various contexts and languages (Alemi et al., 2017; Darweesh & Muzhir, 2016; Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Sardabi et al., 2014; Wahyudi, 2012). This suggests that positive self- and negative other-representation are universal features of political discourse. Positive self-representation allows politicians to legitimize their policies, ideologies, actions and decisions, whereas the negative representation of others delegitimizes these same aspects in political opponents.

On the other hand, we also see individual differences between politicians’ macro-strategies. The first possible explanation for the differing distributions of positive self- and negative other-representation in the presidents’ respective speeches relates to their diverse political platforms. Rouhani is known for his more moderate political stance. Correspondingly, his talks reveal more positive representations of Iran than criticisms of Western and other unfriendly powers (Alemi et al., 2017; Gowhary et al, 2015; Sardabi et al., 2014).

The next factor likely contributing to the two presidents’ variable uses of macro-devices relates to the domestic, regional and global socio-political contexts. The presidents came to power facing two very different situations. Ahmadinejad took power when Iran was politically and economically more stable, while his successor, Rouhani, took office when Iran was embroiled in harsh political and economic difficulties, including scrutiny of Iran’s nuclear dossier and an economic recession (KhosraviNik, 2015a). A perception that Iran’s internal strength and stability were compromised could have caused Ahmadinejad to produce

more explicit critiques of non-allies in his speeches. This would explain his reversion to a higher level of negative other-representation in contrast to positive self-presentation.

Rouhani led Iran's negotiations team for approximately two years (2003-2005) when he served as the secretary of the National Security Council of Iran (KhosraviNik, 2015a). After Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the President of Iran in 2005, Rouhani resigned from the negotiation team due to his conflict of ideas with Ahmadinejad's (Chaudhri & Fyke, 2008). These differences may explain Rouhani's higher reliance on positive self-representation and use of consensus devices when discussing nuclear program issues.

While speaking of the Iranian nuclear program, Rouhani also made a few positive representations of them-members, a macro-strategy very rare among politicians (Darweesh & Muzhir, 2016; Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Van Dijk 2005). This likely reflects Rouhani's individual political stance of "playing nice" to de-escalate potentially disruptive situations.

In sum, although commonalities in the respective presidents' uses of positive self-representation and other-negative representation exist, the nuances of the presidents' respective political platforms appear to manifest a higher proportion of positive self- to negative other- representations in the speeches of a more moderate politician (Rouhani) than a more radical one (Ahmadinejad). In addition, a proponent of negotiations with Western Powers (Rouhani) employed positive representations of other powers.

The micro-level analysis demonstrated that the two Iranian presidents widely employed Van Dijk's (2005) twenty-five discursive devices (with the exception of Ahmadinejad not using 'consensus'). These results validate Van Dijk's paradigm as an effective tool for analyzing political discourses within a variety of contexts and backgrounds. We will first discuss some similarities in the presidents' uses of micro-level discursive devices with implications for political discourse in general, and will then focus on differences in their use of devices.

The devices used most frequently in the talks of both presidents (pooled together) were lexicalization (N=394), presupposition (N=210), implication (N=207) and actor description (N=168). The dominance of lexicalization as a micro-device was observed not only in our study but in many earlier studies as well, which seems to highlight the universal features of political discourse, whereby lexicalization "rules" political speeches across time, as well as across geographical and ideological space, from Osama Bin Laden (Al Saaidi, et al., 2016) to Hilary Clinton (Abdel-Moety, 2014). Lexicalization is an ideologically based way of referring to events (Van Dijk, 1995), a "signifier" of ideologies; the communication of any ideology requires specific lexical items in its surface representation.

The presupposition is a hidden, un verbalized part of meaning which is assumed to be known, understood, and held true. It is a part of the shared "general sociocultural knowledge" (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 739), essential for the construction of "us"-representation. It has also been seen as a resource for establishing socio-political dominance (Atieno Peter et al., 2016) and is therefore widely used in politics regardless of the specific political platform, as the Iranian presidents' examples demonstrate (both of them using similarly high numbers of presuppositions).

Implications (implicatures) are implicit parts of a discourse that could be reconstructed by listeners from shared knowledge. They sometimes help to convey meaning that, if explicitly stated, could be perceived as troublesome, confrontational, biased, or leading to undesirable consequences (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 737) such as objections (Swanson, 2017, p. 117). The high number of implications in the talks by both presidents could be the result of a communicative situation whereby each had to address Iran's troubled relations with Western powers (in hopes of gaining support from other countries) right in front of the Western Powers' representatives.

Actor Descriptions are utterances, shaped by ideological and political stances, whereby in-group members are described positively, and others negatively (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 735). Actor descriptions directly contribute to macro-level positive self- and negative other- representations and were found in almost equally high numbers in both presidents' talks.

In our study, we observed not only some similarities, but also statistically significant differences between the respective presidents' uses of the following micro-level devices: lexicalization and vagueness were more frequent in the talks by Ahmadinejad, whereas Rouhani employed more hyperbole, illustration, and polarization. Only Rouhani utilized consensus, whereas Ahmadinejad did not revert to it at all. We will consider these differences in detail below from the viewpoint of their possible connections to the Presidents' political agendas.

Despite the rich lexicalization output in the talks of both presidents described above, Ahmadinejad produced a significantly higher number of lexicalizations. This could be explained through Van Dijk's suggestion (2005, p. 737) that more conservative discourse yields a high number of "negative expressions" describing the "others". Therefore, a high number of negative lexicalizations helped President Ahmadinejad to achieve multiple negative other-representations at the macro level.

Vagueness (or "language elasticity") is found in a variety of contexts, including politics (Cutting, 2007; Zhang, 2015). In politics, vagueness is often employed by a speaker to shelter him/her from criticism while addressing contentious issues, or to avoid referring to out-group characteristics or to in-group positive features that are taken for granted (Darweesh & Muzhir, 2016; Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010). It can be regarded not as a "deficiency," but as an effective tool of communication, particularly in tension-prone encounters (Zhang, 2015). In the context of pressures on Iran to stop its nuclear program, Ahmadinejad's agenda focused on confrontation with Western powers and Israel. There are thus more instances of vagueness in his talks, presumably allowing him to outline his position while not directly antagonizing any specific state leaders (thus, vagueness (micro-level) is employed to mitigate negative other-representations (macro-level)). These findings agree with earlier research that examined Ahmadinejad's use of vagueness to refer to countries to which he attributed the worldwide expansion of terrorism, violence, poverty, etc. (Alemi et al., 2017).

Consensus is a widely used political strategy, particularly in "situations where the country is threatened, for instance by the outside attack (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 736). It was utilized by President Rouhani to promote his ideological stance of moderation, negotiation, and compromise while discussing nuclear

issues and violence. This strategy was likely intended to win the support of the international community and to diminish hostilities between Iran and other countries. His reliance on “consensus” therefore arguably stems from his more moderate political platform, as noted in earlier research (Alemi et al., 2017; Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015). Ahmadinejad’s lack of consensus devices, on the other hand, can be explained by his political goal of challenging rather than appeasing Western powers.

Hyperbole is a tool for enhancing or exaggerating meaning. It is a typical feature of political discourse and is used to “gain particular ends and to win or retain support” by means of “focusing attention on specific aspects of reality” in order to connect with “values and norms associated with those aspects in an emotionally charged way” (Swartz, 1976, p. 101). Hyperbole can be used by both left and right politicians to either praise their own (positive self-representation) or condemn others’ (negative other-representation) actions (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 737) and is therefore unlikely to be connected to a specific political stance. Hyperbole is associated with a high degree of formality, complexity and difficulty of text and text rhetoric devices (Alemi, et al., 2017; Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015). It is possible that the higher number of hyperboles in President Rouhani’s speeches reflects his longer and more varied experience in the world of politics, particularly in his previous roles in Iran’s international negotiations.

Illustration (example) is known to be “a powerful move in argumentation”, since concrete examples are better memorized and have a more emotional impact (Van Dijk, 2006, p 737). Political platform differences cannot explain why illustration is more prevalent in Rouhani’s talks, because examples can serve any political platform.

Polarization (us-them) is a tool helping to contrast inside- and outside-group representations (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 738) and therefore directly feeds into macro strategies of positive self- and negative other-representations. Polarization is known to be widely used by politicians (Jensen et al., 2012). It is not clear why a more moderate politician (President Rouhani) has more instances of polarization in his speeches, particularly when Ahmadinejad employs more positive self- and negative other-representations than Rouhani.

The above differences in the use of hyperbole, illustration, and polarization cannot be explained by differences in the political agendas of the two Presidents. It has been suggested earlier that higher use of these devices by President Rouhani could reflect his long experience in giving public political speeches (Alemi et al., 2017), and consequently, of his more extensive practice in using rhetorical devices.

In sum, some differences exist in the two presidents’ employment of micro devices (lexicalization, vagueness, and consensus) that feed into the macro-structures and that could be explained by some differences in their respective political platforms. However, some other observed differences (the higher frequency of illustration, hyperbole and polarization in Rouhani’s speeches) are hard to explain in terms of politics, and thus are probably rooted in personal political and public speaking experience, preference for rhetoric devices, or other individual differences.

In terms of micro- and macro-strategies evident in the speeches, our results confirm that, reflecting the Conservative (Principalist) agenda, Ahmadinejad tended to be ideologically radical and direct,

especially in representing the out-group members negatively, while Rouhani took a less radical stance (Alemi et al., 2017; Gowhary et al, 2015; Sardabi et al., 2014).

Ahmadinejad's radical foreign policy coincided with multiple economic and political sanctions against Iran (Alemi et al., 2017; Gowhary et al, 2015; Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015). By contrast, Rouhani's non-radical approach towards the nuclear program helped him to become a president in 2013 as well as to secure some international support (Mazlum & Afshin, 2016; Gowhary et al, 2015; Sardabi et al., 2014).

This study was limited by three factors: a small sample size (eight talks by two Iranian presidents analyzed in their English translations); a focus on only one macro-level dichotomy (positive self/negative other-representation); and an analysis of text transcript data that excluded gestures, facial expressions, and prosodic features known to be important in public presentations (Sayenko, 2014).

5. Conclusion

As Van Dijk (2005, p. 739) notes, "there is a close relationship between discourse, ideology and politics, in the sense that politics is usually discursive as well as ideological, and ideologies are largely reproduced by text and talk." UNGA addresses by world leaders reveal the dynamics of the re-construction and re-creation of nation states by their leaders, and therefore provide rich research material for CDS and Political Discourse Studies. Through yearly UNGA speeches, we can observe how "the nation ravel, unravels, and unravels... transforming into something which has yet to take shape" (Heller et al., 2016, p. 255). In today's global market, symbolic capital gained by the use of a successful rhetoric device or a convincing argument in the UN can translate into actual financial gains via new trade agreements, and the lifting of sanctions and embargoes. On the other hand, a poorly conceived expression or a tongue-slip can lead to negative consequences. Contrary to earlier findings in Iranian political discourse studies (KhosraviNik, 2015a), Rouhani introduces positive other-representations (as opposed to more common negative other-representations) in his UNGA talks in order to "score points" with Western powers.

Both Iranian presidents use a vast array of Van Dijk's discursive devices. However, at the micro-level, Rouhani relies more than Ahmadinejad on "consensus", "illustration", "hyperbole" and "polarization," whereas Ahmadinejad favors "lexicalization" and "vagueness." Some differences in the use of these micro-devices (consensus, vagueness, lexicalization) are explained by nuanced difference in the presidents' respective political platforms and world views. However, some other differences (in the use of hyperboles, illustrations, polarizations) are more likely rooted in their respective personal backgrounds, experiences, and individual rhetoric preferences. At the macro-level, for both presidents as well as for countless political leaders around the globe, a key to gaining ideological ascendancy is employing macro-level positive "us" and negative "other" representations (Van Dijk, 2005). However, there is also room for nuanced differences that reflect political platforms at the macro-level: Rouhani employs positive "self-representations" more often, while Ahmadinejad employs negative "other-representations" more frequently; Ahmadinejad also produces more "self- and other-representations" than Rouhani. The study

shows how CDA and CDS can help not only to unravel discursal devices evident in the expression of political agendas and reflecting individual differences across politicians, but also to raise awareness of realities as they are reflected through ideologies and power (Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Van Dijk, 2005).

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