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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH OF

THE DOCTORAL THESIS

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TRUMP’S POLITICAL TWEETS ABOUT BLACK AMERICAN, MEXICAN, AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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Cuvinte cheie / Keywords:

Presidential Twitter discourse, political tweets, critical discourse analysis, racism, marginalization, Black Americans, Mexicans, Muslims

Rezumatul în limba engleză al tezei de doctorat

Summary in English of the Doctoral Thesis

Introduction and context

In the contemporary world, communication and related meanings transmitted from a high political level within a given society frequently exert a considerable impact on the communities living in that society. There are multiple interdependences between the leaders' political discourse and the troubled or peaceful existence of certain communities. In the context of the US, political discourses towards marginalized minorities may lead to hypersegregation in the social fabric. It is, therefore, considered that when the most influential political leader, instead of propagating democratic legacy, chooses to construct the social and political dimensions of 'They' and 'Us', through his political discourse, the close analysis of such a discourse becomes not only a matter of urgency but the survival of democratic principles.

This study aims to analyse Donald Trump's preferred rhetorical devices and linguistic features that he used in his political tweets about Black Americans, Mexicans, and Muslims in the US. The current study simultaneously relates to the dimensions of racism, presidential political discourse, critical and political discourse analysis and use of digital space social media to disseminate ideologies. The most significant, among these aspects, is racism due to the global concern with it in the present century.

The study builds on the hypothesis that critical discourse analysis of Trump's tweets can furnish a critique of the specific American White ideology existing in his era. However, in doing so, the underlying intention is that of remaining unbiased, so as not to build opinions about the tweets through any pre-determined negative or positive lens. Although critical discourse analysis, in its essence, presupposes that the researcher takes an engaged approach, yet it also provides a systematic method for recontextualizing ideologies by analyzing them to their core, while remaining open to exceptions and

objections. This study, thus, aims to reveal the kind of world the former US President wanted to create in terms of social setup, social relations, global harmony and exercise of authority. For that matter, Twitter and CDA both provide a critical workspace to investigate his political discourse in the form of tweets.

Research Objectives, Research Questions, and Rationale

The main research objectives of the current study are: (1) to identify and critically analyze Trump's preferred discursive strategies that he employs in his tweets in relation to Black Americans, Mexicans, and Muslims in the US; (2) to critically explore how the socio-historical background of Black Americans, Mexicans, and Muslims affect Trump's discourse in his tweets in relation to these communities; (3) to identify and critically analyze Trump's preferred linguistic features that he employs in his tweets in relation to Black Americans, Mexicans, and Muslims.

In line with these main aims, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What rhetorical devices does Trump preferably employ in his tweets when referring to the communities of (a) Black Americans, (b) Mexicans, and (c) Muslims?

2. How does the socio-historical background of these communities in the US exert an effect on Trump's discourse in his political tweets about the (a) Black Americans, (b) Mexicans, and (c) Muslims?

3. What linguistic features does Trump preferably employ in his tweets about the communities of (a) Black Americans, (b) Mexicans, and (c) Muslims?

According to Blumler & Gurevitch (2005), the political discourses of political leaders have a huge potential to transmit their intended conceptions into the minds of the masses. This creates and nourishes 'a collective mind' in the shape of new identities, that are often in line with the leaders' intention. It is with the help of critical discourse analysis that such hidden motives can be identified, while critically analysing the means employed by prominent political leaders, with a view to making a lasting impact. This has been the strongest motivation for conducting this study.

Further underlying objectives for conducting this research included (1) understanding which rhetorical and discursive strategies Trump preferred in order to create *Us-They* paradigms among the White supremacists and the Black American, Mexican, and Muslim

communities in the US; (2) how Trump's Twitter discourse tended to initiate and consolidate power relations based on the *marginalizing* vs. the *marginalized* dichotomy among these communities, using specific linguistic features; (3) how the selected discourse simultaneously provided the understanding of the broader picture of the existing racial discrimination in the US socio-cognitively, historically, and linguistically.

This research agenda can be considered crucial and important in the contemporary world of multiple conflicts and evolving challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework and a critical review of the literature are presented in Chapter Two of the current study. A review of the origins of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is followed by arguments in favour of chosing CDA for the current study as both research approach and methodology. The chapter also presents critical arguments in favour of the interlinked status of discourse with ideology, power, and privileged social access in societies with a reference to that of the US, as well as the rationale for the intertwined relationship between political discourse and social media

A close review of the existing literature revealed that most previous studies in CDA research have employed certain CDA frameworks as a single approach to discourse analysis. This left a large room for researching Trump's political tweets by employing an integrated framework that could provide the socio-cognitive, historical, and linguistic significance of the data simultaneously in a single study.

Thus, three frameworks were chosen:

(1) van Dijk's *Socio-Cognitive Approach* to CDA (2009), that can assist in identifying potential linkages between the social setups and formation of a 'Collective Mind' that reflects social cognition in a society; according to van Dijk, the interplay among discourse, cognition and *society* is not direct but has to be mediated by *cognition*; this CDA approach has been integrated in the research framework of this study to critically analyze the rhetorical and discursive strategies employed by Trump in his selected tweets.

(2) Wodak's *Discourse Historical Approach* to analyze discourses in their socio-historical contexts; just as cognition plays a significant role in linking society and

discourse, the historical element is equally important in Wodak's discourse-historical approach (Wodak, 2001) to CDA.

(3) Hallliday's *Systemic Functional Grammar* Approach (2006) to analyzing discourses; according to this model, linguistic meanings are generated through a socio-grammatical system in which grammar is related with the discourse produced in a social surrounding (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Halliday's (2006) Systemic Functional Grammar Model, was used to explore relevant linguistic features in Trump's selected tweets, at the clause level, with a view to identifying how specific words and grammatical categories in the tweets functioned to create discursive meanings in the social setting of the US.

The integrated framework provided critical and argumentative grounds for analyzing a multitude of aspects in Trump's political discourse about the three marginalized communities.

Methodological Approach and Corpus

The research paradigms and research design are presented in Chapter Three ("Research Methodology"). The relevance of the selected CDA model, reviewed in Chapter Two, is continued in this chapter, with further details regarding the application of the methodological approaches opted for, in association with the collected data.

It is considered that for a complex analysis, such as the one envisaged here, only a single framework would not have been enough. Thus, van Dijk's (2009) Socio-Cognitive Model was used to analyze how Trump constructed racism through employing certain discursive strategies, while Wodak's (2001) Discourse Historical Model was employed to reveal how Trump reconstructed that racism, which had been associated with the US society for a long time and had its specific racial history. Further, a linguistic model was required to see how this discourse functioned linguistically in the US society and, therefore, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar Model was employed.

At the data collection stage, Twitter was used as the parent platform for collecting the tweets regarding the Black Americans, Mexicans and Muslims, posted by Trump from 2015 to January 2021. As certain tweets have been deleted or restricted on Trump's Twitter handle, Trump's Twitter Archive (accessible at http://www.trumpTwitterarchive.com), that has collected all of Trump's personal tweets

tweeted on his personal account @realDonaldTrump in verbatim, was accessed. A total of 136 tweets were extracted from this archive to form three datasets in accordance with the selected communities. Specific representative keywords (e.g., *Black American(s)*, *Mexican(s)*, *Muslim(s)*, *Wall*, *Protests*, *Floyd*, *Looters*, *Terrorists*, *Radical, Islam*) were keyed in for filtering the tweets. Subsequent to collecting the tweets, the tweets were chronologized and coded according to the communities they referred to: Black Americans (*n*= 54, code= BAT00), Mexicans (*n*= 56, code= MXT00), and Muslims (*n*= 26, MLT00). After compiling the three sub-corpora with all the tweet samples coded, the data were ready to be critically analysed.

Analysis, Findings and Discussion

Data analysis through the three CDA paradigms explained above, the main findings and discussion on the findings are presented in Chapter Four ("Data Analysis, Findings and Discussion").

The data analysis was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, the socio-cognitive analysis (van Dijk, 2009) was conducted, in two stages, to analyse the rhetorical and discursive strategies and devices that Trump employed in his tweets about the three communities. In the Macro Analysis stage, the social context and related content were investigated, while in the Micro Analysis stage, the rhetorical devices were analysed. The macro analysis revealed the existence of a strong ideological ground for marginalization and racism towards the selected minorities. It complied with the findings of previous studies, such as Coe and Griffin (2020), that there has been a prominent force of racism in the political landscape of the US. Further, the micro analysis revealed that Trump's preferred rhetorical devices that he used in the selected tweets on Black Americans, were Actor Description, Hyperbolic Self-Glorification, Lexicalization, Victimization, Burden, Manipulation, Legitimization, Authority, and Persuasion. The rhetorical devices used about Mexicans were Burden, Victimization, Lexicalization, Number Game, Persuasion, Manipulation, and Legitimization. The strategies used when referring to Muslims included Victimization, Irony, Hyperbole, Lexicalization, Legitimization, Persuasion, and Manipulation.

In the second phase of the study, the Discourse Historical Analysis (Wodak, 2001) was conducted for each community, in two stages. First, the Discourse Imminent Technique was applied to the tweets of each community and later, Socio-Diagnostic Critique was

established respectively. Both stages in the analysis regarding the Black Americans revealed that Trump's textual choices regarding this community portray a negative image according to which, this community is considered unpeaceful and historically a 'gun-grabber' community in the US. In contrast to the colours used for portraying this community, Trump paints his personal image as a law-abiding individual who has empathy for other races and religions.

Likewise, the analysis of the discourse regarding Mexicans revealed that Trump ignored the historical underlying reasons behind the illegal immigration of Mexicans to the US. He regarded them all as 'Illegal Immigrants' who were 'after' the US economy so that they could take a big portion of it. He also homogenously victimizes Mexicans by putting the burden of establishing, through time, cartels and mafias on the shoulder of the Mexican government, while he calls Mexicans 'drug dealers', 'criminals', and 'rapists'. He criticizes the Southern Border as unsafe and open to migration. Socially, Trump's imaging reflects a racist ideology whose core problem is suggesting homogeneity across the community of Mexicans, as if they were all guilty of crime and negative actions.

Next, the analysis of the discourse about Muslims revealed that Trump was highly skeptical of Islamic norms and the actions of this community. Overall, Trump ended up by calling all Muslims 'radical', overlooking the fact that different individuals have different mentalities. Trump reconstructs the historical marginalization and xenophobic *otherization* of Muslims in the US. The aspect that makes Muslim's otherization different from that of the Mexicans and Black Americans is that the former is religion-based alienization in Trump's discourse. This historical impression regarding Muslims often reflects through Trump's lexical choices that feature Muslims and Islam as a threat to the US. However, the current study contends that Trump's phrases such as 'radical Islam' are ambiguous, and should not be rushed to be interpreted, as it is unclear in his discourse whether he is calling Islam and Muslims 'radical' or he is talking about the extremists' radical version of the religion. Nevertheless, several other instances provide proof that in his discourse, he tends to marginalize Muslims, as it has historically been in the US. Overall, the discourse historical analysis revealed racist approaches in Trump's tweets for the selected communities.

In the third phase, the metafunctional analysis using the Systemic Functional Grammar Approach (Halliday, 2006) was conducted for each sub-corpus of tweets. In this linguistic

analysis, the linguistic features of the tweets were analysed using ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. In ideational analysis, the identification of the patterns with regard to the participants, processes, and circumstances of the tweets were explored for each community. Likewise, in interpersonal analysis, the patterns of attitudes, opinions, and judgements were analysed. Further, in textual analysis, the features of cohesion in the discourse were analysed. The metafunctional analysis of the discourse regarding the Black Americans revealed that Trump used binary patterns in which the positive participant is always he himself, whereas the negative participants are the Black Americans, as well as his political opponents, such as Biden and Hillary Clinton. Further, this community, as 'participant' in the tweets, appears depicted as 'looters', 'flag burners', 'rioters', 'criminals', 'agitators' and 'thugs', and the processes root out of these adjectives. Therefore, in the ideational analysis, it was revealed that Trump had an extremely negative image of this community and its social role in the US. The interpersonal analysis revealed that Trump uses imperative, indicative, and conditional grammar moods for the Black Americans, which shows a threatening and confirmatory attitude.

The metafunctional analysis regarding the tweets on Mexicans revealed that the latter always appear in Trump's discourse as 'hidden looters' of the US economy who have always taken unjustified benefit of the economy. The analysis showed that Mexicans had a '*They'* image in Trump's ideological makeup, and this community was bringing all the social negativity to the US in the form of cartels, drugs, and crimes. A major image that appears as a process is the construction of the Wall between the Mexican border and the Southern border of the US. This is pictured as a consistent image of peace for Trump, because according to him, Mexicans were the '*other'* in the *process*. Thus, the *participants* were mostly the 'Positive' Trump and the 'Negative' Mexicans. The ideational analysis indicated that the Mexican's negative processes were homogenized by Trump, as he tends to use the word 'Mexico' for 'Mexicans'.

The metafunctional analysis of the tweets on the Muslim community also revealed certain racist attitudes that Trump sustains not only for the Muslim in the US but at large. He refers to other Muslim countries, as well, while talking about the Muslim community in the US. According to him, this community, as a whole, is extremist with weird beliefs in terrorism. The *participants* are frequently Trump on the right side, and Muslims, Muslim countries, and Islam, on the wrong side, because they are a radical and terrorist

community. The processes referred to are the destroying of the US, robbing the economy, and spreading anarchy in the world. Trump perceives Islamic countries and Muslims as destructive elements that have nothing to do but terrorize the peaceful and developed world. The ideational analysis, accordingly, reveals a consciousness that perceives all Muslims as lesser human beings who have an undeveloped mentality and uncivil behaviour. Trump also homogenizes Muslims as terrorists, while he blames them for the terror attacks in several different locations. Terrorism is a colossal image of destruction that he consistently associates with Islam, thereby assigning negativity to all Muslims.

The findings of the three different analyses (i.e., Socio-Cognitive analysis, Discourse Historical Analysis and Metafunctional Analysis) appear to align with one another. They provide a clear and critical picture of Trump painting a positive image of the White supremacists, while otherizing the Black American, Mexican, and Muslim communities. While previous studies have mostly researched the tweets through a single point of view in a single study, the novelty of this study lies in that three different and separate analyses indicate findings that converge on a point of reference, which is the expression of the racist approach in Trump's tweets, confirmed from three different angles – social-cognitive, historical and linguistic.

Contributions, Implications, Conclusions

From a methodological perspective, the innovative contribution brought by the current study consisted in integrating three CDA frameworks of analysis - the socio-cognitive research paradigm, the discursive historical paradigm, and the linguistic model, based on the systemic functional grammar model.

It specifically contributes to the analysis of the discourse published on the Twitter platform, a contemporary social platform for professional, political, academic communication. The integration helped in avoiding making rushed judgements about the prominent 'Participant', the author of the tweets. By this method, socio-cognitive, historical, and linguistic traits of the data were analyzed at a deeper level. This revealed the hidden meanings more clearly than using one of the frameworks would have done.

The present study also has implications for CDA research. To achieve greater understanding of presidential, social media, and political discourses, these discourses need to be critically analyzed from varied angles.

This study also has some limitations. The present analysis did not use any software for collecting and analyzing data. Concordancing software could have contributed to obtaining more precise conclusions, so future researchers could take work in this area further by expanding and diversifying the data set. Further, the study used qualitative research design and methodology that analyzed data non-statistically. Employing other methodologies and research designs may add to the current conclusions, therefore, in the future also other methodologies could be incorporated. Additionally, a larger sample of tweets may expand results in varied directions, therefore, other researchers may like to work with a wider corpus.

The study presents four significant conclusions: Firstly, Trump behaves as an "echo chamber" of the time-old racism and the racist *Us-They* status quo. Secondly, he uses language efficiently and fearlessly, to create the *Otherizing* and *Otherized* groups. He rigorously employs certain rhetorical devices and linguistic features to obtain his goal of marginalizing the selected communities. Thirdly, the discourse historical analysis revealed the longitudinal background of the spacio-temporal features of Trump's tweets. Lastly, the metafunctional analysis of the data revealed that Trump used language functions to construct and reconstruct racism towards the Black American, Mexican, and Muslim communities in the US. However, the tweets containing certain phrases about Islam and Muslims should not be rushed for judgmental conclusions and homogenous targeting.

As a final conclusion, it is hoped that by applying three different CDA research paradigms / three different angles contributing to an analytical organic whole, the study will be of assistance in understanding racial attitudes and socio-political foundations hidden behind such political discourses.

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