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**A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL POSTERS OF THE
AMERICAN ELECTION OF 2020**

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Abstract:

The current study focuses on the United States Presidential election of 2020. The candidates of the presidency of the United States of America are the Democratic former vice president Joe Biden and the Republican Donald Trump. The aim of this study is to analyse the key political posters made for the campaigns of the elections. Four posters of the candidates in the election of 2020 have been chosen randomly, two for each of them. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model is adopted for the analysis of the visual devices. A political discourse perspective is used to identify the main discursive strategies employed to persuade the American population to vote in a certain direction. Van Leeuwen's approach (2008) is adopted for this purpose. It concentrates on the representation of social actors in discourse as individuals or in groups, as active agents or patients. Nomination, functionalization and identification.

It is hypothesized that the visual devices employed by both candidates are similar in some aspects and different in others. These devices reflect the ideologies of each party. The background of the posters, colours, orthography, body language and facial expressions have a similar effect to persuade the audience to vote for a certain candidate.

It is also hypothesized that the written texts used in the US electoral posters are characterized by ellipsis, repetition, positive language, and short phrases. The phrases and sentences are carefully chosen and worded so as to be more effective.

1. Introduction:

When the US voters go to the polls or attempt to mail their ballots in the 2020 election, they are not only choosing between the two parties-the Democratic Party or the Republican Party- but are also making a choice about the future of their nation. The threats that are confronting the United States of America nowadays are white supremacy, authoritarianism, and nationalism as well as fatal threats to their democracy. In all cases, there exists a rebuke of racist, autocratic politics, and healthy problems.

In terms of health, the US administration under the President Donald Trump has intentionally lied about the risks of COVID-19, failed to introduce a coherent national pandemic strategy to confront this deadly virus, and initiated the process to withdraw the USA from the World Health Organisation. Furthermore, the US administration has cut food stamps, denied climate change, prevented Arab's from travelling to the US, and separated immigrant families from their children.

Iran's nuclear programme is another political problem confronting the United States of America. Both parties, the Democratic and the Republican, have been looking at Iran's nuclear programme from a different angle. So these and other related factors have been formulating the political conflict between the two parties, the Republic and Democratic. Donald Trump is the candidate of the Republic Party and Joe Biden is the candidate of Democratic Party (Boyd RW et al., 2020: 1377).

Through the United States Presidential election of 2020, both candidates have intentionally employed different strategies to persuade their audience to vote to them. These strategies are either linguistic (through using linguistic devices), or non-linguistic strategies (through using visual, colour, and orthographic devices). These strategies, whether linguistic or visual, play a major role in stating the policies of both candidates, and presenting their economic future plans. From the previous discussion, two questions might inevitably be raised:

1. What are the linguistic and non-linguistic strategies employed by both candidates in the US election of 2020?
2. How have the US presidential candidates made use of these strategies to convince their audience to vote to them?

2. Multimodal-Political Discourse Analysis:

Paltridge (2012: 167, Elaf & Hussien 2020) states that to read, understand, and analyse a text, it is not only words, phrases, or sentences that we adhere to, but also other modalities, such as pictures, films, video images and sounds. If effective and inspiring, these modalities make people involved and immersed in any action and situation. People in the United States of America have witnessed the sight of destruction, and the shock of the 9/ 11 attacks might be greater for them.

A multimodal approach to texts accounts for the integrated part of each mode situated within a certain text (Kress, 2012: 39, Alakrash et.al 2020). The relationship between speech and writing is a kind of inherent and conventional association, which is similar to forms of visual modes that represent a culturally significant meaning. Colour, dress, font, size, layout, and bodily gestures, as well as related auditory elements such as (music, sound and speech) all have social and semiotic meaning. So each mode is capable of representing a similar socially constructed knowledge.

Employing distinct modes, therefore, enables the producer and the comprehender to multiply choices to create meaning (ibid.).

In recent times, critical discourse analysis has been of interest for some linguists and scholars.g, Fairclough, N., 2002, 2012; van Dijk, T. A., 2006; Wodak, R. & Meyer, M., (2009);and van Leeuwen, T. (2009). Crystal (2003:117) defines critical discourse analysis as “ a perspective which studies the relationship between discourse events and socio-political and cultural factors, especially the way discourse is ideologically influenced by and can itself influence power relations in society.”Paltridge (2012:169) argues that, to examine the way in which a text is employed for critical purposes, there is a number of strategies that can be noted such as, the way in which the text is presented to its audience, the visual modes employed, and what perspective, angle and slant the writer is taking.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model is adopted for the analysis of the images in this study. Their model (2006: 210) consists of three main parts, information value, salience and framing. These main parts can be subdivided into minor ones. The information value is further subdivided into centred (circular, triptych, centre-margin, mediator-polarised elements); and polarized (given-new, no horizontal polarization, ideal-real, no vertical polarization). Salience is either maximum salience or minimum salience. Framing is also subdivided into maximum disconnection and maximum connection.

Furthermore, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006: 209) explain their model as follows:

1. Centred: an element or picture is placed in the centre of the composition.
2. Polarized: no element may be seen in the centre of the composition.
3. Triptych: an element in a centred composition is placed either on the right or left above and below the Centre.
4. Circular: an element is placed both above and below and to the sides of the Centre, and further elements may be placed in between these polarized positions.
5. Margin: an element in a centred composition is identical or near-identical, so creating symmetry in the composition.
6. Mediator: the centre of a polarized centred composition forms a bridge between Given and New and/or Ideal and Real, so reconciling polarized elements to each other in some way.
7. Given: the left element in a polarized composition or the left polarized element in a centred composition.
8. New: the right element in a polarized composition or the right polarized element in a centred composition.
9. Ideal: the top element in a polarized composition or the top polarized element in a centred composition.
10. Real: the bottom element in a polarized composition or the bottom polarized element in a centred composition.
11. Salience: the degree to which an element draws attention to itself, due to its size, its place in the foreground or its overlapping of other elements, its colour, its tonal values, its sharpness or definition, and other features.
12. Disconnection: the degree to which an element is visually separated from other elements through frame lines, pictorial framing devices, empty space between elements, discontinuities of colour and shape, and other features.

13. Connection: the degree to which an element is visually joined to another element, through the absence of framing devices, through vectors and through continuities or similarities of colour, visual shape, etc

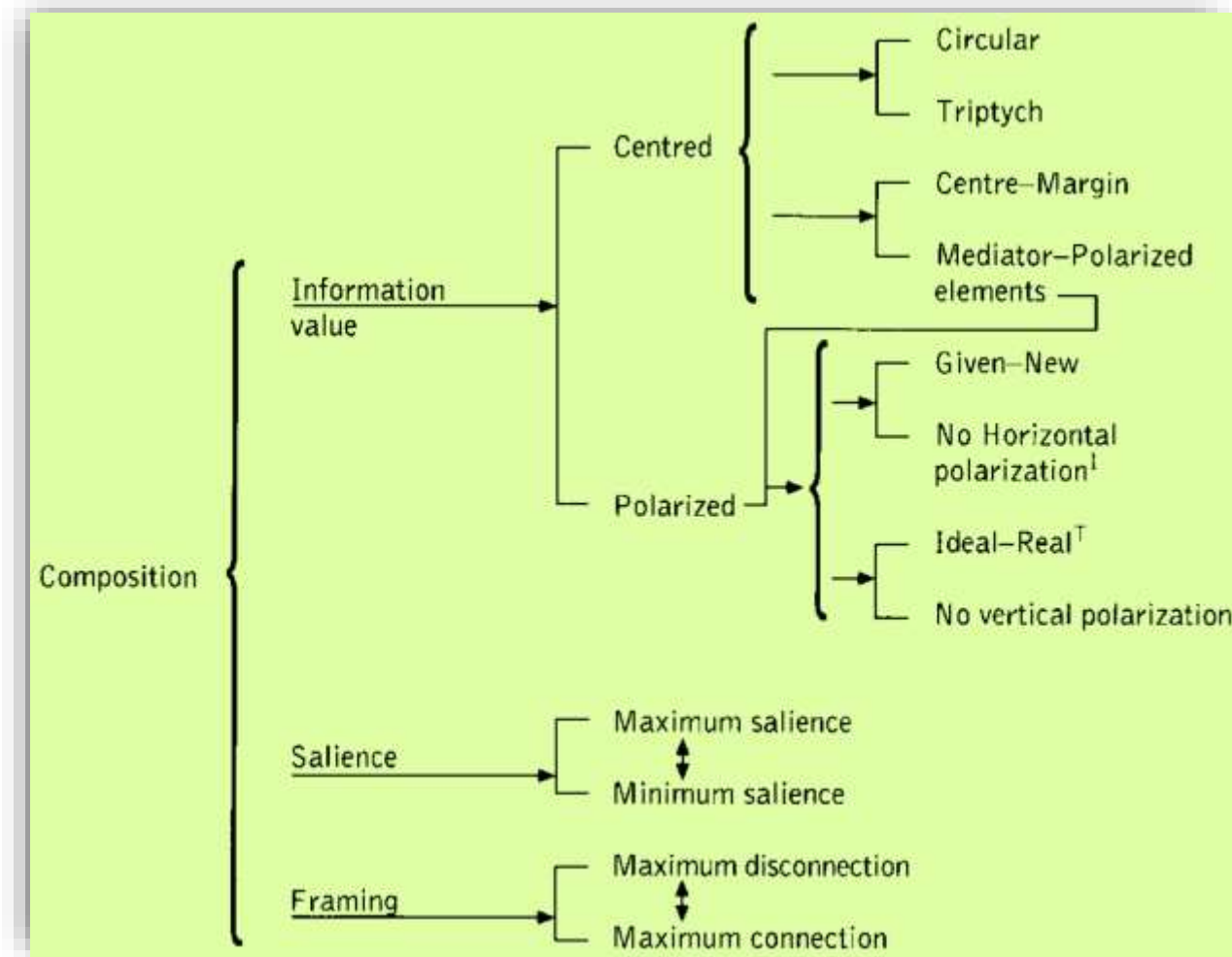


Figure 1: Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model

As for political discourse analysis, Van Leeuwen's approach (2008) is adopted in this research, because it concentrates on the representation of social actors in discourse as individuals or in groups, as active agents or patients. Nomination, functionalization and identification are among other political explanations that this approach accounts for. Leeuwen (2008: 133) argues that, to understand how people appear in visuals and their interpersonal relationships, it is essential to observe their social distance, social relation and social interaction.

Main categories refer to politicians in the election posters.	Examples of categories in the election posters.
1.Role allocation agent / patient	Politicians are the agents. They speak and explain their political program.
2. Nomination (reference to the unique identity of social actors.	The name of the political leader is mentioned several times in the poster.
3. Functionalism	The functional of the political leader is to represent the ideology of their political party and to persuade the audience to vote for the party.
4. Identification : reference to social actors in terms of something they do or they are.	The political leader is identified with a determined political party.

Figure 2 : Leeuwen (2008) model for critical discourse analysis

3. Analysis and Results:

The data consist of four posters, two for Donald Trump, candidate of the Republican Party and two for Joe Biden, candidate of the Democratic Party. The posters have been selected randomly from the google. The analysis begins with visual devices according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model. A political analysis is carried out using Leeuwen (2008) model. A third analysis is added to show the linguistic cues and their integration with visual modes.



Figure 3: Political poster of the candidate of the Republican Party, Donald Trump

As for the information of the poster, Donald Trump appears on the right of the poster (New according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model). According to salience feature, Trump occupies a small size in the poster (minimum). According to the (framing) feature, the background colour of the poster is white, his suit is blue, which is in harmony with the written text. Donald Trump appears to be hopeful; and this hope reflects his self-confidence. There is a satisfying smile on his face, which is another indication of self-confidence.

As for the political analysis, Donald Trump is the agent who represents his party's political program. According to nomination, the name of the candidate (Trump) is mentioned only one time, at the bottom of the poster within the phrase "Vote Trump". The candidate, according to the functional feature, represents his political party, the Republican.

With regards to the written text, the text is written in capital letters. The colour chosen for the text is blue to be compatible with the president's suit; and red to be compatible with his necktie. The sentence "LET'S KEEP AMERICA GREAT", is all written in blue except for the word "AMERICA" which is written in red to make it highlighted.



Figure 4: Political poster of the candidate of the Republican Party, Donald Trump

The second poster of the president Donald Trump is different from the first, where it is central (centre according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) model). According to the salience feature, the president stands in the center, occupying a big size in the poster (Maximum). As for the (Framing) feature, the figure seems to be in (connection) with the other elements of the poster. The candidate seems more serious, pointing with his forefinger to attract the attention of the audience. His facial expressions, with little anger, indicate that there is something dangerous would happen if the Americans did not vote for him. What is interesting about his suit is that it seems as if it is somehow torn, reflecting how dangerous and serious the situation is. The background colour is in compatible with his shirt.

As for the political analysis, Donald Trump is not only the agent, representing his party's political program, but also the leader who (as his picture shows) can save America. As the nominational feature indicates, the name of the candidate (Trump) is never mentioned in the poster.

Similar to the first poster, the text is also written in blue and red to be compatible with the candidate's suit and necktie. In the clause, "I WANT YOU", which is written above Trump's picture, the object "you" is underlined to be emphasized. Then, it is completed by the rest of the clause "TO DIE", again the word "die" is highlighted to be emphasized. So the pronoun "you" matches "die" so as to stress the idea that American people must die for their nation, or as the clause indicates "for our ECONOMY".



Figure 5: Political poster of the candidate of the Democratic Party, JOE BIDEN

Confidently standing in the centre of the poster (centred), Joe Biden is conveying a message that he is coming with strength. According to salience feature, Joe Biden occupies the whole size in the poster (Maximum). The background colours of the poster are red and blue. The colours and features in the poster may seem vague and obscure (Disconnection), which has two directions, one for the audience and the other for his rival, Donald Trump. As that for the audience, Biden is sending a message that some hidden hope is coming to save them. The message that Biden is sending to his rival, Trump, is that Biden is going to win the US election. This ideology followed by the poster's designer is supported by the integration of the colours, blue, red and white.

As for the political analysis, Joe Biden is the agent who represents his Democratic Party. According to nomination, the name of the candidate (Biden) is mentioned only one time, at the top of the poster. The candidate, Biden, according to the functional feature, represents his political party, the Democratic.

The text is written in capital letters. The colour chosen for the text is white to be in contrast with the red background of the picture, and the candidate's blue suit. The name of the political

candidate “Biden” is written above his picture, then the year “2020”beneath. The phrase “ New HOPE”, which is an ellipsis of “There is still hope”.



Figure 6: Political poster of the candidate of the Democratic Party, JOE BIDEN

As for the visual devices of the poster, Biden appears on the left of the poster (Given according to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) model). According to salience feature, Biden occupies the upper part of the poster (Maximum).Being in (connection), this poster is different from the previous one in that Biden seems more hopeful. Bright colours are used, white and bright blue. Biden this time seems happy, he is smiling. Everything in the poster indicates hope. Some white stars illuminating the poster which is another indication that he is going to win the election of 2020. The picture of Biden, which is positioned to the left, shows the details of his smiling face.

As for the political analysis, Joe Biden is the agent who represents his Democratic Party. According to nomination, the name of the candidate (Joe Biden) is mentioned only one time. Joe Biden, according to the functional feature, represents his political party, the Democratic.

The text is written in white to be contrasted with the colours, black, red and blue. The phrase “build back better” is an imperative clause. The name of the candidate “JOE BIDEN” is written in capital to be highlighted. The name “JOE BIDEN” is completed by the phrase “For president”

which is ellipted by dropping the verb “is”, so the whole sentence might be “JOE BIDEN IS FOR PRESIDENT” (Alakrash & Bustan , 2020 , Elaf & Hussien 2020).

3.1 Comparison of the four posters: Similarities and differences:

Table (1) summarizes the results of analysing the images of the American candidates. The four figures are analysed according to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) model, which shows the position of the candidate in the poster, whether in the centre, in the margin, and its salience (the degree to which an element draws attention).

Composition	Figure 1	Figure 2	Figure3	Figure 4
1.Information values	Polarized/ New	Polarized/ centred	Polarized/ centred	Polarized/ Given
2.Salience	Minimum	Maximum	Maximum	Maximum
3.Framing	Connection	connection	disconnection	connection

Table (1): Image analysis of the four figures

Comparing the four posters according to visual devices, it is clear that the candidate, Donald Trump, appears to the right in the first picture (New in Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) model), and in the centre of the second picture (centre). The second candidate, Joe Biden, appears in the centre of the poster in the first picture, whereas in the second, he occupies the left position of the poster (Given in Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) model). The salience feature, as stated by Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) model, is “the degree to which an element draws attention to itself, due to its size, its place in the foreground or its overlapping of other elements, its colour, its tonal values, its sharpness or definition, and other features.” Both candidates, Donald Trump and Joe Biden in the second, third, and fourth posters occupy a big size (Maximum), except in the first poster, in which Donald Trump occupies a small size (Minimum). The background and dress colours of the four poster are white, blue, bright blue, yellow and red. All these colours are employed in harmony to show the consistency of integrated elements which state the presidential candidates. According to the (Framing: connection/ disconnection) feature, there is a significant difference between the colours used by the first candidate and the second one. The colour of the background of Trump’s posters are white or semi-white and his clothes are blue with a red necktie. These colours seem to be in consistency with the written texts. The matter is different with the second candidate, Joe Biden, where the colours of the background are dark blue, dark red and blue, whereas texts are in white (Bustan & Alakrash 2020).

The four posters are different in some aspects and similar in others. As for similarity, the four posters share the same feature of being the main social actor. The second feature shows that the candidates in the first three posters are serious. Donald Trump seems more serious than Joe Biden. In the fourth poster, Joe Biden is smiling. Candidates are active, but Donald Trump seems more active. In the second poster, Trump seems to be pointing at something important, no one knows what it is, might be the audience, might be something else. Both of the candidates appear with photographs cut. Only the photograph of Biden in the third poster appears to be in close up,

his facial expressions are clearer. The candidates are looking at the audience, but the way they are looking is different.

Main categories refer to politicians in the election posters.	Figure 1	Figure 2	Figure3	Figure 4
1. agent / patient	Agent	agent	agent	agent
2.Nomination	Named	-----	named	named
3.Functionalism	economy	economy	democracy	democracy
4.Identification	Republic Party	Republic Party	Democratic Party	Democratic Party

Table (2): Political analysis of the four figures

As for the political analysis, Donald Trump and Joe Biden are the (agents) that represent their political parties. As for the nomination, (how often the name of the political leader is mentioned in the poster), the name of each candidate is mentioned only once, with a difference that in the second poster the name of the first candidate, Donald Trump is never mentioned. The name of each candidate is sometimes mentioned as a full name as in the case of (Joe Biden), in the fourth poster, and sometimes the last name as (Trump), in the first poster and (Biden) in the third poster.

According to Functionalism and Identification, the two candidates are the main characters in the four posters. They further represent the United States of America, but each one of them has his ideologies that are different from his counterpart. Donald Trump is the candidate of the Republic Party, whereas Joe Biden is the candidate of Democratic Party.

With regards to the written texts, some are written in capital letters such as the sentences in the first poster, “LET’S KEEP AMERICA GREAT”, “I WANT YOU TO DIE”, “OPEN AMERICA TODAY”; or as a phrase as in “A NEW HOPE” in third poster, and “FOR PRESIDENT” in the fourth poster; or as a single noun phrase as in “ECONOMY” and “Biden” in the second and fourth posters respectively. The colours chosen for the written texts are blue and red for the first candidate, Donald Trump; and white for the second candidate, Joe Biden.

4. Conclusions:

The written language of the four posters shows different linguistic strategies to convey a political discourse, but there is an agreement on how to use effective language to persuade the audience to vote to both of the candidates, Donald Trump or Joe Biden. The language is characterised by the presence of ellipsis, repetition, positive language, and short phrases. Some of the texts are written in capital letters to highlight what is important in the poster.

The analysis shows that the visual and linguistic characteristics found in the posters are an indication that the poster is an example of a multimodal discourse framed inside a political genre; and it is a powerful tool employed in the election in order to point out the political power that both parties may have. The way the candidates construct their political discourse linguistically and visually is a type of genre used to convince people of the convenience of choosing the candidate proposed. Thus, the poster as sub-genre put inside political genres is not defined as structure and the multimodal elements that create it, but as a political context that frames it.

The four posters analysed above interact with the audience through the various visual and linguistic elements that appear in them. The political messages conveyed in the posters are explicit because the phrases are accurate and subtle and clearly interwoven to persuade the audience to vote for this candidate instead of any other, and the photographs represent the candidate to be the president of the United States.

The designers of the posters take into consideration the language and the visual aids that should be used in a way that they may integrate to create an effective and inspiring picture for the American people.

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