

Anger Management in the American Presidential Debates between Trump and Biden 2020: A Critical Discourse Analysis Study

By

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Abstract

In the midst of the mutual aggressiveness between Trump and Biden in the presidential debates 2020; there might be attempts by the two candidates in reducing the force of their statements. Therefore, the main goal of the critical discourse analysis in this study is revolving around probing the rhetorical methods, specifically *hedges*, on them the two candidates rely to make their talk listener-friendly and coherent. A qualitative and quantitative analysis is employed by utilizing an eclectic model of taxonomies of hedges Salager-Meyer's (1994) Hyland's and Brown and Levinson(1987),and Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis (1995). The results of the analyses revealed that despite the differences between the two personalities in following the rhetorical style or not in speeches, each of them has a conservative base that achieves the highest percentage of votes for them because of their possession of the ability to manipulate words.

Keywords: Trump, Biden, Critical Discourse Analysis, Hedge, Fairclough, Hyland, Salager-Meyer.

1. Introduction

The controversial American election (2020) between The American president Donald Trump, and the Democratic Candidates John Biden went on to the winning of Biden over Trump. President Biden was born in 1942. Biden has (36 years) of political work and had many contributions in shaping U.S. foreign policy before becoming the (47th) Vice President of the United States. On the other hand, Donald Trump was born on June 14, 1946. Before 2015 he has nothing to do with politics. In 2004 he launched a famous television series that aired until 2015. During the 2016 primary season Trump won the election over former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to be the President of the United States 2016-2020. The debates between the Trump and Biden are characterized with the differences between the two candidates on some key issues with mutual aggressiveness.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The debates between Trump and Biden 2020 are characterized with an apparent aggressiveness. However, there must be some statements with mitigated force and the means of that mitigation is hedges. The effect of the mitigated forceful statements is the focus of this study.

1.2. Questions of the Study

2. Do Trump and Biden use hedges in the presidential debates.
3. Are they really used as an indication of weakness or some vague purposes.
4. If they are used for ambiguity, what are their aims.

1.3. Aims of the study

This study aims at revealing the use of hedges and their contribution in the presidential debates between Trump and Biden 2020.

1.4. Limits of the Study

2. The study is a critical discourse analysis one.
3. The chosen data is the American presidential debates between Trump and Biden in 2020.
4. Among all the linguistic features used by the two candidates, the focus of the study will be on the hedges only.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study contributes in highlighting the secrets of the uses of hedges from another angle, the political discourse and their ambiguities, and the way of formulating the ideology in this unprecedented crisis of Covid19.

2. Theoretical Literature

2.1. Previous Study

The two researchers Thao Q. Tran & Tham M. Duong (2013) investigated frequencies and functions of hedges the section of results and discussion in in Applied Linguistics and Chemical Engineering .the qualitative and quantitative analysis adopted by one model is the taxonomies of hedges by Salager-Meyer's (1994) and Hyland's (1998). The present study studies the frequencies and the usage of hedges in political discourse adopting an eclectic model of Fairclough's model (1995) of critical discourse analysis alongside with the taxonomies of hedges by Salager-Meyer's (1994) and Hyland's (1998).

2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) according to Wodak (1995: 204) is *"fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language"*. According to Widdowson

(2004:158), is an approach of creating specific ideology by delving into the social justice and the corruption of power.

Fairclough (1995) considers language use not as a completely individual activity or a result of situational variables. Rather, he avers that language use is as a means of social practice. Fairclough's system of discourse analysis has three dimensions,

- (i) a text
- (ii) discourse practice production, consumption and distribution of the text
- (iii) A socio cultural practice.

2.3. Definitions and Functions of Hedge

Hyland (1998:1) avers that hedge is “*any linguistic means used to indicate either (a) a complete commitment to the true value of an accompanying proposition, or (b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically*”.

The functions of hedges have been the focus of many researchers and each adopts various attitudes concerning the use of hedge. Salager-Meyer (1994) clarifies that the use of hedges makes sentences vague enough to reduce the risk of negation by the hearer/reader. Also (Wardhaugh, 2010: 292) also states that mitigating the significance of an utterance is ascribed to the use of hedges to save a speaker's face. Moreover, hedges could be the choice for avoiding any responsibility of direct answers or promises (Webster's Dictionary). Hyland (2005:130) classifies hedges according to their functions into three categories: (i) hedge contribute in the reduction of force of statements such as simply; (ii) hedge which create indefinite statements such as *sometimes*; and (iii) and hedge that use for getting rid of responsibility for truth such as *may*.

Various taxonomies of hedges have been addressed by several researchers. Given their sufficiency, those by Salager-Meyer's (1994) and Hyland's (1998) might be the most reliable (Gholami & Nasiri, 2012).

Salager-Meyer's (1994) proposed five types of hedges as follows:

- i. Shields which include modal verbs (such as suppose); semi-auxiliaries (such as to seem); possibility adverbs (such as probably) and their derivative adjectives (such as possible); and epistemic verbs (to suggest) and their derivative nouns (such as suggestion).
- ii. Approximators of frequency, degree, time, and quantity (such as much).
- iii. Expressions of the speaker's suspicions and direct involvement such as (I think).
- iv. Emotionally charged intensifiers which are used show the speaker's reaction (surprisingly).
- v. Compound hedges which are more than one hedge compound together. They might be double hedges (It maybe be assumed that), or treble hedges (It could appear probably that), etc. (ibid., 1994)

Hyland's taxonomy of hedges (2000), on the other hand, involves the same group of hedges just like that of Salager-Meyer's (1994). However, he adds (if-clause) to be a type of hedge which could measure the speaker's or writer's doubt. (ibid: 4).

Brown and Levinson (1987:147) adds some other expressions which has the function of hedges such as tags, expressions like (I wonder), apology hedges for changing a topic such as (by the way), expressions such as (in fact, don't you agree), (ibid: 161-172).

4. Data Analysis

In what follows, the purpose of analyzing these political speeches is to see the amount and diversity of hedges in the presidential American debates and analyze the three levels of analysis namely, textual analysis, discourse practice and social analysis according to Fairclough's (1995) classification of three-layer model of CDA. The results of the analysis are shown as listed in Table (1) and table (2)

Table (1) the Total Number of the Hedges Used by Both Trump and Biden

	The Number of the Hedge Items
Trump'	261
Biden	250

Table (2) The Percentages of Each Type of Hedge Used by Trump and Biden

	Shields	Approximators of degree	Emotionally charged intensifiers	If clauses	Apology hedges	Discourse epistemic phrases	
Trump'	30,2%	16,8%	21,3%	19,9%	9,5%	2,3%	100%
Biden	25,6%	13,6%	6%	16,8%	9,2%	28,8%	100%

What is clear currently is Trump adopts the use of hedges more than Biden. There are (261) hedges used by Trump, whereas Biden uses (250) hedges only.

By the same token, it is obvious that Trump uses more hedges than Biden in all the varieties of hedge except in *Discourse epistemic phrases* that Biden comes first with (28,8%) percentage, while Trump uses it with only (2,3%) percentage. As for the other types of hedges, Trump always uses more

hedges than Biden. *Shields hedges* are used with (30, 2%) percentage by Trump, and Biden with (25, 6%) percentage. There are (16, 8%) percentage of *Approximators of degree hedge* adopted by Trump, but Biden uses (13, 6%) percentage. Trump uses *Emotionally charged intensifiers hedge* with (21, 3%), whereas they are used with only (6%) by Biden. *If Clauses* and *Apology hedges* are used with (19, 9%), and (9, 5%) percentages respectively, whereas they are adopted by Biden with (16, 8%), and (9, 2%) percentages respectively.

3.1. Result Discussion

- Since the political event is one which is the presidential election, it is logical starting with the social analysis level. These two debates understudy are delivered as a part of American presidential election in 2020 between Trump and Biden. Both are doing their best in discrediting each other by the mutual accusations and the mocking statements. The political context is that both Trump and Biden try to convince the American people that each is on the right path.

- *So I think that she will be outstanding. She's going to be as good as anybody that has served on that court. We really feel that. Very few people knowingly say otherwise. And by the way, the Democrats, they wouldn't even think about not doing it. And probably that would happen in reverse, also.(Trump, 2020)*

Some issues have been discussed in the two debates. Concerning nominating *Amy Coney Barrett* on the Supreme Court, Trump, on the textual level, Trump uses expression of future meaning to indicate that he is confident of the fact that he will win the elections.

Concerning hedges, Trump used hedges in showing off his nominee without exaggeration to prevent any critic to him.

On the discourse practice level, Trump uses the anaphoric reference (she) to refer to the nominee and for assuring her importance in these declarative sentences. Trump uses both (I pronoun) to denote his own responsibility, and to include his party with him by using (we) with his attitudes.

- ***I'm not opposed to the justice, she seems like a very fine person. But she's written, before she went in the bench, which is her right, that she thinks that the Affordable Care Act is not Constitutional.*** (Biden 2020)

As for Biden, his opposite statements are also entrenched on some hedges instead of attacking her directly, Biden said some nice words about her but at the same time he uses hedge to lessen the effect of that statement. (fine person) On the textual level, Biden did not use (*I, or we pronouns*) in order not to include anyone in this subject matter, he is satisfied with the anaphoric reference to Amy. On the discourse level, and in order to depict his positive statement about Amy and then denying it, Biden uses (but)

- ***You didn't think we should have closed our country because you thought it was terrible. In fact, people that would not be necessarily on my side said that, "President Trump did a phenomenal job."***(Trump2020)

Concerning the issue of Covid19 crisis and the way to deal with it, Trump uses some hedges to mitigate his accusation of Biden's suspicious of his plan in not closing the institutions in the country. On the textual level, Trump uses the pronoun (*You*) which refers to implied criticizing when addressing Biden. Then he used direct speech which is more informal than the indirect speech when showing off how his actions. On the discourse level, Trump chose to begin his answer by mentioning

Biden's criticizing then end it with mentioning the positive side when those who are not by his side admired his actions.

- *And he said, if we just wear a mask, we can save half those numbers. Just a mask. And by the way, in terms of the whole notion of a vaccine, we're for a vaccine, but I don't trust him at all*

By using hedges, Biden is more suspicious concerning Trump's reaction to Covid19 that he resorts to hedges for mocking Trump's plan instead of mitigating his angry words. On the textual level, Biden uses I pronoun when mentioning his suspicious of Trump but uses (we pronoun) to include the whole nation in waiting for the vaccine. On the level of discourse, Biden resorts to (But) to connect between his positive statement about the vaccine not Trump, then expressing his own opinion of Trump which deny the possibility of the usefulness of the vaccine brought by Trump.

- *Well, I've spoken to the companies and we can have it a lot sooner. They can go faster than that by a lot.*

In asking Trump about the availability of the vaccine in summer, he uses hedges to increase his certainty and confidence not for mitigating his forceful statements. On the textual level, Trump uses (I) pronoun to refer to his own efforts in dealing with this matter. On the level of discourse, the anaphoric reference (they) is used to connect the two statement.

- *And by the way, maybe you could inject some bleach in your arm, and that would take care of it.*

On the same token, Biden used hedge to increase the mockery in his statements about Trump's confidence. On the textual level, Biden used the pronoun (you) for more criticizing.

- *No, I think masks are okay. You have to understand, if you look... I mean, I have a mask right here. I put a mask on when I think I need it.*

When asked about his suspicious of wearing masks and the usefulness of masks, Trump is obviously against masks as it is clear from his usage of hedges in expressing one idea. On the textual level, Trump's statement begins by using the strong (No) without priorities. (I *pronoun*) is used excessively by Trump and here he is responsible for his decisions concerning wearing masks without venturing in including other people by this decision in this unprecedented crisis.

- *Well, masks make a big difference. His own head of the CDC said if we just wore masks between now, if everybody wore a mask and social distanced between now and January, we'd probably save up to 100,000 lives. It matters. It matters*

As for Biden, he has opposite opinion concerning the benefit of masks but to get rid of possible critic from Trump he uses hedges to mitigate his statements. On the textual level, Biden is rarely used (I pronoun), instead he used the direct speech and the witnesses of others to confirm his statements. On the discourse level, Biden used the speech of Trump's head of the CDC to support his idea on one hand, and to show the contradiction of Trump concerning masks on the other hand. Then he ends his statements by repeating his assurance.

- *If you could get the crowds, you would have done the same thing. But you can't. Nobody cares.*

When asked about the large rallies in his campaign and its danger effect on the masses, Trump increases his attack more than mitigating it by using hedges. On the textual level, attack is increased by the use of (you pronoun) to indicate aggressiveness. On the discourse level, Trump uses (*but*) to increase his mockery of Biden by claiming that Biden could have rallies but nobody cares about him so there is no rally in his campaign.

They can in fact take care of it if he just stay out of the way. And by the way his own former spokesperson said, "Riots and chaos and violence help he cause." That's what this is all about. I think Kellyanne Conway.

When Biden was asked about the protests of American people in 2020, he is suspicious of Trump's role in making things got worse. Biden's use of hedges seems to increase the force of his suspicions more than mitigating them. On the textual level, Biden uses direct speech when mentioning other witness's statement especially those who are in Trump's side to attack Trump. On the discourse practice level, he uses anaphoric references (they) and (he) to refer to Trump and the government.

- *A whole range of things the President has said, even today, he thinks we are in control. We're about to lose 200,000 more people*

In accusing Trump of saying some facts about covid19, Biden uses hedges to mitigate his accusation and lessening any exaggeration of the facts he, Biden, said about the number of victims. On the textual level, Biden uses future tense to refer to the problems in the near future. In

addition to that, the use of (we pronoun) indicates that the whole nation will be victim of Trump's decisions. On the discourse level, the use of the anaphora (he) to refer to Trump indicates an implied anger of Trump.

- *perhaps just to finish this, I was kidding on that, but just to finish this, when I closed he said I shouldn't have closed. I think he called me racist even, because I was closing it to China*

Trump answers Biden's accusations by confessing that he was kidding. But some hedges as priorities might be enough for face saving. There is mitigation in accusing Biden as if Trump is not sure if Biden called him racist. As for textual analysis, Trump used the past tense along with (*I pronoun*) for the conformity that everything wrong he did which were mentioned is over. According discourse practice, Trump used (because) to connect Biden's negative attitude, which is illogical, with the main reason which is protecting his own country from (China) which is the real threat to America as Trump tried to state.

- *We're not going to have a country. You can't do this. We can't keep this country closed. the cure cannot be worse than the problem itself. You can't do that to people. You just can't*

In justifying his decisions of not closing schools during Coronavirus pandemic, Trump uses hedges to express the impossibility of the lockdown. Textually, Trump did not use (*I pronoun*) as in most of his statements, rather, he used (*we*) to include his audience and his government in making his decisions. Moreover, he used the pronoun (*you*) as a technique to make his audience more sensible to understand his actions. As for the discourse analysis, he uses (*the cure*) as an

anaphora to refer to the lockdown, then the anaphoric reference (that) he means the hurt that might be done to people if there is a complete lockdown.

- ***And by the way, all you teachers out there, not that many of you are going to die, so don't worry about it. So don't worry about it.***

Starting by a hedge, Biden lessens his certainty of the teachers' death because of the Trumps decisions of not doing the lockdown. Textually, he resorts to the future tense for an indication to the dark future coming forward. On the discourse level, Biden repeats his mocking statements to ensure his attitude.

- ***I made it clear and I asked everyone else to take the pledge. I made it clear that any country, no matter who it is, that interferes in American elections will pay a price. They will pay a price. I don't think the President has said anything to Putin about it. I don't think he's talking to them a lot. I don't think he's said a word***

Biden, with an assumption that he is confident enough to express his decisions of protecting his country, uses hedges for emphasizing his implied threats not mitigating them. As for accusing Trump of turning a blind eye to the Russian interfere with the American election, Biden used hedges to mitigate those implied accusation. According to the textual analysis, Biden uses (*I* pronoun) to confirm his responsibility of protecting his country against any threat. The future tense indicates the confidence in winning the election. On the discourse level, Biden repeats his statements for confirming his point in protecting his country and in accusing Trump complicity with Putin.

- *I know but when somebody gets three and a half million dollars from the Mayor of Moscow*
- *I don't make money from Russia. You made \$3.5 million, Joe, and your son gave you, they even have a statement that we have to give 10% to the big man. You're the big man, I think. I don't know, maybe you're not, but you're the big man, I think. Your son said we have to give 10% to the big men. Joe, what's that all about? It's terrible*

In the mutual accusations of complicity with Russia, and with intensive way which has nothing to do with mitigating the accusation, Trump used hedges to accuse Biden and his son of taking money from Russia. On the textual level, to indicate the continuous action, Trump uses the present tense to refer to Biden's son and to Biden. On the discourse level, he uses (but) and a question with an answer to emphasize his point.

- *And by the way, so far, I respect very much the way you're handling this, I have to say*

In expressing his real opinion of Biden's healthcare plan, Trump praised Biden starting with a hedge expression. It is either face saving, preparing the listener or something surprising, or it might lessen his praise, but Trump praise Biden in the above statement.

Conclusion

- In the present study, hedges might be used by the weaker addresser, but in fact they have nothing to do with weakness as it is known. Rather, hedge has more functions that are attributed to them.

- Under the pressure and severity of Coronavirus, people need no power anymore as they need to feel of spiritual warmth.

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السيطرة على الغضب في المناظرات الرئاسية الأمريكية بين ترامب وبايدن 2020: دراسة تحليل خطاب نقدي

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الملخص

في خضم العدوانية المتبادلة بين ترامب وبايدن في المناظرات الرئاسية 2020 ؛ قد تكون هناك محاولات من قبل المرشحين للتقليل من قوة تصريحاتهما. لذلك ، فإن الهدف الرئيسي من تحليل الخطاب النقدي في هذه الدراسة هو التحقق من الأساليب البلاغية ، وتحديد التحولات ، التي يعتمد عليها المرشحان لجعل مستمع حديثهما وديا ومتناسكاً

يتم استخدام التحليل النوعي والكمي من خلال استخدام مودل انتقائي مكون من استراتيجيات التحول ل (Hyland 1998) و (Salagger-Meyer's 1994) من جهة وموديل (Fairclough 1995) لتحليل الخطاب النقدي من جهة ثانية . وكشفت نتائج التحليلات أنه بالرغم من الفروق بين الشخصيتين في اتباع الأسلوب الخطابي من عدمه في الخطابات ، فإن لكل منهما قاعدة محافظة تحقق أعلى نسبة من الأصوات لهما بسبب امتلاكهما القدرة على التلاعب بالكلمات.وعلى هذا الاساس تم التوصل الى عدة استنتاجات.

كلمات افتتاحية: ترامب، بايدن، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، المناظرات الرئاسية الامريكية 2020.