



The Art of Insults: A Linguistic Analysis of Trump's Verbal Attacks During Campaigns

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Abstract— *This study aims to investigate the linguistic features and strategies used by Donald Trump in his verbal attacks during his presidential campaign. The study aims to investigate the quotes, either directly or indirectly. The objective is to determine the persuasive level of verbal abuse as a rhetorical device in contemporary political discourse. A comprehensive linguistic analysis of his speeches during his campaign trail is used to examine the effect of verbal attacks on the delivery of his campaign speech in the presidential campaign and how this kind of political action affects the field of politics or politicians, which remains the main area of interest.*



Keywords— *Linguistic features, Trump, insults, and verbal attacks.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Few political campaigns in the United States have been as audacious as Donald J. Trump's bid for president. Littered with memorable phrases—"Little Marco," "Low-Energy Jeb," "Lyn' Ted," "Crooked Hillary," and, of course, "Make America Great Again"—his campaigns changed the way candidates communicate, particularly with insults. Mr. Trump's insults—which generally did not discriminate—ranged from attacking leaders of both parties to targeting journalists to undermining members of his administration. This study, in short, aspires to examine the linguistic peculiarities of Mr. Trump's verbal attacks by providing a granular analysis of his choice of words, his employment of rhetorical devices, and the ultimate impact that it had on his campaigns. By seeking to better understand Mr. Trump's insults, it hopes to shed light on their central role in his political communication and how they wound up shaping public opinion, media coverage, and ultimately the polarization of American politics during his candidacy. Through this deep linguistic dive, we aspire to better understand the particular dynamics that marked this highly important season of American politics.

II. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The strategic use of insults in contemporary political landscapes has become a topic of intrigue. Donald Trump's unique approach to insults has created fervent debates about their effectiveness, ethical dilemmas, and long-term effects on political communication. "Understanding the use of derogatory language in politics is crucial to comprehending the power dynamics at play." (Jost & Banaji, 1994: 248). This study hopes that linguistic analysis will contribute to and provide a better understanding of the dynamics of political discourse and persuasion.

In today's political climate, where public figures regularly trade verbal jabs, political discourse often includes insults and derogatory comments, which have become weapons of choice for many. Donald Trump emerged on the political scene with an outrageous, sometimes offensive, approach. It was a brash and often confrontational communication style that has left an indelible mark on American politics. It's also one that's worth discussing. Using insults strategically during debates, political campaigns, and policy discussions is a topic that goes far beyond words (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

This study's broader contribution stems from its ability to better reveal the implications and meanings contained within these insults. As a recent analysis noted, "deciphering the linguistic nuances, rhetorical devices, and underlying motivations behind Trump's verbal attacks is essential for understanding their impact on public perception and voter behavior" (Smith & Johnson 2020: 112). Further, this study unpacks the ethical boundaries (or lack thereof) within contemporary political discourse.

A comprehensive and thoughtful examination of the use of insults in these contexts is both timely and important in a political climate that is constantly changing and pushing the boundaries of acceptable speech. As Smith and Johnson (2020) argue, "Examining how insults shape political communication is crucial in our understanding of contemporary politics" (p. 124).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The rhetoric of insults in politics

In 2017, there was a widespread understanding that rhetoric serves as a powerful tool in political discourse. One of the most frequently used forms of political language to accomplish this is insult (Smith, 2017). Political platforms often feature rhetoric that lacks nuance in addressing acrimonious political relationships, as human history has repeatedly demonstrated. As part of this function, choosing to be insulting and being willing to do so repeatedly is one of the most powerful ways to assert dominance over opponents and establish a character foil (Smith, 2015). So what happens when a candidate refuses to ever respond to an insult?

Scholars primarily focus on insults as a campaign strategy, but they also note that politicians use insults in different ways. McGee (1980) explained that after studying a wide range of sources and looking at the history of political insults, he was not able to find a record of any sort of golden age. Insults in political campaign rhetoric and political discourse in general have always been staples of politics. The majority of the sources that McGee used pertained to presidential campaigns. Trump was not the type of person or politician to care about who he offended. He had no one to help him craft speeches that were meaningful and relative to the topic at hand; he said whatever was on his mind. McGee's analysis is clear: Trump was the campaigner who slayed the average way that politicians approached campaign rhetoric, so modern bile in politics was not unexpected.

Donald Trump, the victor of the 2016 election, stood out as one of the least typical presidential hopefuls in history due to his unconventional views on political discourse.

Because Donald Trump was not a typical politician, he did not communicate in a representative manner, and for some, this was the sole reason they voted for him. Donald Trump's communication methods were perceived as unsatisfactory and somewhat hostile, although some may argue that they were innovative. Donald Trump emerged victorious in the 2016 political election, prompting supporters to speculate about his winning strategy and the attributes he possessed that Hillary Clinton lacked (Smith, 2022).

Jones (2019) argues that studying Trump's use of insults in particular reveals how political communication has changed and how those in power strategically use rhetoric to change public discourse. This research methodology is more advanced as it shifts its attention from past insults to the current use of insults in politics.

3.2 Linguistic analysis in political discourse

Over the past few decades, linguistic analysis of political discourse has gained prominence, leading to numerous studies on the various components of political language, including linguistic strategies, framing, and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013: 42; Van Dijk, 1998: 137). From Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) perspective, we can affirm that "our thought is mostly unconscious and is carried out in the form of internal symbolic manipulation." Besides, as they also argue, "It is language that provides the bulk of the examples the mind uses to work out its thoughts." (p. 5). While they are referring to political language, we can also affirm that we think through language, so language analysis in the political field is essential.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) set forth the proposition that "language shapes our perceptions and influences our judgments" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 5). This point is very salient because it shows the importance of language analysis when we look to understand political communication. The question then arises: how precisely does language shape our perceptions and influence our judgments? Is language the primary factor that shapes our perceptions of situations and decisions, or is it merely one of the few factors we must take into account when attempting to explain influences? The power of words and their utilization are substantive and have a few major implications for political communication.

The study of political language had become a critical means by which to unpack the strategies and tactics used by politicians to articulate their messages and beliefs more than a decade ago (Chilton 2004: 73). Enquiries into the use of such linguistic items as metaphors, framing devices, and persuasive rhetoric have been able to shed light on and ultimately explain the very real persuasive mechanisms at

work behind the act of political communication (Chilton & Schäffner 1997: 213).

This study adopts a linguistic approach to insults, focusing on a specific dimension of political discourse that is prominent in Donald Trump's political style. As Smith (2015) has observed, Trump's use of insults has "been one of the things that has most captured scholars', voters', and ordinary citizens' attention while he has been in the public eye. To look back at just the last year or so in politics is to remember what a unique style of politics he has practiced." (p. 8). After he won the Republican nomination in 2016, a little earlier than his critics expected (and a lot earlier than his detractors hoped), there was considerable speculation about just how promptly he would abandon the tone and approach that had carried him through an unprecedented primary campaign. Political observers, including those who questioned the veracity of pundits' predictions, remained consistent in their expectations on a few key points (Smith, 2022: 12).

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Data collection

This study relies on the meticulous collection and analysis of primary data gathered throughout Donald Trump's presidential campaigns. The primary dataset consists of the transcripts and recordings of Donald Trump's speeches and rallies held during both of his presidential campaigns; hence, this corpus of text and audiovisual material is the lifeblood of this study. Consequently, analysis of this corpus will allow us to uncover many of the intricacies and subtleties of Trump's political communication.

The aim of this analysis is to create a broad database of explicit and implicit insults performed by Donald Trump during his campaigns. Therefore, it was crucial to identify not only overt insults but also subtler forms of derogatory speech acts that Trump could strategically incorporate into his discourse. We need this broad-based database as the foundation to systematically investigate the functional and linguistic characteristics, contextual factors, and rhetorical strategies of insults in Trump's political communication.

This corpus composition uses established political discourse analysis methodologies, as laid out in Chilton's (2004) work, *Analyzing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. We employ these widely used methods to collect data systematically for a disciplined analysis of Donald Trump's linguistic features and rhetorical devices in his campaign speeches. By staying true to these methodologies, we hope to ensure that our analysis is rigorous and transparent so that it may contribute to the field of studying political discourse.

4.2 Linguistic Analysis

We employ a complex research methodology, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, to conduct an extensive investigation into the linguistics of Donald Trump's insults. The combination of these two methods proved to be useful in fully identifying the different linguistic signs that Donald Trump used to manipulate public opinion throughout his presidential campaigns.

This study heavily relies on qualitative analysis, which allows for a detailed examination of Trump's linguistic insults at a micro level. This analysis reveals not only the constituents of the insults (as revealed by earlier quantitative work), but also the subtle nuances of their language and intent, their rhetorical positioning, the phrasing of the attacks, and the deft integration of other discourses into the insult. Additionally, it reveals the choice of words, the pitch and delivery of the argument, how he uses words to paint vivid and visceral pictures, and how he appeals to voters through his speech.

Quantitative analysis, on the other hand, provides essential quantitative data to support the findings of qualitative analysis and put them in context. It allows us to identify patterns, trends, and frequencies in the use of insults, providing a quantitative framework from which to understand how prevalent, for example, personal insults are and how likely they are to have major social or psychological effects. We are at the stage where, with quantitative data on the linguistic structure of insults, we can begin to talk about how effective these strategies are in achieving their goals.

This argument is in line with Chilton's assertion that "a combination of quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of political discourse" (Chilton 2004: 128). After all, the use of numerical data and other statistically verifiable measures is what often enables a humanist to construct evidence and argue for its validity. The humanist toolkit of text analysis is its posture in the formal elements of language, a structure on which to hang its qualitative findings.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Lexical choices and semantic significance

The heart of this inquiry is a close look at the particular words and phrases Trump has employed in his panoply of derogatory nicknames, and especially the implications of their sometimes impressive precision. The words politicians use to address the public can make a big difference in how they see the world and make judgments and decisions. And in no realm is Trump's choice of words

more provocative—or more revealing—than in his daily assault on news outlets whose reporting he deems unflattering. As we will see, his preferred phrase of abuse, "fake news," is a topic that lends itself to deep analysis.

This analysis delves deeper than Trump's widely reported verbal assaults, concentrating on the semantic meaning these words express. Trump continues to employ pathos and targeted linguistic strategies, such as epithets and hyperboles, to manipulate the public. Specifically, this analysis focuses on rhetorical, class, and ethnic slurs used by Trump and how they go unnoticed by the public.

In his work, Johnson (2003) underlined that "the choice of words can have a profound impact on how a message is received and interpreted" (p. 452). As a result, the linguistic choices made in political communication are of acute interest. In the last couple of years, words like fake news, Crooked Hillary, Low-Energy Jeb, or Pocahontas have emerged as particularly potent rhetorical weapons, which altogether have served to discredit media outlets and political opponents and instill doubt as to the credibility of these sources of political information and the political actors themselves. This concept will guide us in the present analysis, through which we will learn to appreciate the weight of the rhetoric deployed in political language.

Donald Trump's preferred nickname for his general election opponent was "Crooked Hillary." This not-so-subtle nickname created a question about her integrity and positioned her as untrustworthy to his supporters. The use of the name "Crooked Hillary" was not designed to inspire confidence in her trustworthiness (Trump, 2016).

In one of his most successful labeling attempts, Donald Trump dubbed his primary rival Jeb Bush "Low-Energy Jeb" (Trump, 2015). Trump strategically employed this approach. Trump said this label was designed to "kill him off," and that it did so because Jeb Bush's energy was widely seen as one of his biggest weaknesses.

For example, we can examine a recent social media post from President Donald Trump criticizing Senator Elizabeth Warren, calling her 'Pocahontas' (Trump, 2018). Trump slams the release of DNA tests on 'Pocahontas.' Elizabeth Warren is far worse than ever, as she stated on Fox News. Donald said, 'Pocahontas has been a tremendous insult to Native Americans.' (2018) Despite Senator Elizabeth Warren being a native American, Trump has used this nickname, which has historical context and is extremely racist, to describe her. Her Native American heritage claims gave rise to the name.

The demonstration of language conflict through the use of a nickname and a label in the speeches of Donald Trump reflects the strategic use of language to control public opinion and create a sense of influence.

5.2 Syntactic structures and rhetorical devices

The study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Donald Trump's rhetorical strategies by examining the syntactic structures of English, or simply any insult caption, and its translated version, in order to identify recurring rhetorical devices. Through this analysis, we plan to extrapolate core rhetorical strategies—what makes a verbal attack stick in the world of politics?

The investigation into rhetorical style will involve a close analysis of the use of metaphors, hyperbole, and irony in Trump's insults. These devices can execute a transitive act, propelling the argumentation beyond the mere exchange of words. Charteris-Black (2005) insightfully discusses the function of these devices as powerful tools in political discourse, enabling public speakers to say more than they appear to say. For example, we can also understand metaphorical language as performing representational or indicative work.

Donald Trump was famous for inserting metaphors into his speeches in order to make things stick or become more memorable. Rather than addressing immigration, Trump chose to call it 'a Trojan horse'. This call implies a potential danger, or perhaps a hidden one, that could pose a threat to the masses upon arrival. Metaphorically, Trump stated, "We will build a great wall along the southern border. And Mexico will pay for the wall. One hundred percent" (Trump, 2015). When it comes to the hyperbolic language, Trump asserted, "We have some bad hombres here, and we're going to get them out." (Trump, 2016). Moreover, Trump ironically criticizes the NAFTA deal; he stated, "Remember, it was Bill Clinton who signed NAFTA, one of the worst economic deals ever made by our country, or frankly, any other country." (Trump, 2016).

VI. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

A contextual analysis of the speakers and the situation is necessary to fully understand the role and effect of insults in political discourse. Understanding the importance and intention of insults in politics depends on a beneficial understanding of insolence and its importance. Observing the timing and context of an insult is key to fully appreciating it. Analyzing the use of insults chronologically will also reveal how the attackers altered their objectives.

Van Dijk (1998) insightfully pointed out, "Understanding the context in which language is used is crucial for a complete analysis of discourse" (p. 18). This idea is especially important in the case of political insults. To prove just how important this is, examples could include

any of Donald Trump's speeches and rhetoric surrounding his presidential campaigns.

Trump's speeches always had context, and along with that context was the use of derogatory comments toward political candidates. For example, Trump referred to Joe Biden as "Sleepy Joe." It was not simply the use of the nickname; it was the context and timing of when he used it that were significant. Trump would say it during a caucus, rally, or even debate. He did this to gauge the impact on voters and to diminish the energy and mental well-being of his opponent. (Manis, 2023).

This illustration underscores the significance of taking into account the timing and context of insults to accurately interpret their overall meaning. Ultimately, a contextual analysis is necessary to get a more profound comprehension of how insulting works in political communication.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of this thorough investigation have proved that the domain of political insults is a very sloshy and tricky one, specifically the insults deployed by Donald Trump during his presidential campaigns. Remember, political insults and attacks extend beyond mere verbal attacks. Under supervision, politicians prepare offensive language and political jargon, using them as options to shape public opinion, fabricate political narratives, and manipulate the social and political environment.

Trump's words were not merely insults thrown about to try to wrest a political advantage. Rather, his decision to use them was a carefully calculated method to try to frame his opponents as in some way defective before they could frame him with a negative narrative. In other words, the language significantly influenced people's perception of Trump's political messages, his threats, his divisive promises, and his constant self-citation of his own genius. A rigorous screening of Trump's insults demonstrates the influence that lexical choices can exert through their semantic nuances. This close attention to linguistic choices thus underscores how language can shape our understanding of political messages and morality, lending empirical support to the claim that language doesn't just express our thoughts but also shapes them.

Contextual analysis has enabled a breakthrough in understanding political insults. Examining the timing and circumstances in which insults took place allowed us to understand their intended effect in the larger framework of political communication.

Unraveling the complex nature of political communication requires an understanding of the use of insults in political discourse. The notional breadth of linguistic elements, and invective in particular, are well situated within linguistic study. By comprehending the use of insults as an example of invective, the general application of invective, and the broader use of language, one can gain a deeper appreciation for the fundamental elements of political communication, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of politicians.

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