
RESEARCH

STRATEGIES FOR REPRESENTING SOCIAL ACTORS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: The study explored the strategies used for representing the two social actors, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton as a case-study. Data was the transcript of the speech delivered at the 2016 Democratic National Convention (DNC) by President Obama. Grounded in the view that an actor is defined in terms of who he is and what he does, the study adopted a combined approach drawn on van Leeuwen's social actor representation framework (SAR) and Halliday's transitivity analysis. Findings reveal the speaker deployed selected strategies to support, to identify with Clinton, and to other Trump at the same time. The use of van Dijk's ideological square showed how the *Us vs. Them* characterization functioned as a strategy to further legitimation or de-legitimation of social actors. The study suggests that representations are potentially biased. However, it implicitly recognizes a more powerful role of non-discursive social practices. Implications and suggestions for future research are offered.

Keywords: representation, social actor, transitivity, legitimation, ideological square

1. Introduction

1.1. The US 2020 Presidential Election

The US 2020 presidential election unfolded like a surreal story. Losing his re-election bid, President Donald Trump was allegedly responsible for all the dramas involved. It suffered from Trump's allegations of fraud, failed law suits, and a kind of "surreal" drama with rioters storming the US Capitol and five deaths as electoral votes were being counted and certified by Congress. Trump was impeached by the House of Representatives the second time, but was acquitted. A Republican leader said on Fox News "*There*

is no question that the President formed the mob. The President incited the mob, the President addressed the mob. He lit the flame". This incident inspired my interest to find out who Trump really was. I hoped the part of the answer would lie in his representations in political discourse or the media. Data was the transcript of the speech delivered at the 2016 Democratic National Convention (DNC) by President Obama in support of Clinton's bid for the White House. This speech represents both Trump and Clinton in a way that enabled the use of referential choices to create opposites (van Dijk, 1993). The benefits are obvious. First, I was able to study how representation

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strategies were deployed in the speech. Second, it was possible to identify contrastive patterns in a single text. The race for the White House in 2016 was not just one between the two candidates, but it could be framed as one between a man and a woman, who famously described the tough challenge of fighting sexism and gender inequality in America in her concession speech in those words *"To all the women and especially the young women who put their faith in this campaign and in me, I want you to know that nothing has made me prouder than to be your champion. Now, I know, I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday, someone will."* As Obama was a powerful politician famous for his rhetorical skills, a focus on the discursive strategies deployed in his speech to support, identify with, and legitimate or delegitimate, social actors will further understanding of the use of representation patterns that function to serve political goals. The represented actors, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are also worth looking at because they represent not only ideological differences but also the social problems of sexism and gender equality in America. With this in mind, the purpose of the research was to explore strategies that could be used to represent and construct social actors. The analysis was modelled on Power et al's study (2020) as it adopted Halliday's transitivity analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and van Leeuwen's social actor framework (van Leeuwen, 2008) to document the types of performances ascribed to Trump and Clinton, as well as the labels used to portray them, respectively. But it expanded by incorporating the polarization of characterization in van Dijk's ideological square to investigate the possible occurrence of legitimation and bias in representation of social actors. This combined theoretical approach is expected to bring about a full

account of the construction of social actors. In light of the above, the paper addressed the following research questions:

- a. What strategies were employed to represent the two social actors?
- b. Did the representations exhibit evidences of legitimation and bias?

Of the two RQs, research question one actually explored the strategies that ascribed the category labels and performances to the actors as answers to the two sub-questions: how were the actors represented? and what performances were ascribed to them? Using this combined framework as the research methodology, this study can provide empirically grounded explanations for a range of social practices in representing and constructing social actors in political discourse. Learning to develop this type of discursive practice involves the ability to use language effectively in tandem with our communicative goal, ideology, cognition, and knowledge of the socio-political context. Apart from assisting critical readings of texts, this research could put CDA on a robust linguistic footing. It makes us aware that a speaker's communicative or political goal might be the key influencer of the choice of discursive strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview

Representing people and things has long been the concern of linguistics and sociolinguistics. Traditional grammar addresses it through such concepts as subject, object, agent, nominalization, and voice (Quirk et al., 1972). Systemic functional grammar (SFG, Halliday, 2004) approaches this issue in terms of transitivity and grammatical metaphor. Influenced by symbolic interactionism, a model called "Dramaturgy" to explain first how the self,

and later social participants in general, can be cast in human social interactions was developed (Goffman, 1959) and applied by Morgan (2020). An individual would construct a performance to provide others with “impressions” that are consonant with the desired goals of the actor (Goffman, 1959, p. 17). Critical discourse analysis (CDA), which emerged in the early 1990s and now exists in a range of approaches, is also interested in representing people, identities and things (van Leeuwen, 2008). The combination of social actor framework and transitivity characterizes a number of studies on representation (see Koller, 2008; Power et al., 2020).

Literature on the representations of social actors has revealed the adoption of the either or both of the van Leeuwen’s social actor and Halliday’s transitivity analysis to varying extents. For example, a functional grammar-based framework was developed involving transitivity analysis, thematic analysis, cohesion, schematic structure to explore how Vietnamese immigrants were represented in Australian media (Teo, 2000). This study shows Vietnamese immigrants were generally constructed as the bad guys, harmful and immoral people in Australia. van Leeuwen’s social actor theory as a model for representing people was discussed by Machin and Mayr’s (2012). The same model exploring how two South African mining companies were represented as social actors in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and Integrated Annual (IA) reports was used by Bernard (2018). The findings show that these companies constructed themselves as having positive human qualities and active participants who were willing to engage in a dialogue with their stakeholders. van Leeuwen’s social actor framework and van Dijk’s Ideological square were used to uncover how Megawati Soekarnoputri, leader of the Indonesian

Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) was represented as an icon of ideological contestation during the 2014 presidential election (Ahlstrand, 2020). The analysis reveals a pattern of strategically ambiguous representations of Megawati, which invited the readers to read between the lines to determine in-group and out-group memberships. Intergroup bias was discovered by another research (Aliaa & Nasir, 2019) in representing M 370 Flight disaster-related social actors, drawing on van Dijk’s ideological square and Reisigl and Wodak’s discursive strategies. Koller (2008) adopted both transitivity analysis (TA) and van Leeuwen’s social actor framework to explain how the construction of female executives and entrepreneurs in lesbian and business magazines was designed for two different types of audiences. Power et al. (2020) in a study on the representation of women in business media also used Halliday’s transitivity analysis and van Leeuwen’s social actor framework. The key findings from this research show that women were under-represented but not mis-represented in the leading North American business magazines in question. And a full range of behaviors is ascribed to them, emphasizing “what they can do” rather than “what they might be said to be”, and the category labels “highlight their humanity” and “accord them respect” (Power et al., 2020, p. 19). Another approach involves the “social drama” pioneered by Goffman, which was applied to analyze how the UK Government managed the Covid-19 outbreak as a social actor (Morgan, 2020). The analysis shows that this “social drama” was able to show, among other things, “how to cast actors in their proper roles, and to plot them together in a storied fashion under a suitable narrative genre.” (Morgan, 2020, p. 1). KhosraviNik (2010) carried out a study on the representation of out-groups (i.e. immigrants) adopting the Discourse-

historical approach and Socio-cognitive approach. In what follows, the three selected frameworks which guided this study are presented.

2.2. The Social Actor Framework

The social actor framework is predicated on three dimensions: Foucault's concept of discourse as "semantic constructions of specific aspects of reality that serve the interests of particular historical and/or social contexts" (see van Leeuwen, 2008, p. vii), Bernstein's (1981) view of discourse as a recontextualization of social practice, and a social semiotic theory of communication based on the work of Halliday (1978). The framework acknowledges the lack of a fit between sociological (the concept of agency) and linguistic categories (the linguistic realization of this agency) and recognizes that meaning is culturally based. The main categories of analysis are nomination and agency (sociological categories) rather than nouns or passive sentences as linguistic categories. The concept of agency can correspond to "agent", "patient" or "beneficiary" in grammar. Combining the two, van Leeuwen offers a "socio-semantic" inventory of social actor representation strategies. A strategy is viewed as "a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal" (Reisigl & Wodak, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 94). The speaker's goal affects the choice of strategies, which in turn involve the selection of linguistic resources. Representations enable the conceptual construction of actors in discourse. This is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real'

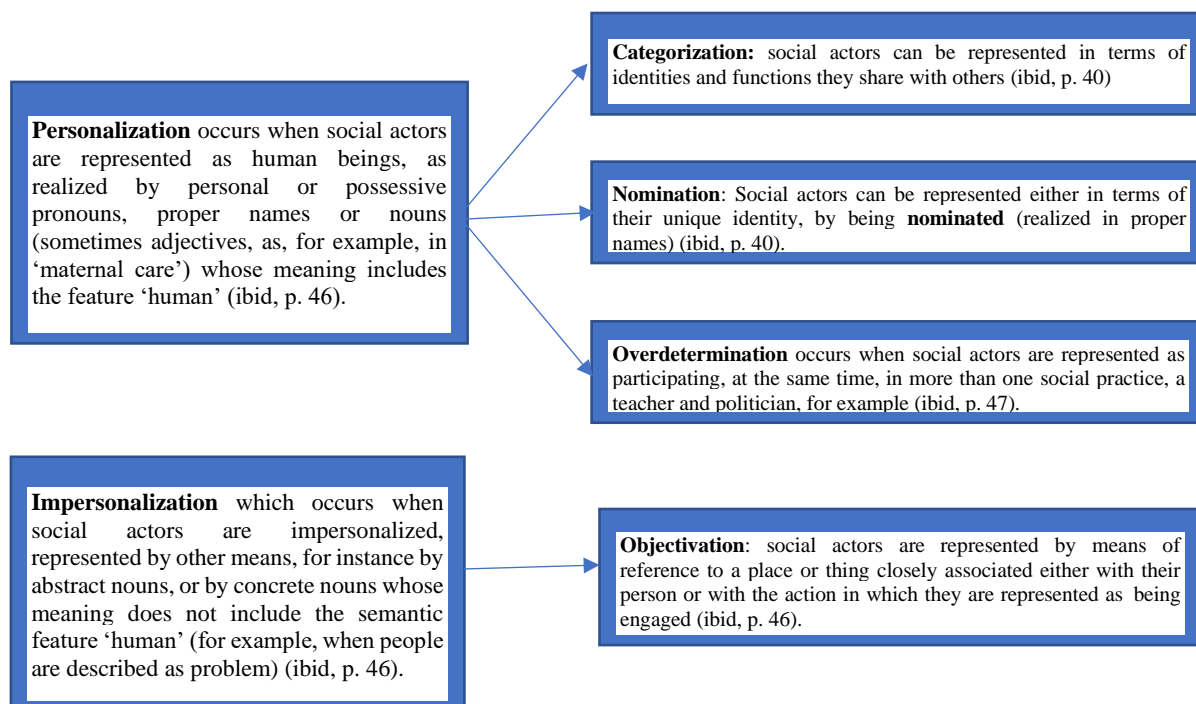
world of objects, people or events or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects and events" (Hall, 2003, p. 7). However, it should be emphasized that there is no neutral way to represent a person or a participant, or a thing (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Some actors can be marginalized while others can be highlighted in terms of certain aspects of identity. This means that representation is ideological and involves a degree of perspectivation.

Framed in the spirit of social semiotic (Halliday, 1978), van Leeuwen's framework reflects a shift from viewing language as a system to seeing it as a meaning potential or a system of meaning-making resources. We are more interested in how a speaker uses the semiotic resources available to him, why they are used, and what possible ideological goals they may serve. In a social semiotic view of communication, choices of resources do not just represent the social world but also constitute it. The choice of resources allows us to represent and highlight certain aspects of identity we wish to draw attention to or omit (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Representations, thus, do not just neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations, but rather, they can create, sustain, or change them.

van Leeuwen distinguishes two broad strategies to achieve the communicative goals of the speaker: exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion refers to the deliberate act of excluding social actors from discourse, and inclusion refers to strategies that involve the inclusion of social actors in discourse. From van Leeuwen's framework (2008, p. 52), the following strategies were selected as they are relevant to our data analysis.

Figure 1

Selected Representation Network (adapted from van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 52)



2.3. Transitivity Framework

Transitivity is a key concept in Systemic Functional Grammar, described by Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) as the system that construes the world into a set of processes. This system is linked to agency and responsibility for actions (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Transitivity is basically about who does what and to whom, thus serving as a set of resources to foreground the attribution of agency to participants. Within the ambit of CDA, an investigation of transitivity can reveal how cultural, political,

social, or ideological variables can influence the way a process is expressed in context. In this study, this well-established framework was used to identify, count and categorize the processes in relation to which the two social actors in the data are positioned as agentive. Identifying and counting these phrases was carried out manually, and content analysis was applied to interpret and make sense of them in context. Identifying and interpreting the phrases, in our view, happened simultaneously, not separately. A brief description of each of the process types is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Process Types

Process types	Illustrative example
Material: the process of doing-and-happening which has an Actor-participant, and some processes have a Patient-participant (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 179).	We <u>battled</u> for a year and a half.

Mental: the process of sensing which has a Senser-participant, and a Phenomenon-participant. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 197).	She <u>knows</u> what's at stake in the decisions our government makes for the working family, the senior citizen, the small business owner, the soldier, and the veteran.
Relational: the process of being and having which has a Carrier-participant. (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 210).	Hillary's <u>got the tenacity</u> she had as a young woman.
Behavioral: the process of physiological and psychological behavior which has a Behavior-participant. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 248).	Even in the middle of the crisis, she <u>listens to people</u> , and <u>keeps her cool</u> , and <u>treats everybody with respect</u> .
Verbal: the process of saying which has a Sayer participant and a verbiage participant. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 252).	As Secretary of State, she sat with me in the Situation room and forcefully) <u>argued in favor of the mission</u> that took down bin Laden.
Existential: the process of existence which has an Existent-participant. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 256).	And then there's <u>Donald Trump</u> .

2.4. The Ideological Square

van Dijk (1998) posits that polarization between Us and Them is a common practice in intergroup relations for purposes of self-representation, self-defense, legitimation, persuasion (a form of power), and other-representation. van Dijk (1998, p. 44) offers a four-dimensional scheme, known as "Ideological square", and presented below:

- Emphasizes positive things about us.
- Emphasizes negative things about them.
- De-emphasizes negative things about us.
- De-emphasizes positive things about them.

It is fairly obvious that a speaker/writer will emphasize the negative aspects of "Them" and emphasize the positive dimensions of "Us". Van Dijk summarizes these strategies as Positive self-representation and Negative other-representation. Van Dijk suggests that this scheme can be applied to all levels of discourse structure, and in terms of content, to semantic and lexical analysis. This means that we can analyze the expression of ideology at multi-levels. Considered in this

light, van Dijk's scheme was integrated at semantic and lexical levels in the analysis of the category labels and performances ascribed to these two chosen participants.

3. Methodology

A critical qualitative research design was deployed in this study. The conceptual approach of this study deployed van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor framework, Halliday's transitivity system and van Dijk's (1998) ideological square. Van Leeuwen's selected strategies (figure 1) were employed to identify and interpret the referring expressions for the two social actors, Trump and Clinton. Halliday's transitivity system provided a roadmap to identify the types of processes, which are recognized by many critical analysts (Hart, 2014; Bernard, 2018) as a means of uncovering the links between language and ideology, and which meanings are foregrounded, backgrounded, or excluded in a text. Adopting Van Dijk's framework, specific attention was paid to properties that seem to demonstrate conflicting ideas, values, views, or beliefs in the representations (i.e. category labels) and performances (i.e. processes) ascribed to the

social actors, and in word-meanings.

The speech is 4161 words in length and covers many issues, and there are a number of other social actors represented and constructed therein, but this study focused only on the part that refers to the two opponents, Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton. Readings of the speech shows that the speaker devoted much of his speech to Clinton than to Trump, which is understandable as he was under an obligation to represent Clinton in the most favorable light so that it could help her to win the race, and Obama had someone to continue his legacy. This fact would not impact the thrust of this study, which was to discover what strategies could be employed to represent and construct social actors. The speaker Obama was rooting hard for Clinton, knowing that much of his legacy was at stake in the election: the Obamacare, the Iran Deal, the Paris Climate Change Agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership was on the line.

For this case study, I identified all the referring expressions of the two social actors, and the verbal phrases expressing the processes ascribed to them, going line by line. Referring expressions are typically realized by nominal phrases, the head of which is a nominal element, modifiable by attributes, and processes are realized by verbal phrases which always involve a verb as their head. The number of mentions of each of the two actors was carried out to see if there is any significant difference in the frequency with which these social actors were mentioned. I was able to identify about forty five mentions of Trump and seventy eight mentions of Clinton. Of these, twenty eight and fifty three are connected with some types of Trump-ascribed processes and Clinton-ascribed processes, respectively. I was not able to make any statistically significant claims based on the difference in the number of the mentions because of the small size of the data. Understandably,

Clinton enjoyed more visibility in the speech than Trump. The frequency of occurrences of processes, and the counts of mentions were calculated manually.

4. Findings

This section reports on findings for the two research questions (RQ) of this study:

- a) What strategies were employed to represent the two social actors?
- b) Did the representations exhibit evidences of legitimation and bias?

The findings reveal the following themes.

4.1. Categorization and Nomination Foreground Us Vs. Them Representation

The first key theme that emerges from the analysis is the foregrounding of *Us* vs. *Them* polarization. The speaker lavishly represented Clinton as “one of us” with vision, knowledge, judgment, and toughness while Trump was othered and cast as impulsive, arrogant, guided by emotion rather than reason. Our findings reveal a clear bias in the *Us vs. Them* construction of actors in terms of lexicalization strategies. In so portraying, Obama supported his justification of Clinton as the “choice”, and forcefully dismissed Trump. Another factor is the amount of language to define these actors. The data shows a much less amount to describe Trump against a much significant number of words to characterize Clinton. But it should be emphasized that since we were just examining the data face-value, the results should be taken as indicative rather than definitive. Categorization and nomination were the main strategies to represent the two social actors. According to van Leeuwen (2008), categorization takes three forms: functionalization, identification, and appraisal.

Functionalization occurs when social actors are referred to in terms of an

activity, in terms of something they do, for instance an occupation or role (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 42). E.g.:

- As Secretary of State, she sat with me in the Situation room and forcefully argued in favor of the mission that took down bin Laden. (of Clinton).
- He calls himself a business guy, which is true, but I have to say, I know plenty of businessmen and women who've achieved success without leaving a trail of lawsuits and unpaid workers, and people feeling like they got cheated. (of Trump)

There is a clear stylistic difference between describing someone using the official role as “*Secretary of State*”, and the other simply as “*business guy*”.

Identification occurs when social actors are defined, not in terms of what they do, but in terms of what they, more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are, (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 42), e.g.:

- And there is only one candidate in this race who believes in that future, has devoted her life to that future; a mother and grand mother who'd do anything to help our children thrive. (of Clinton).

Appraisement: social actors are appraised when they are referred to in terms of which evaluate them as good or bad, loved or hated, admired or pitied (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 45), e.g.:

- Then there is Donald Trump. He is not really a plans guy. Not really a facts guys, either.

Nomination occurs in four forms in van Leeuwen's framework (2008): formal, semi-formal, formal and honorific. *Formalization* uses surname only, with or without honorifics (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 41). Our data does not contain any instances of

formal nomination. Semi-formalization uses a given name and a surname (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 41), e.g.:

- I promise you, our strength, our greatness, does not depend on Donald Trump. (of Trump)
- If you want someone with a lifelong track record of fighting for higher wages, better benefits, a fairer tax code, a bigger voice for workers, and stronger regulations on Wall Street, then you should vote for Hillary Clinton.

Trump was semi-formalized more often than Clinton. The predominance of informalization might signify some social distance that Obama wanted to create between himself and Trump, furthering the connotation of “being othered”.

Informalization uses given names only (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 41). Informalization of Clinton occurs at quite a high rate (18 mentions, according to our manual count), but I did not find any instance of Trump being informalized using given name. It should be noted that informalization in this context did not signify a lack of respect or potentially refers to “less powerful actors” (Hart, 2014). Quite on the contrary, it connoted a sense of closeness, in-group membership, and being one-of-us. In the speech under question, informalization can involve other words, and potentially indicates a lack of respect. For instance:

- She got her share of critics, she's been caricatured... that's what happens when we try. That is what happens when you are the kind of citizen Teddy Roosevelt once describes... Hillary is that woman in the arena.

Honorification in our data mainly involves “functional honorifics” (Machin &

Mayr, 2012, p. 82). Trump was not “honorificized” whereas Clinton was, via the use of “senator”, or “secretary of state”. This may add a sense of respect and authority, e.g.:

- As Senator from New York, she fought so hard for funding to help first responders.
- As Secretary of State, she sat with me in the Situation room and forcefully argued in favor of the mission that took down bin Laden.

Our findings reveal the use of overdetermination that occurs when social actors are described as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice, (a teacher and politician, for example), (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 47), with the effect being to implicitly evoke the positive characteristics and identities associated with those social practices: a leader is someone with *vision, experience...* ; a mother is *caring*, e.g.:

- And there is only one candidate in this race who believes in that future, and has devoted her life to it; a mother and grandmother who’d do anything to help our children thrive; a leader with real plans to break down barriers, blast through glass ceilings, and widen the circle of opportunity to every single American – the next President of the United States, Hillary Clinton.

Impersonalization takes the form of abstraction or objectivation. Our analysis reveals the occurrence of objectivation, which occurs when social actors are represented by means of reference to a place or thing closely associated either with their person or with the action in which they are depicted as being engaged. The use of the metaphorical “choice” to refer to Clinton was ideologically significant because it

could potentially legitimize Clinton as the only person who Americans should choose to lead the nation. E.g.:

- And if you’re concerned about who’s going to keep you and your family safe in a dangerous world – well, the choice is even clearer.

By contrast, Trump was designated as a non-choice in the rhetorical question below:

- Does anyone believe that a guy who’s spent his 70 years on this Earth showing no regards for working people is suddenly going to be your champion? Your voice?

All these lexical resources deployed by the speaker Obama helped define the two social actors in terms of who they are. But the picture of these two actors was not complete without a characterization in terms of what they did or performed, which is discussed through analysis of processes below.

4.2. Process Types Portray Clinton Engaged in Performances That Typically Characterize Leadership Whereas Trump was Ascribed Unworthy Behaviors

Findings show that Clinton was depicted as agentive in relation to a full range of performances especially through material actions, paying attention to what she can do. The role of material processes is to represent one as both “dynamic” and “forceful” (van Leeuwen, 2008), and a can-do-type via the projection of behaviors that are traditionally found in a leader. This is consistent with Koller’s research (2008). By contrast, Trump was depicted as just a bombastic talker, careless with deplorable through verbal actions. The following table presents performances assigned to the two social actors. I found no existential process ascribed to Clinton.

Table 2*Percentages of the Ascribed Processes*

Process types	Trump-ascribed	Clinton-ascribed
Material	20%	35.5%
Mental	10%	27.6%
Relational	20%	26.3%
Verbal	40%	6.5%
Behavioral	6.6%	4.0%
Existential	3.3%	0%

Our findings show Clinton's performances were mostly represented via the three principal processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 248): *material* processes (35.5%), followed by *mental* processes (27.6%), and *relational* processes (26.6%). Taken together they accounted for quite a high percentage (89.4%). *Verbal* and *behavioral* processes were also deployed, but at much lower rates (6.5% and 4.0%, respectively). We did not find any instance of *existential* process in our data. Interpreting the *material* processes shows that a predominance of material processes represents performances or doings that are not stereotypically feminine (e.g.: related to house-keeping, family, housework), but things expected of someone in a top leadership position. E.g.:

- Has worked closely with our intelligence teams, our diplomats, our military to keep you and your family safe in a dangerous world.
- I know Hillary won't relent until ISIL is destroyed. She'll finish the job – and she'll do it without resorting to torture, or banning entire religions from entering our country.

The *mental* and *relational* processes appeared with high frequencies. *Mental* processes ascribed to Clinton portrayed her as someone with knowledge and experience, and these traits are hardly feminine, but

qualities of a leader. E.g.:

- She knows that for progress to happen, we have to listen to each other, and see ourselves in each other, and fight for our principles but also fight to find common ground, no matter how elusive that may sometimes seem.
- She knows we can work through racial divides in this country.
- She knows that acknowledging problems that have festered for decades isn't making race relations worse.

By contrast, the *mental* processes that were assigned to Trump depicted him a negative light implying a lack of knowledge or displaying an attitude of carelessness. For example:

- (He) doesn't know the men and women who make up the strongest fighting force the world has ever known. (lack of knowledge)
- It doesn't matter to him that illegal immigration and the crime rate are as low as they've been in decades, because he's not offering any real solutions to those issues. (attitude of carelessness).

The *relational* processes assigned the same attributes to Clinton, but what is

striking is that they did not portray traditionally feminine characteristics and specific identities, but leadership-related qualities. E.g.:

- Hillary's got the tenacity she had as a young woman.
- She has got specific ideas.
- Now, Hillary has real plans to address the concern (she's heard from you on the campaign trail.)
- (and she) has the judgment and the experience and the temperament to meet the threat from terrorism.
- She's been in the room.
- She has been part of those decisions

Intensive relational processes appeared to play a very important role in tandem with the meanings of the words which are used to help to characterize Clinton as someone fit for the job, and trustworthy. She was implicitly described as "*the choice for president*" because she had the critical qualities such as "judgment, temperament, experience, the care for others, intelligence, discipline". These are the attributes and traits we can find in men who are in leadership position: they need to be visionary, experienced, tough, and having sound judgment.

Trump's performances were mostly represented via *verbal* processes (40%, a subsidiary process, Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 248), followed by *relational* processes and *material* processes. *Behavioral* and *existential* processes appeared at extremely lower rates (6.6% and 3.3%, respectively). The dominance of *verbal* processes might suggest Trump was much of a talker, rather than a doer. As we looked more closely into the semantics of those processes, we found that these processes not only portray Trump as a talker, but in a very negative light as well. E.g.:

- Meanwhile, Donald Trump calls our

military a disaster.

- He praises Saddam Hussein.
- He's just offering slogans, and he's offering fear.

There was a scarcity of *behavioral* processes (6.6%) and *existential* processes (3.3%). However, factoring in the meanings of specific words realizing the process, Trump was cast in a very negative light as someone "*who shows no regards for working people*" and "*cozies up to Putin*". There was a sense of irony, too, in the following utterance:

- Does anyone believe that a guy who's spent his 70 years on this Earth showing no regards for working people is suddenly going to be your champion? your voice?

Trump was further depicted via the behavioral process of "*He cozies up to Putin*". The name of Putin might evoke strong negative reactions as he was perceived as a dictator in the West. Behavioral processes were also assigned to Clinton, but the contrast was quite pronounced. Clinton was cast as someone who "*listens to people*", "*keeps her cool*" and "*treats people with respect*", which are must-have traits of leaders. E.g.:

- Even in the middle of the crisis, she listens to people, and keeps her cool, and treats everybody with respect.

Existential processes are not related to agency, and therefore, should not be subjected to our analysis. However, I located one significant *existential* process ascribed to Trump "*Then there is Donald Trump. He is not really a plans guy*". This *existential* process was significant as it reinforced the sense of othering Trump.

4.3. Representation Patterns Offer Evidences of Social Actor Legitimation and Reveals a Potential Bias

The key theme here is Obama was supporting and defending Clinton's

candidacy by legitimating, or seeking the “social approval” (Hart, 2014, p. 7) of his choice, Clinton while delegitimizing Trump. Based on the analysis of data, it can be inferred that the “One of us” vs. “Other” portrayal represents a potent embodiment of legitimation (van Dijk’s, 1998) through a positive self-representation and negative other-representation, which is a structure of mutual oppositions. The speaker cast Clinton as “one of us” with vision, knowledge, judgment, and toughness. These traits define leadership and are aligned with American expectations of someone who will lead their country (Rath & Conchie, 2008; Garcia, 2019). Clinton was overdetermined as “candidate, a mother and grandmother, a leader, senator, secretary of state, commander-in-chief, and the next President of the United States”, so that a sense of owning desirable qualities associated with these job titles, and legitimacy could be evoked (Machin & Mayr, 2012). By contrast, categorization and nomination put Trump in a negative light, and othered him as “a self-styled savior” in “*Our power doesn’t come from some self-declared savior promising he alone can restore order*” or as the “bombastic” talk-the-talk guy, not to trust through the abundance of verbal processes. The evidences that emerge out of our label ascriptions and transitivity analysis are seen as indicative of Obama’s bias in his representation of the two actors. It can be inferred that Obama perceived and stereotyped Trump and Clinton the way he did as a result of his experiential contacts and cognitive processing. Obama foregrounded those attributes and identities of Clinton that he saw fit for his political goals, and might on purpose mis-represent Trump. Therefore, it is important to be critical about what we read or what we hear to be fully aware of the ideology or hidden agenda of the speaker (Irwin, 1996).

5. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore Obama’s use of social actor representation strategies. Findings reveal that he selectively employed strategies, and his choice was influenced by his political goal, ideology, perspective, cognition, and social context. First, as widely reported in the media, Obama did not only realize the urgent need to protect his legacy (the Obamacare, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), the Iran Deal, the Paris Agreement on climate change), but also was cognizant of the negative labels ascribed to his candidate such as “*crooked*”, (coined by Trump), “*dishonest*”, “*power hungry*”, etc. Second, as president, he was well cognizant of the qualities expected of this top leadership position. A combination of factors enabled him to represent Clinton in a positive light and Trump negatively in order to ensure a Clinton win, protect his legacy, and save the social structure he was part of. That was the key part of his strategic goal in the election. It is found that Obama used categorization, nomination, material and verbal processes to ascribe labels and performances to Trump and Clinton in ways that betray a distinctly ideological purpose. They form an ideological mechanism to control the discourse. As remarked by Gall (1989), control of discourse or representation of reality is a form of power.

The analysis of representation patterns is also indicative of the link between representation and legitimation. This is made possible by the positive self-representation and negative other-representation. While the linguistic evidences are not definitive of a bias, there is reason to infer that there is. First, Obama might have a cognitive bias commonly understood as “a tendency to view another person as consistent, especially in an evaluative sense...”, according to Freeman et al. (1981, p. 89, as cited in Teo, 2000). One can delve

into how the social world is defined, based on our ideology, worldview, our values, and practices as the frames of reference. This ethno-centric and ego-centric view prevails and “helps us define ourselves and others” (Teo, 2000, p. 41). In all likelihood, he was ideologically wired to see these social actors in this particular way. This suggests that the “Us vs. Them” or “In-group vs. Out-group” identity negotiation is a common practice in social construction of subjects, identities and social relations. Obama may have judged and evaluated the two social actors based on his ideology, his social and institutional political views. This study lends further support to the argument that people are normally engaged in a social practice to maximize positive things about *Us*, and maximize negative things about *Them* (van Dijk, 1998). This practice can result in shaping opinions and values, and perpetuating social prejudices, possibly leading to discriminatory practices. Discursive representations, therefore, are potentially biased.

Findings of this research implicitly recognizes the crucial role of non-discursive social practices. While the study did not negate the role of discursive practices, it should be recognized that non-discursive social practices play a more powerful role in creating social effects and effecting social change. However, it should be noted that in positing “power relations are discursive” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 272), Fairclough and Wodak appear to make the assumption that discourse is equivalent to social power, or that “all power is expressed in texts” (Rampton, 1995, p. 243). If this was the case, then Obama might have succeeded in persuading the voters to get Clinton into the White House. Clinton (2017) admitted her loss was probably due to some of the social forces going against her such as “a historic wave of angry, tribal populism” (p. 388), “the Comey effect and the Russian attack” (p. 407), or “economic anxiety or

bigotry” (p. 410), or “voter suppression” (p. 418). Therefore, it is critical that one should be aware of the limited impact of discursive practice in general on creating social effects. This fact is significant as it suggests that discursive representation has its limits, and is not equivalent to social power as one may be led to believe by Fairclough and Wodak’s assumption that it is.

It needs to be pointed out that discourse interpretation should not be limited to what is in the text; one needs to move beyond the boundary of text and make sense of meaningful absences (for example, the significance of contextual information about Putin helps to interpret “*cozies up to Putin*”). It entails exploring implicit or indirect meaning (van Dijk, 2001), or reading between the lines to identify an argument being made, (KhosraviNik, 2010), or identity and ideology reflected. The ability to use language effectively and appropriately in social contexts becomes an imperative for discourse producers and interpreters.

Finally, this study recognizes that representing a social actor in terms of both the social actor framework and transitivity analysis is simply not enough. Attention should be paid to words at the lexical and semantic levels (van Dijk, 1998) because representation is in the final analysis about the production of meaning. People do not just rely on the grammatical structure of language to construct representations; they constantly make use of meanings. This resonates with what van Leeuwen (2008) has remarked about the cultural basis of meaning.

6. Conclusion

Revisiting the aim of the study and research questions, it is found that there exists a dialectical relationship between a speaker’s political goal, ideology and social context and representation strategies.

Implementing a critical analysis of the actor labels and performances ascribed to the two social actors, it is found that selected strategies were deployed by the speaker to ideologically represent these social actors in a contrastive manner. The study re-affirms that van Dijk's *Us vs. Them* characterization is a strategy to further legitimation, which functions to secure social approval of actors (Hart, 2014) and ideology, and as such, it is potentially biased. Polarization can operate as a speaker's strategy to identify with social actors. As the study implies, one should not put discursive practices on the same plane as non-discursive practices because doing so would elide the distinction between ideology, power and social reality (Rampton, 1995). Clinton's failure to capture the White House in spite of Obama's whole-hearted support is the best evidence of the limits of discursive representations. This study especially emphasizes the significant role of the words, which are the "most sensitive index of social change" and potentially a "fully-fledged ideological product" (Voloshilov, 1973, as cited in M. Holborow, 2015, p. 124) in the representation and construction of social actors. It is a fact often ignored. This means a combination of the selected frameworks and semantics may offer a window into how discursive representations of social actors are created and interpreted.

This research contributes to the growing field of CDA by deepening our understanding of the application of grammars (Halliday, 2004) or frameworks in discourse analysis, and motivating linguistically-based research into representation of social actors. A point worth noting is the observation made by Dunmire, "CDA, so far, has been "insensitive to non-Western societies and what analysis of them can tell us about discursive practice in an era of globalization" (Dunmire, 2012, p. 740). It is argued that this study may inspire research into similar issues happening in non-

Western societies from a CDA perspective. Studies outside Western societies can produce quite different patterns of representation. Further consideration could go to other representation strategies (van Leeuwen, 2008). One could examine the role metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) can play in the crucial "articulation of ideology in language" in discourse (Gramsci, 1971, as cited in M. Holborow, 2015, p. 2). Another interesting possibility for research is to examine the role of such constructs as worldview, cultural values, and psycho-cognitive variables involved in social actor representation and construction.

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CHIẾN LƯỢC THỂ HIỆN VAI XÃ HỘI: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP

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Tóm tắt: Bài viết là một nghiên cứu về chiến lược thể hiện (representation) vai xã hội (social actor) trong bài diễn văn của Tổng thống Mỹ Obama tại Đại hội Toàn quốc của Đảng Dân chủ năm 2016. Nghiên cứu áp dụng khung kết hợp dựa trên lý thuyết thể hiện vai xã hội của van Leeuwen (2008), chuyển tác của Halliday (2004), và “khung tư tưởng - ideological square” của van Dijk (1998). Kết quả cho thấy người nói đã lựa chọn chiến lược thể hiện vai xã hội theo mục đích, tư tưởng, nhận thức của mình. Khung tư tưởng cho thấy tính tương phản giữa “Ta” và “Họ” là một chiến lược tạo ra sự “chấp thuận” hay tính “chính danh” cho các vai xã hội. Nghiên cứu cho thấy sự hiện hữu của tính thiên vị, không khách quan trong thể hiện vai xã hội. Kết quả cũng cho thấy các tập quán/hành động xã hội dường như có vai trò to lớn hơn diễn ngôn để tạo ra hiệu ứng hay thay đổi xã hội. Một số hàm ý và gợi ý nghiên cứu hữu ích được đưa ra dựa trên kết quả của nghiên cứu này.

Từ khóa: thể hiện/tái hiện, vai xã hội, chuyển tác, khung tư tưởng, chính danh/chấp thuận