

*(De)legitimization in the Discourse of Obama and Trump
on the Syrian Crisis*

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Abstract:

This piece of work accounts for the process of legitimization which is considered to be pivotal in the use of discourse in society. It is an attempt to explain how language can be a medium of legitimation in society (Fairclough, 1989, 1995; Hodge and Kress, 1993). It highlights the various discursive strategies of legitimation that social actor could utilize to legitimize specific social practices. It shows how these strategies are employed by the American Presidents Obama and Trump in regard to the Syrian crisis and the character of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. van Leeuwen's (2007) four-strategy framework of legitimation has been advocated in this study to reveal how the two speakers manipulate the four strategies for legitimizing their social acts and delegitimizing the social acts of their adversary Bashar al-Assad. The study concludes that the four strategies are utilized by the two speakers to delegitimize the social act of using chemical weapons in Syria and to legitimize the launching of missile airstrikes against Syria. Among the four discursive strategies of legitimation (rationalization, moral evaluation, authorization, and mythopoesis), the discursive strategies of rationalization and mythopoesis appear to be the most productive in the discourse of the two speakers. The study also concludes that the discourse of the two Presidents shows intertextuality which echoes shared ideological implications.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, legitimization, political discourse, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, social practice, recontextualization.

الشرعنة واللاشرعنة في خطاب اوباما وترامب حول الازمة السورية

المدرس

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المخلص:-

يهتم هذا البحث بدراسة عملية الشرعنة التي تعتبر اساسية في المجتمع. فهذه الدراسة محاولة لايضاح كيف يمكن ان تكون اللغة واسطة للشرعنة في المجتمع. فهي تسلط الضوء على الاستراتيجيات الخطابية المتنوعة التي يستخدمها الفرد لشرعنة فعاليات اجتماعية معينة. تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء بشكل خاص على استراتيجيات الشرعنة التي مارسها الرئيسين الامريكين اوباما وترامب ضد سوريا والرئيس السوري بشارالاسد اثناء الازمة السورية. استخدمت هذه الدراسة النموذج النظري للتبرير المقدم من قبل اللغوي فان ليون في عام ٢٠٠٧. فهو يتضمن اربع طرق لغوية للتبرير. فهذه الدراسة تهتم بكيفية استخدام هذه الطرق من قبل الرئيسين الامريكين اوباما وترامب ضد الاخر المتمثل بشخصية الرئيس السوري بشارالاسد. استنتجت الدراسة بان الرئيسين استخدموا الطرق الاربعة للتبرير لدعم مواقفهما ضد الحكومة السورية والرئيس السوري بشارالاسد. لقد استخدموا هذه الطرق لادانة استخدام السلاح الكيماوي من قبل الحكومة السورية كما يزعم هذان الرئيسان. استخدمت هذه الطرق من قبل ترامب لدعم الموقف الامريكي من الضربة الصاروخية الامريكية للسلاح الجوي السوري. اظهرت الدراسة من ان الطريقتان العقلانية والسردية هي الاكثر استخداما من قبل الرئيسين الامريكين بالمقارنة مع الطرق الاخرى وهما طريقة التقويم الاخلاقي والطريقة الشخصية. كذلك بينت الدراسة من ان هناك تناص في خطابات الرئيسين الذي بدوره يكشف عن توافق ايديولوجي بين الرئيسين

1. Research Objectives

This paper is an attempt to highlight the relationship between social practice and political discourse through the social act of legitimation; an aspect that can be sketched out within the conventions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It seeks to demonstrate how the Presidents, Obama and Trump are able to build up an Us/Them binary by means of a semantic macro-strategy of positive self and negative other presentation to legitimize social actions against the other (the Syrian Government and the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad). The present work attempts to determine if the discourses of the American presidents: the former president Obama and the current president Trump are intertextualized in regard to the Syrian crisis and the character of Bashar al-Assad. In the light of the aforementioned objectives, the present study analyzes how the two American politicians (Obama and Trump) endeavor through discursual practice to manufacture legitimation for their social actions and deligitimization against the social acts of the other (Bashar al-Assad). The study also aims to show how the discourse of the two Presidents involve recontextualization.

2. Introduction: Legitimization in Political Discourse

Historically, the Latin word 'legitimus', which means 'lawful' or 'legal', was related to the word 'legis' to mean 'law' or 'agreement', and it involves the semantic connotation of 'justification' (Reyes, 2011:783).

The relationship between language and identity, language and ideology, language and power, and language and gender are all general discursual practices that can be decoded by practitioners of CDA (Fairclough, 2003). van Dijk (2001) defines CDA as that interdisciplinary field which is interested in how the social acts of power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are shaped and reshaped,

produced, reproduced and resisted through discourse in a variety of social and political contexts.

The process of legitimization involves speakers to justify or permit a sort of social practice. Against such backdrop, it could be said that legitimization is that process wherein a justification of a mental or a physical behavior is empowered or licensed. What is significant to be realized in this regard is that legitimization is enacted only by means of argumentation; that is by the process of systematic reasoning on the side of an idea, action, policy, or theory (van Leeuwen, 2007). Hence, the reasons that are formed and the conclusions that are drawn, for the process of legitimization, are applied to a certain case in discussion or deliberation. Maintaining power, seeking social approval, improving social identity, or obtaining popularity can all be motivations for the process of legitimization (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). According to Silverstein (2004), the process of legitimization is ideologically shaped and, it is defined within a social group. In similar vein, Habermas (1988) believes that the act of legitimization involves facts (facto validity) and norms (normative validity of values) which merged together in language use.

McCann-Mortimer et al. (2004) and Tusting et al. (2002) believe that in the pursuit of legitimization a variety of arguments are run and conducted; such arguments can be scientific so as to prove a scientific truth or personal to justify a personal act or experience (Tusting et al. 2002). The use of personal experiences play a pivotal role in the process of legitimization. Arguing for a specific foreign culture, for example, is rooted in personal experiences.

Eye-witnessing experiences, whereby expressions such as “I know because I was there....” are central in arguments engaged in describing a social or a cultural phenomenon. That “ I am a fireman myself” is an indication of the legitimization of the opinions of a

speaker, within a social group, in regard to a certain event, the news related to that event, or the response taken to that event (Hutchby, 2001).

van Dijk (1992) states that legitimization and de-legitimization of viewpoints and ideologies is the main concern of politicians. In more exact words, justifying an action or no action or justifying an ideological positioning in regard to a specific issue is the spirit of the social act of legitimization which is consciously or unconsciously practiced by politicians. Ochs (1979) and Capone (2010) explain that there is an intrinsic relationship between political discourse and the social act of legitimization. What is significant to be realized in this respect is that politicians, by means of discourse, attempt to maintain their hegemonic power. The term 'hegemonic power', according to Foucault (1980), is used to refer to the geographical or the cultural predominance of one country or group over others, as the case with the great powers which have sought to establish European or American hegemony over Asian or African countries.

The genre that involves social actors, politicians or laymen, speaking politically is referred to as political discourse (Chilton, 2004). According to Ochs (1979) and Capone (2010), political discourse is planned or preplanned since politicians think, in advance, of the views and attitudes they intend to pass on during public speeches and press conferences. Legitimization is viewed, by Cap (2008), as the principal target that politicians endeavor to arrive at via political discourse. According to Chilton (2004) political discourses, as social acts or events, are managed and conducted in public and political forums wherein politicians promote for their political agendas. It is through political discourse, politicians may legitimize their political agendas which can change the course of social, economic, and political life of a nation or nations. Martin

and van Dijk (1997) explain that the authoritative source and formal contexts of political speeches make them legally legitimized. Politicians, being authorized, often produce official and institutional discourse. The institutionally political context can define the authority of the speaker as well as the discourse he produces.

The validity of political discourse rests upon the contextual setting which, on its part, can validate the authority of politician. Hence, the power of a political message is based on the institutional authority of the discourse itself (Martin and van Dijk ,1997). For achieving their goals, politicians utilize the symbolic power which is implied in the use of discourse (Fairclough, 2002). Power, henceforth, is enacted by politicians to legitimize their acts after having gained the support of people (Chouliaraki, 2005). Against such background, Cap (2008) states that legitimizing political goals are conceived via political discourse which on its part constitutes a form of persuasive speech.

3. Theoretical Background

Social actors, such as governments, officials, and politicians employ a variety of strategies for legitimization; these strategies constitute wider macro-strategies utilized by different social agents in question to achieve their variously individual targets (Fairclough, 2010). Describing legitimating strategies implies digging up the ideological aspect involved in language use. Hence demystifying ideas, beliefs, norms, and attitude existing within unconscious ideology and maintaining unequal relations of power in social and political life appears to be the main objective of Fairclough's tenant of CDA (Fairclough, 2010). Van Leeuwen (2009) highlights the recontextualization of social practice as a dynamic strategy utilized by social actors in discourse. Through this strategy, social actions are transferred and broken down into constitutive elements that agents can recontextualize into specific discourses. 'Addition',

which is described as one of these constitutive elements, is formed of 'reactions' and 'motives'. The mental processes, as interpretation, which accompany actions are referred to as 'reactions', whereas those elements which entail legitimation are referred to as 'motives'. Van Leeuwen (2007: 94) puts forward a four-strategy framework that can be utilized for identifying the strategies of legitimation. This theoretical framework was advocated in the current study so as to analyze the discursive strategies accountable for producing and reproducing the social acts of legitimation in the discourse of the two American Presidents, Obama and Trump. It was chosen since it involves variously concrete and inclusive strategies. These strategies are:

- 1) authorization: tradition, law, or individuals with institutional authorities are referred to in this strategy. This discursive strategy is subdivided into the following subcategories:
 - a) 'personal authority': legitimation, in terms of this authority, is provided by referring to individuals who have roles in particular social or political institutions,
 - b) 'impersonal authority': this strategy involves laws, traditions, rules, or regulations;
 - c) 'expert authority': expertise rather than status is the vehicle to legitimation in such type of authority;
 - d) 'role model authority': based on this authority, examples of role models or opinion leaders are followed;
 - e) 'authority of tradition': according to this type of authority, the answer to the 'why' question is based on what we always do, that is not because the doing of something is obligatory;
 - f) authority of conformity: in terms of this authority, the answer to the 'why' question is not on what we always do but on what everybody else does or on what most people do.

2) moral evaluation: this strategy involves discourses wherein values are incorporated so as to legitimize or delegitimize social actions. This strategy is subdivided into the following subcategories:

a) evaluation: through this type of subcategory, legitimization is established via the use of adjectives, such as ‘normal’, ‘natural’, ‘golden’, etc. (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 110);

b) abstraction: in this type of evaluation, the legitimization of social actions is , in abstract ways, linked to discourses of moral values, that is to abstract ideas rather than to social events;

c) analogies: in terms of this type of evaluation, legitimization is established by means of drawing a positive comparison when the two social actions are associated with positive values, or negative comparison when the two social actions are associated with negative values;

3) rationalization: this strategy gains its validity from institutional actions that are based on social knowledge. Rationalization, as a discursive strategy of legitimization, entails two subcategories through which social practices are legitimized: instrumental rationalization, and theoretical rationalization:

1. Instrumental rationalization involves three subcategories:

a) goal-oriented instrumentality: conscious or unconscious motives, aims, intentions or goals are utilized in discourse so as to legitimize particular social practices. An example of ‘goal-oriented instrumentality is “The formula is I do x in order to do (or be, or have) y” (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 114).

b) Means-oriented instrumentality: in this type of legitimization, the stress is on action as a means to a particular end. An example of means-oriented instrumentality is “ I achieve doing (or being,

or having) y by x-ing” or “x-ing serves to achieve being (or doing, or having) y” (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 114).

c) Effect-oriented instrumentality: The outcome or effect of an action is stressed as a medium to legitimization.

2. Theoretical rationalization: such kind of legitimization is based on truth, that is on “the way things are”(Van Leeuwen, 2008:116). It involves two forms:

a. definition: in this form of theoretical rationalization, one activity is defined in terms of another moralized activity. The link between the two activities is either attributive with words as “is”, “constitute”, etc., or significative involving words such as “means”, “signals”, “symbolizes”, etc. (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 116).

b. explanation: The answer to the “why question”, in this form of rationalization, is “because doing things this way is appropriate to the nature of these actors”. The general attributes and habitual activities of actors are described by this form of theoretical rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2008: 116).

4) mythopoesis: the users of this strategy attempts to legitimize a social practice through storytelling. Ideas and values are produced in the form of narration. Narration is utilized by the speaker to achieve legitimization through images which can evoke the feelings and emotions of his receivers.

Fairclough (2010: 239) put forward his dialectical-relational approach of CDA whereby he attempted to seek a semiotic ‘point of entry’ that may work as obstacles preventing any transformation against ‘social wrongs’. By orders of discourse, these obstacles are recognized by Fairclough (2010: 239) as the ‘hegemonic struggle’ which is thought to be dialectically involved in maintaining prominence in social and political life via competing opponent discursal ideologies. In terms of the present framework, a new discursal practice, which could be the key to a point of entry into

the hegemonic cycle, can be created. The term ‘semioses’ was used by Fairclough (2010: 111) to replace the term ‘discourse’. Fairclough (2010) viewed that any particular social process in society is composed of semioses. Visual imagery and body language are involved as non-discursive elements in semioses. An action in society, in the form of social practices, can be caused or developed as a result of semioses (discourse). An example of social practice was the intention of the US government to change the political system of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003 and establish a new political system; a social practice that was based on the hegemonic struggle which was implied in the US semioises that Iraq was possessing mass deconstruction weapons.

Social structures, according to Fairclough (2010: 164), are those institutions which serve to mediate between social practices and specific and concrete social events. Examples of such social structures are the White House, Pentagon, British Government, etc. For example, the British Common House acted as an intermediary in the abstract concept of the British liberal democracy and the decision of Theresa May (the British Prime Minister) to withdraw from EU (European Union) in 2016, as a global social event.

Three elements of semioises were distinguished by Fairclough (2010:111). They are: ‘discourse’, ‘genre’, and ‘style’. They are sketched in the figure below.

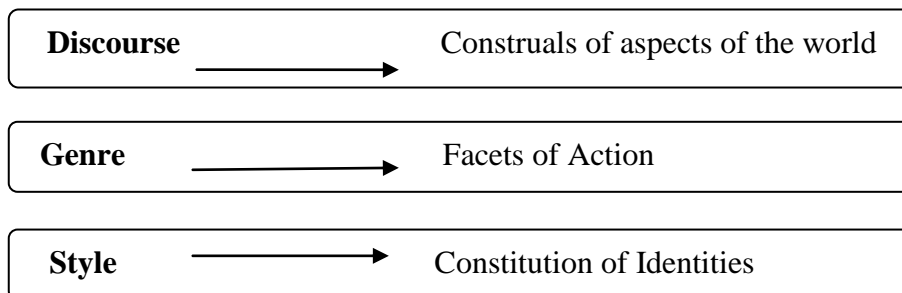


Figure 1: Elements of Semoises (Fairclough, 2010)

The discursual nature of the social practice is formed through the interaction and the contest of these elements (discourse, genre, style) against one another. The ideological shift in any of these elements, which has its effect on its relation to the other elements and areas of the practice, could lead to a change in the social practice. Significantly enough, the social structures as well as the interpretation of social events are highly affected by the changes of social practices. The establishment of an order of discourse as 'networks of social practices' will lead to the operationalisation and ideological acceptance of the semoises of the social practice in and across societal institutions (Fairclough, 2010: 163). Particular discursual texts are correspondingly produced by networks of social events. What is significant to be realized in this respect is that intertextuality can be recognized since there is development of texts; it is an aspect of 'interdiscursivity' which shows the nature of texts to have diverse genres and discourses. Fairclough (2010: 232) adds that interdiscursivity also 'highlights a historical view of the past..... in the present. The written or spoken language produced in a discursive event is referred to as 'texts'; in this light, texts are produced with a discursive event, that is 'an instance of language use' (Fairclough, 2010: 95). Reisgi and Wodak (2009: 90) view that texts are related to other past and present texts. Discourses, according to them, are the product of these oral, written, and visual texts which are related to 'genres'. 'Genres' are, as defined by Van Leeuwen (2009: 144), as formations of language in relation to the actual social action.

4. Previous Studies

Sadeghi and Jalali (2013) studied the discursive strategies that Fars News applied to highlight the event of Egyptian revolution as a legitimized action and the regime of Hosni Mubarak as a

delegitimized social and political institution. Van Leeuwen's (2008) model of legitimation was advocated in this study to show how the four categories of "authorization", "evaluation", "rationalization", and "mythopoesis" were used by the Fars News to delegitimize Mubarak's regime. The study came up with the conclusion that the Egyptian revolution, through the given categories of legitimation, was legitimized, whereas the regime of Hosni Mubarak was delegitimized by the Fars News. Using Norman Fairclough's (2010) dialectical- relational approach and Van Leeuwen's (2008) modal of legitimation, Morgan (2012) shed light on the discourse of 'War on Terror' in the speeches of the two American presidents: George W. Bush and Barack Obama. The study showed how the discourses of the two presidents legitimized actions against Iran. Reyes (2011) accounted for the process of legitimization which is a crucial use of language in society. Drawing on examples from political discourse, Reyes (2011) concluded that legitimization could take place via different linguistic paths, such as emotions, hypothetical future, rationality, voices of expertise, and altruism.

5. Methodology

Attempting to highlight the interconnection between discourse, legitimation, and politics, this study adopted van Leeuwen's (2008) model of legitimation. This model involves four discursive strategies of legitimation: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis. It was advocated, as the main theoretical move, to spotlight the connection between social practice, legitimization, and social action in the discourse of Obama and Trump on the Syrian crisis and the President Bashar al-Assad. Highlighting this connection cannot be manifested without revealing the binary of US/Them as a supportive strategy for uncovering a consistent ideology. To call attention to this binary, van Dijk's (2004) discursive strategy of positive self- and negative

other- presentation was utilized to reveal the specific ways by means of which we, as social actors, can construct a reality through emphasizing our good things, and their bad things and de-emphasizing our bad things, and their good things.

As a methodology for the whole study, Fairclough's (2010) dialectical-relational approach of CDA was employed as the methodology for this work. It has been accommodated in this study to help explore the social acts of legitimation which are beyond the linguistic perspective. This approach, whereby the term 'semiosis' is emphasized, is adopted in this study because semiosis is involved in any particular social process in society (Fairclough, 2010). The three theoretical moves are illuminated in the following conceptual framework.

(De)legitimization in the Discourse of Obama and Trump on the Syrian Crisis		
Dialectical- relational Approach (Fairclough, 2010)	Discursive Strategies of Legitimation (van Leeuwen, 2008)	Discursive Strategy of Positive Self- and Negative Other-Presentation (van Dijk, 2004)

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study

5.1 Research Design

The current study is qualitative in nature reflecting the conventions of CDA. As it is a qualitative study, encompassing non-statistical approach to data analysis (Merriam, 2009); it is grounded on selection of material that can be done manually. Words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and the total speech situation compose the unit of analysis in this study. Coulthard (1977) and Stubbs (1983) view that the task of discourse analysis is to analyze the various social contexts of language use. The analysis goes beyond the meaning of

sentence boundaries (words, phrases, and clauses) to highlight the whole text in relation to the exterior world.

5.2 Research Reliability and Validity

It is worth noting that although the analyst translated the analysis through theoretical moves and methodology, the interpretations of the findings are biased to the analyst. Against such backdrop, it could be stated that since the study is based on the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, the interpretations of the findings of this study can be a reflection of the analyst's viewpoints and attitudes. A point that has been raised by Wodak and Meyer (2001) who assume that no research is objective in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis.

5.3 Data Collection

The main criterion of data collection was to choose two speeches, one addressed by Obama and the other addressed by Trump, during critical and memorable moments in the history of the Syrian crisis. The speeches, which were downloaded and printed out, were the following:

1. President Barack Obama's address to the nation of Syria

Occasion: The Use of Chemical Weapons

Place: The White House/ Washington

Date: September, 10, 2013

Website: <https://genius.com/Barack-obama-address-to-the-nation-on-syria-annotated>

2. President Trump's address on Syria airstrikes

Occasion: Syria Airstrikes

Place: The White House/ Washington

Date: April, 13, 2018

Website: <https://washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2018/04/13/full-transcript-address-on-syria-airstrikes?n...>

6. Results and Discussion

Excerpts from the given speeches of Obama and Trump are analyzed, explained, and interpreted in terms of van Leeuwen's (2008) strategies of legitimation, (authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis). They were chosen in terms of their relevance to the process of analyzing the four discursive strategies of legitimation in the discourse of Obama and Trump.

Excerpt 1

Over the past two years, what began as a series of peaceful protests against the **repressive regime** of Bashar al-Assad has turned into a brutal civil war. Over 100,000 people have been killed. Millions have fled the country. In that time, America has worked with allies to provide humanitarian support, to help the moderate opposition, and to shape a political settlement. But I have resisted calls for military action, **because we cannot resolve someone else's civil war through force, particularly after a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan**

(Obama, September, 10, 2013).

Using the phrase “Over the past two years”, Obama tends to produce his ideas in the form of storytelling. By this discursive strategy, he tries to delegitimize the political system of Bashar al-Assad (the President of Syria) especially when he describes it as being “repressive”. Following the discursive strategy of ‘mythopoesis’, Obama seeks to appeal to the emotions of his recipient, to stimulate their imagination, and to build a sense of community with them. Through this strategy of legitimation, the events of the Syrian crisis have been dramatized as they are demonstrated in these sentences “Over 100,000 people have been

killed”, and “Millions have fled the country. Obama, via this strategy, tries to define the victims of the crisis in Syria demonstrating the other ‘ the Syrian government’ as being responsible for the killing of thousands of Syrians. Linguistically, the use of the adjective “repressive” which is linked to the noun “regime” , which refers to the political system of Syria, are ideologically loaded. They enumerate the negative attributes and characteristics of the Syrian government (the other). Meanwhile, America and its allies are positively represented as they provide the solution to the crisis of Syrians through providing humanitarian support, eliminating the political system of Bashar al-Assad, and shaping a political settlement. It is recognizable that Obama’s legitimate power or positional power, as President of the United States of America, enables him to have enduring influence on others. Power is understood by Foucault (1980) as a relational force that can permeate the whole social body and can connect all social groups in a web of mutual influence. Power, as a relational force, is capable of constructing social organization and hierarchy. It can produce discourse and truths; it can also impose discipline and order and shape human desires and subjectivities. In terms of this context, power, as seen by Foucault (1980), is productive and repressive; it is inevitable in a social body to such an extent that a social body cannot function without it although its manifestations are perennially oppressive.

That “ But I have resisted..... Afghanistan.” Can be realized as a form of delegitimization on the part of Obama to the calls of taking a military action against the Syrian political system. In this context, Obama utilizes the discursive strategy of rationalization where he gives explanation to ‘why should not America take a military action against Syria?’. The answer to this question, explained by the ‘cause clause’ “because we cannot

resolve..... Afghanistan”, implies the justification that America has been engaged in two wars, one is in Afghanistan and the other is in Iraq. Therefore, it would be irrational, according to the speaker, to be involved in a third war in the same region. Having the strongest military and economy, America, as viewed by Okawa (2013), has appeared as the only superpower of the world which has significant influence worldwide. Lukes (1974: 23) puts forward a formula on the notion of power as, “A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants”.

Excerpt 2

My fellow Americans, a short time ago, I **ordered** the United States Armed Forces to launch precision strikes on targets associated with the chemical weapons capabilities of Syrian **dictator** Bashar al-Assad. A combined operation with the armed forces of France and the United Kingdom is now underway. **We** thank them both. Tonight, I want to speak with you about why **we** have taken this action. One year ago, Assad launched **a savage** chemical weapons attack against his own innocent people. The United States responded with 58 missile strikes that destroyed 20 percent of the Syrian Air Force

(Trump, April, 13, 2018).

It can be realized that Trump in the above excerpt employs means-oriented instrumentality as one category of discursive strategy of instrumental rationalization. Trump focuses on the social action which is the American launch of airstrikes on Syria, as it is stated in “My fellow Americans.....al- Assad”. An action that has taken the United States to delegitimize the political system of Bashar al-Assad who has used chemical weapons against his citizens ,as it is claimed by Trump, and to legitimize the American airstrike on

Syria. The word “dictator” is used by the speaker to enumerate the negative image and attributes of the other (Bashar al-Assad) and to emphasize the extent of his threat. To polarize the attention of his audience and evoke their feelings, the speaker utilizes the pronoun “we” (the American Government), allocated with the pronoun ‘them’ which denotes France and the United Kingdom. Syntactic features, such as pronouns, according to van Dijk (1998: 203) “are perhaps the best known grammatical category of the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power, and hence underlying ideologies”. Using the mental verb ‘thank’ (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 281) in “ We thank them both...”, to link the two pronouns ‘we’ and ‘them’ uncovers the strong ties between the three given states. In addition, it reveals that the three given social and political institutions (the American, British, and French governments) share the same ideology in regard to the Syrian political system. Beside the United States, Britain and France, as viewed by Okawa (2013), have been the strongest opponents to the idea that Bashar al-Assad should play a role in the ruling of Syria.

In the above excerpt, Trump utilizes the discursive strategy of ‘theoretical rationalization’ employing the form of ‘explanation’ when he attempts to produce an explanation to the question ‘why has the American government resorted to military action against Syria?’, as it is stated in “ Tonight I want to speak with you..... action”.

That “ One year ago..... force” is an indication that the speaker goes to shift the strategy of ‘theoretical rationalization’ to use the strategy of ‘mythopoesis’ to legitimize the American military action against Syria. Using the time phrase “one year ago” helps the speaker to produce his ideas in the form of narration to capture the attention of his listeners. Meanwhile, the discursive strategy of evaluation is employed by the speaker when values are incorporated

in his account through the use of the adjective ‘savage’ to delegitimize the social action of Bashar al-Assad which is the launching of chemical attack against the Syrians as it is claimed by Trump. By using this ‘adjective’, Trump tries to emphasize the negative attributes of Bashar al-Assad (the other) and to emphasize the positive characteristics of the United States (the self) as a custodian of the Syrian people and the whole people over the world.

The semiotic elements in excerpt 1 (by Obama) and those used in excerpt 2 (by Trump) are used to develop a discourse on Bashar al-Assad (the head of the political system of Syria). In both excerpts, al-Assad is described as being a dictator committing repressive and brutal acts against his people. The noun phrase “repressive regime”, which denotes the Syrian political system, is used in excerpt 1 and the noun “dictator”, which refers to Bashar al-Assad, is used in excerpt 2. It can be recognized that the two excerpts are intertextualized in regard to the figure of Bashar al-Assad. The basic theme in Obama’s language is picked up by Trump that Bashar al-Assad has developed as a dictator who has committed atrocities against his people. The discourse on the figure of Bashar al-Assad as tyrant and dictator has been recontextualized by Trump, in excerpt 2, towards the semiotic construction of military action against the infrastructures of Syrian Army which is the Syrian Air Force. That “But I have resisted calls for military action”, in excerpt 1, indicates that Obama is against the strategy of taking a military action; it is strategy that is advocated by Trump, in excerpt 2, when he says “The United States responded with 58 missile strikes... Force”. It is worth noting that Trump has employed ‘mythopoesis’ and ‘evaluation’ as a discursive device to back up the legitimation of social action (the military action against Syria).

Emphasizing his power and influence, as President of the US, Trump uses the verb “ordered” in “ I ordered the United States

Armed Forces.....Bashar al-Assad” to impress the public by showing them that he is a man of action who can make the right decision on the right moment. A point that he endeavors to communicate to the general public that he is different from his predecessor with respect to the foreign policy, namely that which concerns the Syrian crisis.

Excerpt 3

The situation profoundly changed, on August 21st, when Assad’s government gassed to death over a thousand people, including hundreds of **children**. The image from this massacre are sickening: men, women, children, lying in rows, killed by poison gas. A father clutching his dead children, imploring them to get up and walk. On that terrible night, the world saw **gruesome** detail the terrible nature of chemical weapons, and why the overwhelming majority of humanity has declared them off-limits.. a crime against humanity, and a violation of the laws of war

(Obama, September, 10, 2013).

In the above excerpt, Obama seeks to delegitimize the social actions of Bashar al-Assad through the discursive strategy of ‘mythopoesis’. By means of this strategy, he tries to evoke the emotions of his listeners by the employment of their senses; he wants them to see, hear, and feel what he talks about. To encourage the members of his audience to feel about the victims of the social acts of his adversary, Obama has negatively produced the image of the other (Bashar al-Assad) via multiple and interlocking reflections of emotional codes. Thus, he produces images about the claimed massacre Bashar al-Assad has committed against his people when he used a poison gas against them. That “ The image from this massacre..... killed by poison gas”, and “ A father clutching his dead childrenwalk” are moving images utilized by

Obama for the purpose of constructing the adversary (Bashar al-Assad) in his discourse.

Excerpt 4

This was not always the case. In World War 1, America GIs were among the many thousands killed by deadly gas in the trenches of Europe. In World War 2, the Nazis used gas to inflict the horror of the holocaust. **Because these weapons can kill on a mass scale, with no distinction between soldier and infant, the civilized world has spent a century working to ban them.** And in 1997, the United State Senate overwhelmingly approved an **internationally agreement** prohibiting the use of chemical weapons, now joined by 189 governments that represent 98 percent of humanity

(Obama, September, 10, 2013).

Attempting to plant his ideas and thoughts into the brains of his recipients, and to evoke their emotions, Obama produces a narrative, “This was not..... holocaust”, that is relatable and memorable to the incident of the chemical weapons attack committed against the Syrians by their government as it is alleged by the speaker. The discursive strategy of moral evaluation, via the subcategory of analogies, is nested with the given narrative since Obama makes an implicit analogy between the Nazis, who used chemical weapons during the World War 2, and the Syrian government which, as claimed by the speaker, has used the same weapon on its own people in 2013. By means of this analogy, the speaker seeks to delegitimize the social acts of Bashar al-Assad who is, in the eyes of the speaker, absorbed in a cycle of violence that is quite similar to that of Adolf Hitler. Farley and Roberston (2017) states that chemical weapons were manufactured and stockpiled by the Nazis who, with the tactic of using chemical weapons, could kill millions of Jews in concentration camps during the Holocaust.

Upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons, Obama employs the discursive strategy of theoretical rationalization to legitimize the stance of the US towards the political system of Bashar al-Assad who is accused by the American authorities of using chemical weapons on his own people. Based on the truth that chemical weapons “can kill a mass scale”, Obama builds up the effect or outcome that “the civilized world has spent a century working to ban them”. Thus, by giving the explanation “Because these weapons.....infant”, Obama pursues to delegitimize the use of chemical weapons .

To stress his opposing attitude to the tactic of using chemical weapons, Obama employs various discursive strategies of legitimation. The strategy of role model authorization is used as he refers to the “civilized world” as global and leading institutional authority. The strategy of impersonal authority is also utilized since he implicitly makes a reference to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), as it is stated in “And in 1997, the United State Senate overwhelmingly approved an internationally agreement Humanity”. Thakur and Haru (2006: 123) state that the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was signed by America and the western countries, in 1997, to outlaw the production, stockpiling, and transferring of chemical weapons. What is significant in this regard is that Obama utilized simultaneously the discursive strategy of role model authorization by referring to the “civilized world” and impersonal authorization, by referring implicitly to the CWC, so as to support his view that there is almost a unanimous veto to the use of chemical weapons across the world. By means of the strategy of authorization, he attempts to delegitimize the social act of using chemical weapons which were used earlier by Adolf Hiltler and later by Bashar al-Assad, as he claimed.

Excerpt 5

Last Saturday, the Assad regime again **deployed** chemical weapons to slaughter innocent civilians- this time, in the time of Douma, near the Syrian capital of Damascus. This massacre was significant escalation in a pattern of chemical weapons use by that very **terrible regime**. **The evil and the despicable attack left mothers and fathers, infants and children, thrashing in pain and gasping for air**. These are not the actions of a man; they are crimes of **a monster** instead. Following the horrors of world war 1 a century ago, **civilized nations** joined together to ban chemical warfare. Chemical weapons are uniquely dangerous not only because they inflict **gruesome** suffering, but because even small amounts can unleash widespread devastation

(Trump, April, 13, 2018).

Looking thoroughly into the above excerpt, it can be realized that Trump employs a variety of strategies whereby he can delegitimize the social acts of the other (Bashar al-Assad). The use of the time adverbial “Last Saturday” and the past form of the verb “deployed” at the beginning of the excerpt shows that the speaker attempts to capture the attention of his audience through the use of the discursive strategy of ‘mythopoesis’. By means of this strategy, he seeks to grab the attention of his audience and get them involved in the bad acts of his adversary, that is in the chemical attack Bashar al-Assad committed against his people as it is claimed by the speaker. Concurrently, the discursive strategy of ‘moral evaluation’ is utilized by Trump when he uses the adjective “terrible” to describe the nature of the Syrian political system. To emphasize the bad acts of the other, he uses the adjectives “evil” and “despicable” to point up his moral evaluation about the claimed chemical attack committed by the Syrian political system. In similar fashion, the

word “monster” is used by the speaker to enhance the view of his audience on the bad attributes of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

It is worth mentioning that Trump employs miscellaneous discursive strategies so as to foreground his denunciation of the politics of Bashar al-Assad and henceforth he can delegitimize his post as President of Syria. He employs the discursive strategy of role model authorization when he makes a reference to the “civilized nations” as model and leading nations when he says “Following the horrors of World War 1 a century ago, civilized nations.... warfare”. The civilized nations, as viewed by the speaker, banned the use of chemical weapons as they are mass destruction weapons. Meanwhile, he utilizes the discursive strategy of impersonal authorization, by referring implicitly to the CWC as a law or regulation, so as to back up his claim that Bashar al-Assad has dropped chemical weapons on his people. By means of this strategy, he attempts to legitimize his act of launching missile air strikes against the Syrian Air Force.

To foreground the legitimization of launching missile air strikes, Trump utilizes the discursive strategy of rationalization, the category of effect-oriented instrumentality, since he grounded the social act of launching air strikes on his alleged knowledge that Bashar al-Assad had attacked his people by chemical weapons. What is notable in this respect is that the speaker lays much emphasis on the effect of the use of chemical weapons which is “uniquely dangerous” as they lead to the murdering and slaughtering of a great number of people and a great deal of devastation.

It can be noted that the intertextual features in excerpts 3, 4, and 5 above. From a thematic point of view, the use of chemical weapons in Syria, which is the main theme in excerpt 3 and 4 by Obama, is

appropriately invoked by Trump in excerpt 5. Trump, in excerpt 5, makes an allusion to the CWC (Chemical Weapons Conventions), which was pointed out earlier by Obama in excerpt 4. The reference of both presidents to the CWC indicates that prohibiting the chemical weapons has become a social practice that is upheld and favored by the US general public and the US political agenda. What is coincidental in this respect is that chemical weapons were used in what is known as the US military program of herbicidal warfare in Vietnam from 1961 to 1971 during the Vietnam war. Martinni (2012) expressed that in addition to the devastation caused for the environment, serious health problems were caused for people. Because of Agent Orange, over three millions of people have suffered lethal illnesses such as leukemia, Hodgkin's lymphoma and other various kinds of cancer.

Interrelationship between excerpts 3, 4, and 5 is also conceived through the delicate use of images. It can be recognized that the visual image used by Trump in excerpt 5, "The evil.....gasping for air", and that used by Obama in excerpt 3, "The image from this massacre..... get up and walk" are assembled. Both are used to evoke the feelings and emotions of the audience in regard to the sufferings of the victims (men, women, and children) of the chemical attack committed by Bashar al-Assad as claimed by the two speakers. Visual imagery used by the two speakers, in excerpt 3 and 5, reveals the subtlety and evocative power of generic intertextuality. Part of this generic intertextuality can be noted in the use of the adjective "gruesome" which has already been employed by Obama as it is stated in excerpt 3. Such interrelationship created by intertextuality in the discourse of the two Presidents reveals the shared ideological implications of both Presidents in respect of the Syrian crisis in general and Bashar al-Assad in particular. The shared ideological implications of the two Presidents surrounding

the Syrian crisis have legitimized the derogatory and disparaging language and ideas of the two American Presidents towards the nature of the political System of Syria as well as the character of Bashar al-Assad.

Excerpt 6

If fighting spills beyond Syria's border, these weapons could threaten allies like Turkey, Jordan, and Israel. And a failure to stand against the use of chemical weapons would weaken prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction, and embolden Assad's ally, Iran..... which must decide whether to ignore international law by building a nuclear weapon, or to take a more peaceful path

(Obama, September, 10, 2013).

It can be perceived that Obama, in the above excerpt, attempts to cement the supremacy of the US as the first power of the world. It is perceived that the discursive strategy of rationalization, through the category of goal-oriented instrumentality where goals are implied in discourse, is manipulated by Obama to legitimize the American stance that the use of chemical weapons must be prohibited in Syria. It is noteworthy that the speaker puts forward his justification that not having a firm stance against the use of chemical weapons in Syria is fraught with danger as it would lead to the threatening of the national peace of the American allies which are Turkey, Jordan, and Israel. Moreover, the use of chemical weapons, according to the speaker, would "weaken prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction" and would also "embolden Assad's ally". It is worth noting that the relations of the semiotic elements that produce a text in relation to 'the use of chemical weapons in Syria' have been instantly shifted in the above excerpt to address 'Iran nuclear weapon', . That "Iran..... which must decide whether to ignore international law by building a nuclear weapon, or to take a more

peaceful path” is an attempt, on the part of the speaker, to transfer the discourse from ‘the use of chemical weapons in Syria’ onto the ‘Iranian nuclear weapon’. This recontextualization, which is shown in Obama’s attempt to use the issue of the ‘use of chemical weapons in Syria’ in line with the issue of ‘Iran nuclear weapon’, reflects Obama’s outright attitude toward Iran. By virtue of this recontextualization, he tries to legitimize an action against Iran. Two options have been put for the Iranian government and one option has to be decided on by it, that is it has either to “ignore international law by building a nuclear weapon” or to “take a more peaceful path”. Such order of discourse is a manifestation of the hegemonic power that is exercised by the speaker to assert domination and maintain prominence in social and political life.

Excerpt 7

In 2013, President Putin and **his government** promised the world that they would guarantee the elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons. Assad’s recent attack- and today’s response- are **the direct result of Russia’s failure to keep that promise**

(Trump, April, 13, 2018).

What is worthy of mentioning in the above excerpt is that the outcome of an action is emphasized. It is the failure of Russia to keep the promise which is the “elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons”. It is “the direct result of Russia’s failure to keep that promise” that led Trump to decide launching missile airstrikes against the Syrian Air Force. The discursive strategy of instrumental rationalization, by dint of the subcategory of effect-oriented instrumentality where effect is stressed, is utilized by the speaker to legitimize the social action of American launching air strikes against the Syrian army. It can be realized that the notion of the ‘other’, Bashar al-Assad and his government, is expanded by the

speaker, in the above excerpt, to include the “President Putin and his government”. Macfarquhar and Shadid (2012) state that Russia, since the Syrian crisis in 2011, has backed up the Syrian nationally recognized government. The Russian support to Syria has gone beyond the political aid to include direct military involvement in 2015.

Excerpt 8

No amount of American blood or treasure can produce lasting peace and security in the Middle East. It’s a troubled place. **We will try to make it better**, but it is a troubled place

(Trump, April, 13, 2018).

Through the discursive strategy of theoretical rationalization, by means of the category of explanation which is stated in “No amount of American blood.....place”, Trump tries to legitimize the decline of the presence of the American troops in the Middle East because he thinks that the Middle East is a troubled place. That “We will try to make it better” is an indication of the power the US exercises in the Middle East. Juneau (2014) believes that the American power in the Middle East remains unchanged and it is increasing; such an increase is owing to the support of the U.S. for the strong positions of its traditional partners in the region, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia and to the rise of regional powers, such as Iran, in addition to the return of Russia as a significant player in the Middle East.

What is significant to be realized in the above excerpt is that the concept of positive self- presentation is pointed up especially when he says that “ No amount of American Middle East” . Trump seeks to extend the American power to the world in general and the Middle East in particular. America is shown by him as a keeper of peace and security in the Middle East. It is a point that arouses much controversy by the governments and peoples of the Middle East. Byman (2016) states that the U.S. has shared common interests with its allies in the Middle East. The U.S. Saudi alliance

was cemented against communism for decades. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the shared interests of the given alliance has been shifted to contain Iraq and Iran and then to block the progress in the Iranian nuclear potential.

The discursive strategies of authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis were used by Obama and Trump to (de)legitimize different social actions and realities. The table below shows the frequency of these strategies in the discourse of the two speakers.

Discursive Strategy of Legitimation	Obama's Speech		Trump's Speech	
	Excerpt No.	Frequency	Excerpt No.	Frequency
Authorization	4	1	5	1
Moral Evaluation	4	1	2, 5	2
Rationalization	1, 4, 6,	3	2, 5, 7, 8	4
Mythopoesis	1,3, 4	3	2, 5	2

Table 1: The Frequency of the Discursive strategies of Legitimation

6. Conclusion

The results and discussion above have shown that Trump and Obama utilized a variety of discursive strategies of legitimization. Both speakers used the discursive strategy of impersonal authority when they both referred to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The reference to this regulation is an indication that both speakers share an array of ideologies concerning the social reality of Syria as well as the character of Bashar al-Assad. What is significant in this regard is that the discourse of the two speakers are intertextualized in regard to the reference to the (CWC). However, it can be noticed that Obama referred to the CWC in order to

legitimize his view that the chemical weapons must be banned in Syria, whereas in the case of Trump, it is intended to justify the American airstrikes on the Syrian Air Force.

The discursive strategy of moral evaluation was utilized once by Obama and twice by Trump. By means of this strategy, Obama seeks to strike an analogy between the two social actors: Adolf Hitler and Bashar al-Assad as they both used chemical weapons as he claimed. Making such an analogy helps him legitimize his view that the use of chemical weapons is a violation of moral and ethical norms. The discursive strategy of moral evaluation was utilized by Trump to point up his moral evaluation about the use of chemical weapons and to enumerate the negative attributes of the other (Bashar al-Assad).

It is worth noting that the discursive strategy of rationalization is the most frequent of the discursive strategies of legitimation in the discourse of the two speakers. It was utilized thrice by Obama and four times by Trump. It was utilized by Obama to justify why America had to avoid any military involvement in Syria, whereas it was used by Trump to legitimize the American airstrikes on a Syrian airbase from which the chemical attack was launched as it was claimed by the American officials. The use of this strategy by the two speakers reveals that the two speakers have different political agendas with regard to the use of the chemical weapons in Syria. Trump endeavored to show himself as an uncompromising and stringent American President, namely in what concerns the Syrian crisis.

To make their ideas more illustrative, memorable, and captivating to the listeners, the two Presidents employ the discursive strategy of mythopoesis which appeared to be productive in their discourse alike. The discursive strategy of narrative was employed by Obama

to make the tactic of using chemical weapons in Syria relatable to the Holocaust committed by the Nazis on the Jews in Europe during World War 2. Trump, on the other hand, utilized the strategy of mythopoesis to draw the attention of his audience towards the social acts of his adversary (Bashar al-Assad). It is worth noting that the discursive strategy of mythopoesis was employed by the two Presidents to emphasize the positive attributes of the self (the U.S) as sponsors of global peace and security, and to emphasize the negative attributes of the other (Bashar al-Assad) who is accused, by the U.S., of using chemical weapons against his own people. The two speakers, via this strategy, sought to legitimize their acts as anti-dictatorial and anti-tyrannical social agents.

It is worth noting that the semiotic elements of the discourse of the two Presidents echoed the American desires for global hegemony (Babones, 2015) on the other in general and on Syria in particular. The American hegemony over Syria can be noticed in “America has worked with allies to shape a political settlement” (see excerpt 1) and in “I ordered the United States Armed Forces to launch precision strikes of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad” (see excerpt 2). The American hegemony over Syria stems from the position of America as dominant, economic, political, and technological superpower of the world which has the right to topple political systems and establish new ones that are in line with the American politics and American agendas. Thus, the power of the two speakers as Presidents of the U.S. would normally and unwittingly resound in their discourse. In a nutshell, the four discursive strategies of legitimation were supportive and helpful in bringing forth the social practice of hegemony in the discourse of the two American Presidents. In more specific terms, the semiotic elements of the discourse of the two Presidents demonstrated that

there is an interconnection between the social acts of legitimation and the social practice of hegemony.

The discourse of the two speakers showed recontextualization; the discourse on the figure of Bashar al-Assad as dictator and tyrant has been recontextualized by Trump in excerpt 2 towards the semiotic construction of military action against Syria. This recontextualization reveals the negative attitude of the speaker towards Bashar al-Assad. In excerpt 6, the discourse was transferred from the use of chemical weapons in Syria onto the Iranian nuclear program. Such recontextualization can be realized as a reflection of Obama's outright attitude towards Iran. It is a revelation of the dramatic reversal; a disagreement between the speaker and Iran.

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