

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2020.054.011](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2020.054.011)

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A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENTIAL' DISCOURSES CONCERNING THE COVID-19 CONTEXT: AUTHENTICITY AND EMOTIONAL TONE

Abstract:

This study aims to examine authentic discourses of eight country leaders, in two different periods of the COVID-19 context, in order to analyze how their authenticity traits and emotional tone might have changed between February and April of 2020 and according to the updated pandemic numbers of each country. Countries and their leaders were selected based on the West and East representation of the North Hemisphere and with no ethnicity concepts attached. The Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC 2015, v. 1.6.0. 2019) instrument was administered to establish the segmentation and codification of 16 international discourses. The texts were coded considering the linguistic dimensions and psychological categories. After the dataset of 39 073 words concluded, the correlation was computed to link linguistic samples with low/high emotional properties (and taking into account the linguistic style of the Presidents). For this specific paper, the data focused the emotional tone and the perceptual processes. The word count will not be addressed attending to the lexicon frequency, the grammar organization and syntax properties of the eight languages. The samples revealed psycholinguistic controversy registered in the two sessions of presidential discourses. Results for authenticity have shown that the Presidents from US, UK and France were more authentic, contrary to Russian and Chinese leaders' discourses. The emotional tone was negative (above $< .50$) for the discourses of Spain and Russian Presidents, by comparing to their peers. Additionally, we had concluded higher levels of perception in the discourses of the leaders of Germany and Spain, against the lowest levels of China but also observed in the Russian President' discourse (more prominent in the period 1, first phase of COVID-19) and in the US (both periods of discourse). The discourse analysis by using automated methodologies such as LIWC, enhances the correct comprehension and detects the locus of misinformation about the COVID-19 measures and phases. That misinformation, when observed, refers to likely mixed messaging used by individuals to prevent the collapse of their government respecting the impact of their discourses on the public opinion. We will discuss the data obtained concerning the results for different emotional response of the eight leaders and controlling for variables such as the culture and socioeconomic background of the country of origin.

Keywords:

Psycholinguistics; COVID-19; Discourse Analysis; International Leaders; LIWC.

JEL Classification: F29, C55, D63