Identity Representation Strategies Used by English and EL2 Political Actors and Researchers

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Abstract

Previous literature on the study of identity representation in political discourse has been mainly concerned with the spoken discourse and the representation of self. However, the way different groups of political agents represent others' identities across languages has not attracted much attention. Using Wodak's (2007) Discourse Historical approach to CDA, the present study investigates the way EL2 and English speaking political actors and researchers in the context of Iran and the U.S represent others' identities in their political discourse. Through purposive sampling, 28 English political speeches and columns produced by native and non-native (Persian) speakers of English were selected for analysis. The results of CDA, as well as Chi-square tests of statistical significance, indicated there were differences in the quality and quantity of the strategies employed by the two groups of political agents across language groups. EL2 speakers of English used more implicit, covert, anonymous and less transparent as well as more distant representation strategies than English agents who tended to use more explicit, direct and involved strategies. Implications were drawn for ESP material development at an advanced level.

Keywords: Nomination, Perspectivation, Political Actor, Political Researcher, Discourse Historical Approach

1. Introduction

Among recent studies on identity, an area that has gained greater prominence has been the study of identity construction by politicians in media and political discourse. The preeminence of such studies is mainly associated with the fact that politicians because of the diversity of the goals they pursue (personal. ideological, social, etc.) enact a multitude of identities, at times within the same context and in interaction with the same participant. Such multiplicity in the reflection of self or representation of others, while not unrelated to the immediate context (e.g., audience, topic, place, time, …) in which the politician is operating, may have explanations beyond the specific context a person is discursively involved. It may be related to a person's perception of self with regard to the degree of authority he can assume in the hierarchical set of power relations. In this regard, some scholars have explicitly or implicitly adhered to the view that identity representation in various discourse domains is always associated with relations of power; i.e. the fact that it always follows and represents the hierarchical structure or the superordinate-subordinate relationships existing in a society (Duncan, 2003; Fairclough, 1989; Gurevitch, Benett, Curran & Wollacott, 1990; Ivanic, 1989; Owens, 1992). This study aims to investigate how English speaking and Persian speaking political agents possessing different degrees of authority; i.e., political actors/politicians and researchers, represent others' identities in their English political discourse.

2. Review of Related Literature

An area of identity study that has seen a widespread interest during the last two decades is political discourse. A large array of such studies (e.g., Arkhetti, 2014, Bayram, 2010; Bwenge, 2009; Ilie, 2010; Jensen, 2008; Lauerbach, 2006; Qaiwer, 2016; Skenderi, 2014; Zhong, 2014), however, have focused on the

spoken discourse on the one hand, and self-representation of the political actors, on the other. However, there have also been studies that have investigated how discourse producers represented other social actors/participants (e.g., Augoustinos and Riggs, 2007; Gleibs, Hendrick & Kurz, 2017; Gu, 2018; Pyykkos, 2003; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Sikankku, 2013; Tekin, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2008; Zhou, 2003).

Among the most recent of these studies, Sikanku (2013), for example, investigated how Barack Hussein Obama discursively constructed his African identity during his first campaign for the presidency and how journalists in some select newspapers (re)presented his narrative. Using framing analysis, he explored Obama's representation of his identity in his speeches and books and analyzed how his Africaner identity was refracted in the media framing used in the discourse of journalists of some leading newspapers from six different countries. The results indicated that how Obama represented his Africaner identity was not different from how media did so, emphasizing the fundamental role of journalists in representing others and Obama's success in the election campaign.

Gleibs, Hendrick, and Kurz (2017) studied how American presidential candidates' spouses represented the identity of their husbands as would-be leaders in their election campaign speeches. The authors showed how the shared conception of Americanism is mingled with the presidential election candidates' personal identities (i.e., attributes, qualities) in defining the notion of leadership. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), they analyzed the discursive strategies used by these identity mediators (spouses) to position their husbands/would-be leaders as prototypical Americans on the one hand and possessing acceptable personal qualities, on the other. They arrived at the conclusion that the concept of 'leadership' in social identity theories should move beyond a limited dyadic process between leaders and followers. It should

also consider the role of third parties or mediators falling between the concepts of leaders and followers.

Gu (2018), using critical manual CDA, studied journalists' representation of the Chinese government through the mediation of government-affiliated 'interpreters' and foreign 'reporters.' He studied how the two groups of journalists (interpreters and foreign reporters) represented the face/image of the Chinese government. The results manifested three discursive means through which interpreters (re)constructed a favorable face/image for the government that stood in contrast to foreign reporters' attempt to challenge its positive face. These included: "(1) interpreters' increased reproduction of institutional self-referential items, (2) interpreters' enhancement and foregrounding of the positive elements in journalistic questions, and (3) interpreters' softening and downplaying of the negative elements in journalists' questions" (P. 18).

One of the most systematic studies of representation was carried out by Reisigl and Wodak (2001). They investigated the racist and discriminatory discourse in spoken and written political discourse to explore the discourse strategies used by social actors to represent participants. Using discourse-historical approach, they focused on five major linguistic or rhetorical means involved in positive self and negative other representations: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation and mitigation/intensification, each with minor sub-categories. Nomination, how we refer to others, and predication, how we positively or negatively qualify participants, are related to aspects of inclusion/exclusion of social participants. Perspectivation, the perspective one adopts in communicating about others, and mitigation/intensification, concerned with the linguistic devices used to increase or tone down the force of the utterances, are associated with

'involvement/detachment' aspects of representation. Finally, argumentation deals with the devices used to legitimize whatever is said about others.

Nevertheless, how different political agents with different language backgrounds and different degrees of power differ in their representation of others did not attract much attention. The present study aims at investigating the discourse strategies used for representing others by two groups of political agents, holding different degrees of power: political actors and researchers in the contexts of the U.S. and Iran. A study of the English discourse of these two politically (actors and researchers) and culturally (English and Persian) different groups may reflect meaningful patterns of relationships in the strategies they employ for (re)constructing identities.

3. Method

This section provides a description of the corpus of the study, the framework for textual analysis of the data as well as the instrumentation used, including data extraction procedures and precautions taken to improve the validity and reliability of the research.

3.1. Corpus of the Study

The data for the present study came from the speeches and columns of the well-known politicians and columnists of the U.S. as well as the English speeches and columns of well-known politicians and columnists in Iran. Through purposive sampling, a total number of 28 speeches and columns produced by native and non-native English language political actors and researchers were selected. These included four English and five non-native speeches produced by the U.S. and Iranian politicians as well as nine English and ten non-native columns produced by the U.S. and Iranian columnists. In

the case of non-native columns translated from Persian, the validity of the translation techniques was confirmed by two of the authors (section 3.3.2.). A description of the topics, dates, number of words and sentences of the texts appeared in the appendix. The data spanned the period from 2009 to 2017. The total number of sentences for English and non-native speeches was adjusted to include 273 sentences each and the total number of English and non-native columns were adjusted to include 342 sentences each.

3.2. Framework for Data Analysis

The framework for textual analysis of the data was Wodak's Discourse-historical approach, a version of CDA. This study investigated the quality and quantity of the nomination and perspectivation strategies used in the English and non-native 2nd language speakers of English (hence EL2) discourse.

Following Reisgl and Wodak (2001), we define a discourse strategy as "a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim" (p.73). The sentence was taken as the unit of analysis. Based on Wodak and her colleagues' framework (Reisgl & Wodak, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2008; Wodak, 2007; Wodak, Cillia, Rudolf, Reisigl, Liebhart & Martin, 2009), nomination includes three sub-categories including personalization, membership categorization and suppression (each including several sub-categories). Perspectivation is linguistically realized through narration, description, reporting, and quotation, requiring different levels of involvement by discourse producers.

3.3. Instrumentation

3.3.1. Data Extraction Procedure

To extract the quantity and quality of the nomination strategy, several steps were followed. First, the semantic content of the elements chosen for reference to others was examined. Based on the entity they referred to and their linguistic realizations, we could identify three major categories of direct reference, membership categorization and suppression, each with several subcategories. After obtaining the frequency of all the sub-categories, they were qualitatively examined and compared regarding their specific socio-political context in English and EL2 discourse.

To extract perspectivation, each sentence (T-unit) was examined in terms of the perspective from which the message was sent across. Based on their level of involvement, they could be labeled as complete involvement (first-person perspectivation), involvement (characteristic of descriptive discourse), mediator (characteristic of reporting discourse), and detached (characteristic of quotations). After identifying and counting the type of perspectivation device/s used in English and EL2 discourse, we examined and compared the occurrence of these strategies in relation to the relevant socio-political context for qualitative analysis.

3.3.2. Validity and Reliability

Some procedures were adopted to check for the validity and reliability of the research. To check the validity of the translated EL2 columns, two of the authors examined and compared the original textual data with the translated versions regarding the use of nomination and perspectivation devices. They found almost total agreement between the two versions of the data regarding the strategies under question.

To check for the reliability of the analysis, the interrater reliability was computed using Kappa Measure of Agreement for different sub-categories of nomination and perspectivation. The index for Kappa measures varied from .83 to .97, indicating high levels of agreement for all variables.

To test the statistical significance of the differences found, Chi-square tests of independence were used. The next section will present the results of the qualitative and quantitative findings of the data as well as their statistical significance.

4. Results

4.1. Results of the Qualitative Analyses

4.1.1. Nomination Strategies Used by English and EL2 Agents

Overall, English and EL2 actors and researchers used three sub-categories of nomination: direct reference, membership categorization, and suppression. The most important qualitative findings in the use of different sub-categories of nomination are presented.

The direct reference in the current study was used by both English and EL2 agents for reference to social participants through using their first, last, first and last names, with or without titles, as well as personal pronouns, referring to specific known participants. As for political actors, both groups (English and EL2) used it mostly for referring to people in power (e.g., 'presidents' of the countries), as in:

1) *I know* **_Hillary Clinton_** *will be that president because I have known her for more than 25 years –…*

2) *[Second, while* **_Obama_** *believed that the United States…., Trump claims that America …..in return.]*[1]

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[1] . Sentences enclosed in square brackets [ ] are derived from non-native data.

The most dominant membership categorization device used by English actors was collectivization, but for EL2 actors it was spatialization. Two examples follow:

3) *Maybe that's because they understand that most **people** who come north are simply trying to ……hopelessness.*

4) *[The **U.S.** then must conclude, based on repeated remarks…., that **Iran**'s back has been broken under sanctions, and that ….]*

The first example uses 'people' as a collectivization device. The 2nd uses ' U.S.' and 'Iran' as specialization devices for referring to presidents of the two countries. The other categorization devices used by the two language groups included de-spatilization (e.g., 'Iranian'), politicization (e.g., 'Democrats'), organizationalization (e.g., 'the government'), professionalization (e.g., 'the President') and criminalization (e.g., 'terrorists').

Suppression was used by English and El2 actors for the same purpose. Two forms of suppression were identified: anonymization and backgrounding. Anonymization was realized in the form of vague use of nouns/noun phrases and used for refraining from naming participants, as in:

5) *[**Those** who are pushing Security Council to take punitive measures against the peaceful nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran, continue to hinder ….]*

In this example, the reference of the vague pronoun 'those' in the context in which it occurs is not clearly known. Backgrounding was realized in the form of nominalizations/process nouns which referred to nouns made of processes in order to deliberately background or suppress the actor of action, as in:

6) ***Foreign intervention*** *in the wave of unrests that sweeps our region is unacceptable and would hinder the genuine and inborn ……nations.*

The underline process noun suppresses the doer of the action (i.e., intervention).

The direct reference was used by English researchers for both positive and negative evaluation (criticizing) of social participants, especially those in power. However, in EL2 researchers' discourse, there was almost no sign of criticism by direct reference to participants' names. Some examples follow:

7) *Instead, **Trump** emerged intact and even stronger as he made news on two other fronts…*

8) *"Hopefully, the unanimous court ruling against **President Trump's** immigration ban will restore some of the damage **he** has done to our country's reputation around the world."*

9) *[The fact that **Rouhani** brings to attention one of the potential capacities of constitution…can lead to improving national security.]*

The first two sentences, adopted from the English researchers' discourse, are positive and negative representations of the U.S. president, respectively. The third example, adopted from EL2 researchers' discourse, is a positive representation of Iran's president. Similar to actors, the dominant categorization device used by English researchers, was collectivization, but for EL2 researchers it was spatialization.

Suppression was used by English and EL2 researchers for rather different purposes. English researchers used it both for referring to actions of those in power as well as other people in a less powerful position, as in:

10) *Another **terrorist attack** would put things in perspective, all right, but our survival ultimately depends on our willingness….*

11) *Similarly, the salacious **allegations** he faced yesterday packed a potential to seriously wound …*

12) *They hit back forcefully, with press secretary Sean Spicer calling **publication** of the allegations "disgraceful" and…… .*

The suppressed social actors in the underlined sections are not people in power. The implied participants in 10 are 'terrorists,' in 11, 'those opposing Trump's presidency', in 12, 'democrats or other groups of people.' However, EL2 researchers largely used it for suppressing the names of those participants in power positions, as in:

13) [<u>Supporting</u> *Saudi Arabia will boost the spread of such beliefs.*]

The underlined nominalization, as a backgrounding device, suppresses the U.S. president (Trump). The anonymization sub-category was largely used by EL2 researchers, not by English agents. An example from English follows.

14) *Sometimes our **<u>bumbling bosses</u>** open the door in the first place.*

Both English and EL2 researchers tended to use them to refrain from naming a specific participant/s in high official position/s.

4.1.2. Perspectivation Strategies Used By English and EL2 Agents

Qualitatively, English and EL2 political agents used mainly three levels of perspectivation strategy. The detached sub-category was almost not used by any groups. Below the nature of the use of each sub-category is explained.

Complete involvement, realized through first person (singular or plural) perspective, was mainly used for taking positions with regard to a specific issue. However, EL2 actors largely tended to use the first person plural in contrast to English actors who largely preferred to use the first person singular perspective, as in:

15) *…, **<u>I</u>** will ask Congress to fully offset the costs of increased military spending.*

16) [As **<u>we</u>** *have repeatedly announced, weapons of mass destruction have no place in the Islamic Republic of Iran's defense doctrine …*]

The examples are from English and EL2 speeches, respectively.

The 'involvement' perspectivation (characteristic of a descriptive genre of discourse) can essentially be used for describing participants, events, or actions.

The nature of the use of involvement sub-category shows that EL2 users mostly used it for talking about abstractions as well as membership categorization devices, as in:

17) *[But various grave **challenges** remain unsolved.]*

18) *[**The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran** pursues a strategic approach towards sustainable development.*

The underlined section in the first sentence is an 'abstraction' and in the 2nd is a 'membership categorization' device, i.e., 'organizationalization',.

The mediator and detached were almost not used by English and EL2 actors. These two sub-categories are mainly used for reporting and quoting others, a feature of the 'reporting' genre but not public speeches.

As for researchers, although it seems natural for the writers/researchers to use complete involvement in their personal writings for expressing personal ideas, EL2 agents, unlike English, tended not to use first-person perspectivation. The following is an example from English researchers' discourse.

19) *<u>I</u> am a populist independent, allied not with the two major parties but with the working men and women of America.*

Involvement allows the writer to adopt a lower level of engagement. The writers write about others without directly committing to what is expressed. English researchers used it for talking about and describing specific known participants as in:

20) *<u>Mayor de Blasio</u> made handcuffing cops a priority, and one of his first moves was to end surveillance of radical Muslims.*

In contrast, EL2 researchers largely used it for depicting and describing membership categorization devices and abstractions, as in:

21) *[<u>The U.S. government</u> also makes clear that its own war on terror and ISIL is bogus, and that the ultimate goal …"Joe Biden Plan."]*

22) *[This humanitarian mission has nothing to do with the alleged Iran-Russia*
   designs and …and beyond.]

Example 21 uses 'organizationalization' device of membership categorization and 22 uses abstraction.

The mediator implies a lower level of engagement than involvement. It requires writing indirectly through reporting what others have said. The discourse producer recontextualizes what others have said by remaining distant from what is expressed, as in:

23) *In 2010, Biden said, "Before we arrived in the West Wing, Mr. Boehner's*
   party ran the economy literally into the ground."

In this example, the writer seems merely to be reporting from another social actor, Joe Biden. Both English and El2 researchers used a mediator for reporting others.

Detached is used when the political agent distances herself/himself from what is said by direct quotations from other participants, as well as presenting a source (e.g., news agencies) from which the message has been derived. Neither English nor EL2 researchers used detached sub-category.

4.2. Results of the Quantitative Analyses

Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of sub-categories of nomination and perpectivation strategies.

Table 1. *Comparison of the Frequencies and Percentages of Nomination and Perspectivation Strategies Used by English and EL2 Political Agents*

	Political Agents			
Strategy type	E/Act.	EL2/Act.	E/Res.	EL2/Res.
Nomination: Direct reference	43	3	192	106
	15%	1%	56%	31%
Nomination: Membership categorization	106	126	108	216
	38%	46%	31%	63%
Nomination: Suppression: Anonymization	20	18	21	10
	7%	6%	6%	3%
Nomination: Suppression: Backgrounding	18	26	10	17
	6%	9%	2%	5%
Total Suppression	38	44	31	27
	14%	16%	9%	7%
Perspectivation: Complete involvement	99	58	22	6
	36%	21%	6%	1%
Perspectivation: Involvement	194	224	265	288
	71%	82%	77%	84%
Perspectivation: Mediator	4	0	57	19
	1%	0%	16%	5%
Total sentences	273	273	342	342

Note. Act. = Actors; Res. = Researchers; E = English; EL2 = Non-native speakers of English

As can be observed from Table 1, EL2 and English agents acted differently with regard to the frequency of most of the sub-categories of nomination and perspectivation (main differences are highlighted). Table 2 presents the results of the Chi-square tests for statistically significant sub-categories.

Table 2. *The Results of the Chi-square Analyses of Identity Strategy Sub-categories Used by English and EL2 Agents*

	Statistical Properties				
Variables	*n*	X^2	*P*	*df*	*Phi*
Direct reference	344	15.53	˂.0001	1	.21
Membership categorization	556	8.71	.003	1	.12

Note. An effect size (Phi coefficient) of .10=small; .30=medium and .50=large (Cohen, 1988, cited in Pallant, 2007). The effect size for both statistically significant variables is small.

As can be observed by the *p* values, the differences were significant for only two of the sub-categories, indicating that there is a close association between the language background of the political agents and the nomination strategy they choose for representing others. None of the differences in perspectivation levels, however, were statistically significant.

4. Discussion

Previous studies on EFL may have generally emphasized how learner identities can be differentially constructed in relation to others and across time, space or other contextual factors (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2009; Hall, 2013; Norton, 2010). Based on the findings in the current study, EFL learners' discursive construction/representation of others may vary, not merely by immediate visible factors, but depending on invisible forces of hierarchical power relations within and across cultures. Although it is too unrealistic to draw any hard and fast generalizations based on the differences found, there are some rather sound conclusions one can draw. First, EL2 and English political agents differ in their degree of transparency of representation of others. While EL2 agents tended to use a higher degree of implicit sub-categories of identity strategies (i.e., membership categorization and suppression), English agents preferred to

use a higher degree of explicit sub-categories (i.e., direct reference). Furthermore, EL2 political agents tended to be more distant in their use of perspectivation strategies than their English counterparts. This was mostly apparent by their refraining from taking a first-person perspective.

One explanation for such differences may be found in the lower social positons that the EL2 discourse producers may feel in relation to their imagined addressees. Given that power resources are not distributed equally in different societies, different political groups within a society may, due to societal pressures, face some sort of controversy between what and how they wish to say or represent and what and how they are allowed to say from a specific position.

Another explanation may be related to the pragmatic phenomenon of ritual politeness and saving others' face through losing and sacrificing one's own face, characteristic of Persian speakers. It signifies a desire for humiliation and a strategy to respect for others' social status to maximize communicative effectiveness. This feature of interactional pragmatics referred to as Taarof ('compliments') in Asian culture has been the topic of investigations in many pragmatic studies (including among them Eslami, 2008; Miller, Strong, Vinson & Brugman 2014; Tan & Farashaiyan, 2015).

The final interpretation of this phenomenon is related to Persian agents' underlying tendency to remain impartial and innocent in politically challenging issues, a discourse strategy employed because of the specific situation the social actors are operating. Hence, the speech strategy of 'political correctness' or avoiding utterances and actions that can marginalize and offend certain groups of people (Szilagyi, 2016) may be another justification for the covert discourse strategies used by Persian political agents.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this research suggest some important implications for TEFL/TESOL. First, ESP course designers and material developers may need a deeper understanding and consideration of the underlying differences in the quality and quantity of the nomination and perspectivation choices across different genres to prepare materials accordingly. The higher or lower percentage in the use of some sub-categories of identity representation strategies as against others can cognitively affect how messages are interpreted or how a discourse producer is judged to be. If the discourse strategies are less transparent, the messages may be more difficult to process, or misunderstandings and misinterpretations may occur. Alternatively, the discourse producer may be implied to be covert, indirect, vague and distant

Second, critical language teaching and advanced level language teachers may need a further understanding of how variations in the identity construction/representation strategies of nomination and perspectivation may be a reflection of the degree of assumed agency arising out of the dominant but invisible forces of hierarchical power relations in a society. Therefore, the methodology they employ for presenting materials may be affected by a knowledge of differences in the power distribution.

Finally, advanced EFL learners need to be made aware of the options available in the system of language regarding identity representation strategies and how the balance or imbalance use of these devices in a single genre can reveal meanings regarding their own or other's identity. They need to take practice in producing and understanding materials addressing different interest groups in order to find out how the quality and quantity of the nomination and perspectivation devices used can create unwanted desirable/undesirable impressions on others.

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