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الرئيس الأمريكي أوباما:  
دراسة تداولية

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## Abstract

The current study addresses doublespeak in the political field. It focuses on the language of politicians from pragmatic point of view, how they use doublespeak in their speeches, their intentions behind using it and non-adherence of Grice's cooperative principle and maxims (quality, quantity, relevance, and manner).

The study discusses the origin and use of doublespeak that is extensively employed to mislead people and distort the reality. Focus is given to the context which is essential in eliciting what is covered up by the politicians who manipulate the language to achieve their cunning goals and speak about the unspeakable. The study shows doublespeak as a violation case of Grice's maxims. It analyzes some Obama's speeches as far as doublespeak is concerned and shows how his speech almost violates all Grice's maxims and the purposes behind using doublespeak such as to deform the reality, to make the bad look good and vice versa. He sometimes uses doublespeak in his speeches in an attempt to appear good, embellish his public face, misrepresent the reality, and evade saying the truth.

Key words: doublespeak, context, Grice's maxims, political language



## ملخص البحث

تناولت الدراسة الحالية الازدواجية في المجال السياسي، وقد اقتصرت هذه الدراسة على لغة السياسيين براهماتيا، وكيفية استعمال الازدواجية في خطاباتهم ونواياهم عند استعمالها، وعدم الالتزام بمبدأ التعاون والقواعد(الكم والكيف والعلاقة والصيغة) التي وضعها غرایس.

وقد ناقشت هذه الدراسة أصل الازدواجية واستعمالها التي وظفت بصورة كبيرة من قبل السياسيين؛ لغرض خداع الناس وتشويه الحقائق. ويحظى السياق بأهمية بالغة؛ لدوره في استنباط ما تم إخفاوه من قبل السياسيين الذين يستعملون اللغة لتحقيق غايتهم الماكرة والتحدث حول الموضوعات التي لا يمكن التحدث عنها. وبينت هذه الدراسة الازدواجية كحالة لانتهاك قواعد غرایس. إذ تحلل بعض خطابات الرئيس الأمريكي أوباما واستعماله للازدواجية وتبين كيفية انتهاكه قواعد غرایس والغرض من استعماله لها مثلاً لتشويه الحقيقة لجعل السي يبدو جيداً وبالعكس. كذلك بينت الدراسة ان أوباما أحياناً يستعمل الازدواجية في خطاباته ليظهر بصورة لائقة ويجعل وجهه وتشويه الحقيقة والهروب من قوهـا.



## 1. Doublespeak and Politics

What is really vital in the formation of a world of doublespeak is the ability to lie, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and to evade it; and the ability to utilize lies and select and shape facts eclectically, blocking out those that do not suit an agenda or program (Herman, 1992).

The word “doublespeak” is a new expression based on the two terms newspeak and doublethink in George Orwell’s Novel Nineteen Eighty-Four 1984. The story of the novel is about a totalitarian state in which government agents observe all aspects of citizens’ lives. The three doublespeak mottos of the state are seen on posters everywhere: “(1) War Is Peace, (2) Freedom Is Slavery, and (3) Ignorance Is Strength.” Deforming the language, the people who are in the authority are capable of fooling the others about their activities and evading responsibility and accountability (Lynch, 2006:2). William Lutz (1996b:4), who is the author of The New Doublespeak: Why No One Knows What Anyone’s Saying Anymore, notes:

Doublespeak is language that pretends to communicate but really doesn’t. It is language that makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive or at least tolerable. Doublespeak is language that avoids or shifts responsibility language that is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is language that conceals or prevents thought; rather than extending thought, doublespeak limits it.

Doublespeak is not a matter of subject-verb concord; it is a matter of agreement between words and facts. Basic to doublespeak is disagreement, the disagreement between what is spoken or left unspoken, and what really is. It is the incongruity between the word and the referent between the main function of language-communication and what doublespeak does-deform, distort, deceive, inflate, compass, fog. (Ibid.).



Depending on Lutz's article, D. G. Kehl (1988 cited in Lutz, 1989:67) suggests this definition:

Doublespeak, constituting the linguistic manifestation of doublethink and involving incongruity between word and referent, is language used to confuse or deceive, serving less to express than to impress, less to communicate than to manipulate, and which, by means of elevation, obfuscation, inundation, circumambulation, dissipation, equivocation, and prevarication, violates both language, the purpose of which is to communicate, and people, whose human dignity demands truth, honesty, and a degree of autonomy.

Doublespeak expressions include 'collateral damage' which is utilized to depict the killing of civilians, and 'surgical strikes' and 'pinpoint accuracy', which attempt to give the tone that buildings not people are being bombed. This is the kind of language that turns 'war' into 'violent peace', 'failure' into 'incomplete successes' and 'death' into 'terminal living' (Burridge, 2004:231). Such examples of doublespeak clearly show that doublespeak is not the product of negligent language or unsystematic thinking. In fact, doublespeak is the outcome of obvious thinking. It is language that is accurately planned and formed to seem to communicate when in reality it does not. It is language designed not to lead but mislead, deform reality and corrupt the mind. (Lutz, 1989:9)

Edward P. J. Corbett (1976, cited in Lutz, 1989:4) sees that this method of identifying doublespeak covers the whole art of rhetoric and gives a set of criteria to help distinguish those uses of language that should be forbidden and those that should be encouraged. When this method of analysis is applied to language, Lutz argues, doublespeak will be identified in uses of language which might otherwise be legitimate or which might not even seem at first glance to be doublespeak.



Orwell (1946:7) says “political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible”, adding that “the great enemy of clear language is insincerity.” Being a gap between one’s real and one’s stated aims, one turns as it were unconsciously to extend words and exhausted idioms. For him, all issues are political ones, and “politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia.” The language must suffer due to the fact that the general atmosphere is bad. However, “if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.”

Lutz (1996:152-6) describes a politician as follows:

Politicians live in two worlds: the world of what they believe and the world they want the public to think they believe. In other words, they live in a constant state of cognitive dissonance, using doublespeak to resolve the continuing contradictions between words and actions, using doublespeak to explain and justify their actions, or to say that they did not do what they did, or what they did is not what we think they did. This illustrates how politicians ignore the principle of language and do what they want with and to language. This is the corruption of public language that leads not to a lack of communication but to the breakdown of public discourse and to a distrust of and contempt for those who would corrupt the language for their ends.

Moreover, Mardirosz (2014:168) points out that understanding political language will drive someone to rebuild those notions settled in a political text. This rebuilding is a rational process that recreates the text depending on someone’s knowledge to interpret it well.



For example, ‘friendly fire’ is utilized to refer to attacks on one’s own troops or allied troops instead of the foe. The word ‘friendly’ in the expression which has a mild tone can make one overlook that persons are slain in such incidents. Condoleezza Rice, the 66th United States Secretary of State, made a reference to the fight in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 as ‘birth pangs’ or ‘growing pangs’ of a new Middle East. Persons recruited as soldiers of fortune are usually referred to as ‘contractors’ or ‘security personnel’. When deaths due to struggle in Baghdad lessened to some extent, it was said that ‘Baghdad is calmer now’; ‘the surge is working’. This number of such examples shows how language has served to mask real horrors and ordeals (Govier, 2010:61). Expressions like these help to diminish feelings of responsibility. As pointed out by Burridge (2005:170) “They play down the slaughter of human beings and also create psychological distance between the perpetrators and their actions.”



## 2. Context

Language takes place in a situation, a context, and the context in which language occurs forms the meaning communicated by the language. As researchers have stated “meaning rather being a thing, becomes an event or operation...” Meaning should not be thought as a thing but as the product of a situation in which all the portions interface to form meaning that will change due to the fact that the parts change and the relationships between them change. “Meaning is not static but dynamic, words in one context or semantic environment can take on an entirely different meaning in another.” (Lutz, 1996 :80).

Context plays a crucial part in comprehending what is implicated by the speaker and reveals the actual speaker’s intentions when s/he is ambiguous and indirect for some reasons. Context is one of those concepts which is employed very broadly in the linguistic literature. From a relatively theory-neutral point of view, however, context may generally refer to “any relevant features of dynamic setting or environment in which a linguistic unit is systematically used” (Huang, 2007:13). Likewise, Yule (1996:128) defines context as “the physical environment in which a word is used.” Also, Widdowson (2004:41) points out that context is a dynamic concept that enables the communicators in the communication process to interact, and that makes the linguistic expressions of their interaction intelligible while Crystal (2008:108) sees that “words have meaning only when seen in context.”

Rank 1974 (cited in Lutz, 1989:4) remarks that recognizing doublespeak needs an analysis of language “in context with the whole situation”. Identifying the full context in which the language takes place, he raises the following questions; “who is saying what to whom? Under what conditions? Under what circumstances? With what intent? And with what results?”

Ochs 1979 (cited in Levinson, 1983:23) states: “one must consider the social and psychological world in which the language user



operates at any given time". It includes minimally language users' beliefs and expectations about temporal, spatial, and social settings, prior, ongoing, and future actions (verbal, non-verbal), and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those contributing in the social interaction in hand.

Furthermore, Firth 1957 (cited in Halliday and Hasan, 1989:8) presents four features of context:

- The participants in the situation,
- The action of participants whether verbal or non-verbal actions,
- The surrounding objects and events, and
- The effects of verbal action.



### 3. Maxims of Grice

Grice (1975) offers the cooperative principle and a group of conversational maxims. Verschueren and Ostman (2009:102-3) state that Grice's theory is based on the belief that human beings are inherently "rational and cooperative"; that is, in their interactions with one another, except in specific cases, human's communications will be meant to be informative. That statement is represented in the cooperative principle by Grice (1989:26): "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". To make a long story short, the cooperative principle demands that one should say what s/he has to say, when s/he has to say, and the way s/he has to say it (Fraser, 1990:222).

In addition to the cooperative principle, Grice (1989:26-7) proposes a set of more specific maxims and sub-maxims that speakers are predicted to follow in an interaction:

1. The Maxim of Quantity: Be informative:

A. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the purposes of the exchange).

B. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. The Maxim of Quality: Be truthful:

A. Do not say what you believe to be false.

B. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. The Maxim of Relation (sometimes called 'relevance'): Be relevant.

4. The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous:

A. Avoid obscurity of expression.

B. Avoid ambiguity.

C. Be brief.

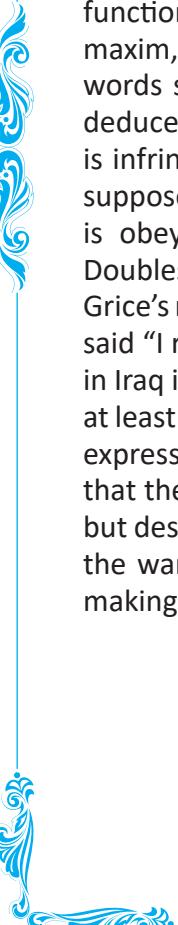
D. Be orderly.



#### 4. Doublespeak as a Case of Flouting Grice's Maxims

Fraser (1990:222) affirms that adherence of the cooperative principle and its maxims is considered reasonable or rational. Grice (1989:30) illustrates that anyone who cares about the aims that are key to conversation (e.g., granting and receiving information, affecting and being affected by others) must be anticipated to have a curiosity, giving apt circumstance, in contribution in talk exchanges that will be profitable solely on the preconception that they are conducted in general accordance with the cooperative principle and the maxims.

When speakers sound not to observe the maxims but assume hearers to appreciate the covert meaning, they are flouting Grice's maxims. Just as with an indirect speech act, the speaker implies a function different from the overt meaning of the form; exploiting a maxim, the speaker predicts that the hearer knows that speaker's words should not be taken at face value and that the hearer can deduce the deep meaning (Cutting, 2002:27). So, though a maxim is infringed at the level of what is said, the hearer is permitted to suppose that maxim, or at least the overall Cooperative Principle, is obeyed at the level of what is implicated (Grice, 1989:33). Doublespeak is the language that deliberately does not observe the Grice's maxims. For example, President George W. Bush in April 2003 said "I reminded them [the soldiers] and their families that the war in Iraq is really about peace..." (CNN, 2013). Here the speaker flouts at least the maxims of quality (be truthful) and manner (obscurity of expression). This is one of the clearest examples of doublespeak in that the speaker depicts the war as peace! War never brings peace but destruction to any country. Bush here misleads the public about the war in Iraq trying to legitimize it there for peaceful ends and making bad sound good.





## 5. Analysis of Obama's Political Speech

The data of analysis are some Obama's speeches that have doublespeak. The analysis is restricted only to five texts that show the use of this deceptive means. The researcher analyzes the speeches from a pragmatic point of view and how the maxims are violated and the intentions behind using this misleading and obscure language as well.

Text (1)

Obama says:

Good evening. Today I authorized two operations in Iraq — targeted airstrikes to protect our American personnel, and a humanitarian effort to help save thousands of Iraqi civilians who are trapped on a mountain[in Erbil, north of Iraq] without food and water and facing almost certain death. Let me explain the actions we're taking and why.... We can act, carefully and responsibly, to prevent a potential act of genocide. That's what we're doing on that mountain. (Chossudovsky, 2017)

On August 8, 2014, Obama decided to start a campaign against Syria and Iraq with no regard to the international law after ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) controlling some areas there. The humanitarian excuse, which is to help the US and Iraqi citizens, is fake; the air strikes are illegitimate, many war criminalities have been perpetrated, and Obama does not guard citizens. But the citizens deaths increased due to the airstrikes that do not stop a mass murder as Obama claimed. The unsaid aim of this campaign is to protect ISIL which is responsible for destroying these two countries. The US airstrikes ruin Iraqi's and Syria's "infrastructure, institutions and economy? (Ibid.)

Uttering the two statements: "... a humanitarian effort to help save thousands of Iraqi civilians..." and "...to prevent a potential act



of genocide...”, Obama flouts the maxims of quality (be truthful) and manner (avoid obscurity of the expression). The speaker plays with words misleading those in the earshot for some purposes. These utterances are doublespeak used to misrepresent the public and legitimize the war on these countries. This is really the sort of language Orwell said; “indefense of the indefensible; language designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable...” (Orwell, 1946:5) making everyone think the action is for “humanitarian” aims to help the people there and evoke the public to support such campaign.

#### Text (2)

Obama says:

Now, after careful deliberation, I have decided that the United States should take military action against Syrian regime targets...our action would be designed to be limited in duration and scope. But I'm confident we can hold the Assad regime accountable for their use of chemical weapons, deter this kind of behavior, and degrade their capacity to carry it out. (Corn, 2013)

After accusing Assad regime of attacking the Syrian citizens by sarin gas, Obama decides to launch an attack on Syria regime to stop the danger of using this weapon against the civilians and the US allies as claimed by him. But is this the real reason to do so? The main cause behind striking Syria is to weaken the strength of the Syrian army and destroy the infrastructure to open the way to the rebels to control some towns and thus the strength is balanced between the two sides; the regime army and the different fighters whether the Free Syrian army or Al.Nasra army or others. Thus, Assad will be forced to give up some of his severe conditions in Geneva Convention (II).

Given the context, the speaker violates the maxims of quality (be truthful), quantity (less information) as well as the maxim of manner (avoid the obscurity of expression) when uttering the utterance “... our action would be designed to be limited in duration and scope...”.



Despite the apparent non-adherence of the maxims, the public will attempt to work out what is implicated by his utterance. The utterance is a doublespeak used to distort the reality and deceive the global public by showing a great care of the people around the world and not allowing lethal weapons against the people. But the US army used different fatal weapons in their war against Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, it is still an attack whether limited or not. How long does it take? To which scope will it extend? These questions are really in need of answers.

### Text (3)

Obama says:

"I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria...I will not pursue an open-ended action like Iraq or Afghanistan."  
(Goodenough, 2016)

The president says no boots on the ground but then his administration announced that 250 more booted US soldiers would be moving to Syrian ground. State Department spokesman John Kirby said, "They are wearing boots, and they are on the ground. But that doesn't mean that they are in large-scale ground combat operations!" (RT., 2017)

Benjamin Friedman, a defense particularist at the libertarian Cato Institute, said the administration could have articulated itself more plainly. Still, he pointed out that the bigger dilemma is that the administration uses language to cover up a contradiction. In fact, they wish for ground forces in Syria and Iraq -- special operations forces are ground forces -- and want credit for not deploying in ground forces. Saying no boots on the ground, Obama apparently states that US fighters aren't there to be shot at. But the truth is the reverse. They are there. So there's dishonesty there, in spite of the lawyerly definitional game they're playing to evade clear lying.  
(Jacobson, 2016)



Giving the context, the speaker flouts Grice's maxims of quality (be truthful) and manner (avoid obscurity of expression) and quantity (less information) as well when saying the utterance "I will not put American boots on the ground in Syria". Yet the speaker still implicates something which is US soldiers are not there for fighting the "rebels" or any elements but doing something else which is training as mentioned above by Kirby. This is a doublespeak that is really intended to obfuscate the reality in an attempt to convince the public that US is not willing to start a new war against Syria as they did in Iraq and Afghanistan.

#### Text (4)

Obama says:

"There is no reason why any American should own assault weapons."

"We are sending assault weapons to rebels in Syria to confront a regime that does not represent them." (Prelutsky, 2015)

These two utterances are totally paradoxical. Obama argues that the Americans are not to have guns due to the repetitive attacks by some US citizens against the innocent in a street or school or college inside the US. But he allows sending weapons to the civilians of another country in which a civil war breaks out between the Syrians themselves. For him, this is a reasonable reason to supply them with weapons to fight Syria official regime, which is not in line with the US but no justification for the US civilians to possess weapons! This is a doublespeak in which two conflicting opinions by the same speaker to make the bad sound good. The speaker intends to deceive the public and deform the reality. According to the context, he is apparently uncooperative flouting the maxims of quality and manner when being self-contradictory.



## Text (5)

Obama says:

“We do not pay ransom. We didn’t here, and we won’t in the future.” (McCarthy, 2016)

The Iranians made a demand for \$400 million to release the American hostages. The U.S. government went to extraordinary lengths to deliver \$400 million to Iran. Therefore, they were released. (Foxnews, 2016 )

Giving the context, the speaker does not observe the maxim of quality (dishonesty) when uttering “we do not pay ransom. We didn’t here, and we won’t in the future.” (McCarthy, 2016). The speaker tries to deny giving a ransom to the Iranian detainees to free the US detainees. But US paid the ransom and this is a big lie. This is the language that Orwell depicts; “words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way” in which someone utilizing them has his own personal definition, but lets those in the earshot think he intends something fairly different. (Orwell, 1946) Who knows? May be the word “ransom” means something else in his own dictionary!This is a doublespeak employed to mislead the public to show the commitment to the law that prevents giving a ransom to kidnapers and avoid its violation.



## 6. Conclusions

- 1- It can be concluded that doublespeak is a language that is really deceptive utilized for some reasons. It is used to distort the reality, to make the bad look good and vice versa. The politicians always doublespeak their speeches in an attempt to appear good, embellish their public face, mislead the reality, evade saying the truth.
- 2- Obama highly uses doublespeak in his speeches and avoids referring to things directly. It is very clear that he is sometimes beating around the bushes and playing with words when dealing with sensitive decisions that have a greater influence on the world.
- 3- It can be found out that doublespeak violates all Grice's maxims (quality, quantity, manner, and relevance).
- 4- Doublespeak is highly dependent on the context that has a vital role in understanding the meanings of doublespeak and knowing the real intentions of the speaker that uses every means to hide his intended words.



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