



ETHNOLINGUISTIC MARKERS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND LEGITIMIZATION IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH TEXTS

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Abstract

This article analyzes how ethnolinguistic markers function as persuasive resources in Uzbek and English political discourse, focusing on identity construction and legitimation. Using a matched corpus of public political texts, it combines corpus-assisted keyword/concordance analysis with segment-level qualitative coding. Ethnolinguistic markers (e.g., people–nation labels, cultural value keywords, historical anchors, phraseology, and metaphors) are mapped to identity functions and interpreted through van Leeuwen’s legitimation categories. The study proposes a replicable coding model and shows how culture-indexing language strengthens “why this must be done” justification in political texts.

Keywords. Ethnolinguistic markers; political discourse; Uzbek; English; identity construction; legitimation; corpus-assisted discourse analysis; van Leeuwen framework; cultural keywords; metaphor

INTRODUCTION

Political communication is not a neutral exchange of information; it is a discursive space where ideologies, identities, and power dynamics are created, contested, and disseminated. Political discourse studies underscores that persuasion frequently operates by rendering political objectives as natural, inevitable, and ethically justified, in other words, legitimate. In this legitimising process, ethnolinguistic choices gain significant influence as they connect political assertions to culturally shared significances—collective memory, values, norms, and what is generally seen as “common sense.” From an ethnolinguistic



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standpoint, language is intrinsically linked to group identity and its enduring preservation: Classic studies of ethnolinguistic vitality underscore that perceived group strength is influenced by factors such as status, demographics, and institutional support. In political discourse, ethnolinguistic markers function as indexical indicators that convey “who we are,” “what we value,” and “where we belong.” These include, but are not limited to, ethnonyms/autonyms (e.g., “the people,” “the nation”), cultural keywords that encapsulate significant values (e.g., homeland, dignity, honour), phraseological units and precedent texts (proverbs, slogans) that distil cultural authority into succinct forms, toponyms and historical references that establish legitimacy in specific contexts, and culturally resonant metaphors (e.g., nation as family/home/path) that contextualise political reality in ideologically significant manners. Legitimation has been conceptualised as discourse that elucidates the rationale behind an action being deemed “right” or “necessary,” often employing strategies such as authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis. Additionally, scholars demonstrate that leaders justify policies through fear appeals, value-based arguments, narrative structuring, and the construction of “the other.” Even though there are more and more studies on comparative political discourse, there aren't many that offer a reproducible ethnolinguistic coding scheme that can be used consistently across languages while still focussing on culture-indexing markers and its two main roles: building identity and legitimising it. This study seeks to discover and analyse ethnolinguistic indicators in Uzbek and English political literature, elucidating how they (1) gain prominence in each corpus, (2) facilitate identity construction, and (3) are employed as techniques of legitimation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political discourse research treats language as a form of political action through which power, ideology, and group relations are reproduced in public communication. In this tradition, political discourse analysis is not only descriptive but explicitly critical: as van Dijk states, “*PDA is both about political discourse, and it is also a critical enterprise.*” [4] This critical orientation is especially relevant for studying identity work, because ideological meanings become persuasive when they are routinized in “common-sense” language. From



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a socio-cognitive perspective, discourse is a main channel through which group beliefs circulate; van Dijk emphasizes that *“Ideologies are largely acquired, spread, and reproduced by text and talk.”*[3] In comparative work (Uzbek vs. English), this implies that identity cues should be studied not only as lexical choices but as patterned discourse resources that stabilize collective self-images (“we”) and political evaluations (“right/necessary”).

Ethnolinguistic scholarship provides the cultural-identity lens needed to capture how political texts index belonging and “shared memory.” In a widely used definition, ethnolinguistic vitality refers to *“a group’s ability to maintain and protect its existence in time as a collective entity with a distinctive identity and language.”*[2] This approach highlights that identity is sustained through culturally anchored language practices, including value-laden keywords, conventional phraseology, and culturally recognizable naming of places, ancestors, and milestones. Cultural semantics strengthens this point by arguing that meaning systems themselves are culture-bearing: Wierzbicka notes that *“the semantic perspective on culture is something that cultural analysis can ill afford to ignore.”*[6] For political discourse, this means that ethnolinguistic markers (e.g., homeland/honor frames, precedent texts, toponyms, kinship/honorific forms) can function as compressed cultural arguments, making political positions feel morally “ours” rather than merely strategic.

A third strand focuses on legitimation—how discourse answers the implicit question of why a policy, actor, or social order should be accepted. Van Leeuwen’s framework is central here, commonly operationalized through recurring justification strategies (e.g., appeals to authority, morality, necessity, narrative). In an applied summary of van Leeuwen’s model, legitimation is described as an element of discourse *“used to answer the question ‘Why?’”* [5]. For ethnolinguistic analysis, the key insight is that legitimation often works *through* culture-indexing language: culturally resonant values can moralize decisions, historical anchors can authorize them, and shared narratives can naturalize them. While political discourse studies have developed strong tools for ideology, metaphor, and legitimation (e.g., political discourse analysis and discourse-historical traditions), comparative ethnolinguistic work still needs more



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replicable coding that tracks (1) culture-indexing markers and (2) their identity + legitimation functions across languages and genres. [1]

METHODS

Data and corpus design. A matched corpus of public political materials was compiled in both Uzbek and English. It consists of an Uzbek subcorpus ([N] texts; [X] words) and an English subcorpus ([N] texts; [X] words) from [YYYY-YYYY]. Texts were chosen from similar genres (such as yearly addresses, official declarations, policy/party programs, and public speeches). Sampling was stratified by genre and year to maintain the two corpora as fair as possible while also reducing genre/platform bias. Only complete, non-duplicate texts were included; minor cleaning (e.g., repeated headers/navigation text) was performed without affecting the wording.

Analytical framework. The research employs four lenses: political discourse analysis (language as political action), ideology-discourse approach (identity boundaries and power), legitimation framework (how texts justify actions/policies), and ethnolinguistic perspective (culture-indexing language as an identity resource).

Coding scheme. Texts were coded by segments (sentences or short paragraphs) along two axes:

A. Marker type (form)

A1 Synonyms/People-Nation Labels (Xalq, Millat; People, Nation)

A2 Cultural Value Keywords (e.g., homeland, dignity/honor; freedom, security—context dependant).

A3 Toponyms and historical anchors (locations, milestones, heritage references)

A4 Phraseology and precedent texts (proverbs, slogans, quotes, and fixed terms).

A5 Kinship/honorific forms (culturally appropriate relational/politeness terminology)

A6: Cultural metaphors (country as family/home, road to the future, rejuvenation)
Function (Identity + Persuasion).

B1 In-group consolidation (inclusive "we," Unity)

B2 Othering/Border Work (We-They contrasts)

B3 Moralisation (Value-based evaluation).



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B4 Mobilisation (Call to action)

B5 Legitimation (Justifying policies and actions)

Segments coded as B5 were further classified according to four van Leeuwen legitimation types: authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis.

Procedure and reliability. First, keyword/keyness (per 10,000 words) and concordances were utilised to identify potential ethnolinguistic elements. Second, segments were manually coded for marker type(s), function(s), and (if appropriate) legitimation category. Reliability was assessed with a second coding run on [15-20%] of the data, using Cohen's κ (or% agreement), and conflicts were handled by modifying coding rules.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

According to Chilton's assertion that "politics is very largely the use of language" (Chilton, 2004, p. 15), segment-level coding of matched Uzbek and English political texts reveals that ethnolinguistic resources cluster in locations where speakers construct a collective subject, evaluate the moral landscape, and justify policy directions. This finding lends support to Chilton's assertion. In both languages, people–nation labels and inclusive “we” are recurrent devices for in-group consolidation, while boundary work is typically realised through contrastive naming and selective historical or place anchoring that positions insiders against implied outsiders; value keywords (homeland, dignity/honor, freedom, security and similar culturally saturated terms) compress evaluation into short, culturally recognisable warrants and often function as the pivot between identity and persuasion. This pattern aligns with van Leeuwen's definition of legitimation, which states that it is "answers to the spoken or unspoken questions 'Why should we do this?' or 'Why should we do this in this way?'" and with his four recurrent strategies of authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis. Legitimation is especially visible in situations where markers are bundled, such as when naming the people or nation, invoking a core value, and attaching the claim to heritage, independence milestones, institutions, or collective memory. This allows for the simultaneous operation of identity construction and political justification. When viewed through the lens of ideology



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and discourse, these recurrent marker–function couplings are significant because, as the phrase goes, "Ideologies are largely acquired, spread, and reproduced by text and talk." This means that culturally indexed choices are a practical route through which group beliefs become publicly shareable and politically actionable. In addition, this lends credence to van Dijk's assertion that political discourse analysis is not merely descriptive. He states, "PDA is both about political discourse, and it is also a critical enterprise." This is due to the fact that the same identity cues that promote cohesion can also normalise exclusion, naturalise authority, and frame inequality as reasonable or necessary. For example, speeches and addresses have a tendency to emphasise metaphor and formulations that are similar to precedents in order to mobilise emotion and unity. On the other hand, policy and program texts more frequently emphasise institutional warrants and necessity framing in order to rationalise decisions. Despite this, both types of writing frequently rely on ethnolinguistic markers in order to make legitimacy appear culturally "obvious" rather than simply argued.

CONCLUSION

This study created to analyse ethnolinguistic markers in Uzbek and English political speech. The findings indicate that ethnolinguistic resources function as structured persuasive mechanisms rather than mere decorative elements: they reinforce in-group identity through people–nation labels, inclusive alignment, and culturally recognisable self-representations; they amplify moral evaluation by activating culture-salient value keywords and conventionalised expressions that convey shared ethical meanings; and they facilitate legitimation by linking political decisions with authority-based warrants, necessity/efficiency reasoning, and historically anchored narratives that portray policies as aligned with collective memory and destiny. Another implication is that similar political functions—such as building unity, marking boundaries, moralising, mobilising, and justifying—can be achieved through different ethnolinguistic repertoires across languages and genres. This helps to explain why similar political messages may seem more "authentic" or "natural" in one context than in another. The primary contribution of the article is a reproducible coding model that associates marker types with identity functions and van Leeuwen-based legitimation



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techniques, facilitating clear cross-linguistic comparison and offering a methodology applicable to many language pairs and political contexts. Subsequent research can enhance and expand these findings by augmenting the corpus, optimising genre balance, incorporating multimodal political communication (visual symbolism, slogans, video performance, gestures), and evaluating audience reception through surveys or experiments to ascertain which ethnolinguistic cues most significantly influence perceived credibility, emotional alignment, and legitimacy.

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