Chapter 8
Mousa–Aboulfotouh the First Arab Presidential Debate in History

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ABSTRACT

This study extends the application of the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse to investigate the nature of the first Arab presidential debate in history. The study also shows how such mediated discourse has been influenced by rhetorical use of the presidential candidates. It is found that the distribution of speech functions represented in attacks, acclaims and defenses has important significances in such kind of discourse. The theory hypothesizes that ‘acclaims’ are more common than attacks or defenses in debates and the analysis confirms such hypothesis. The analysis of this first Arab presidential debate reflects significant rhetorical strategies analysed within the framework of the Theory of Political Campaign Discourse. The findings depict the role of media as an influence on the political situation in Egypt at the climate of political conflict especially when the two candidates have totally different political and ideological backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

How voters assess a presidential candidate is a question sought to be answered especially in countries which are facing changes on the political, social, and economic levels. It is worth nothing that the main target of any political discourse is to convince the electorate that one candidate is worth choosing than the other. It is a well-established fact that the language used by the candidates has a direct influence on the outcome of the elections Benoit (2003) asserts that there is a relationship existing between campaign discourse and election results. So, according to Benoit et al (1998), functional theory assumes that a voter selects the preferable candidate based on salient criteria of the voter. Using this theoretical framework, the current presidential debate is analyzed in adjunct with the pronominal use of the candidates so as to perceive how each one portrait his image and depict the image of the other.

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Presidential campaigns all over the world have been analyzed for trends and shifts in rhetoric using the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (FTPCD). Similarly, this study applies the FTPCD on the first debate that took place in Egypt within the revolutionary period. As proposed by Benoit (2004), the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse predicts that acclaims will be more frequent than attacks, which will be more frequent than defenses. Also, Benoit assumes that policy-related utterances are more frequent than character utterances. This study tests these hypotheses in the context of the presidential debate carried out between the two candidates. The importance of this study lies in what Hart and Childers (2005) states that political campaigns should be analysed not only because they give us insight into the candidates, but also “because they can shed light into the institution of the presidency, the evolving nature of political campaigns” (p. 184).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The 2012 presidential debate is selected for this study for two specific reasons. First, this presidential debate is the first in the Arab modern history. Secondly, and most importantly, the two presidential candidates come from different political schools that have always been known to be of conflicting interests. The different political ideologies of the two nominees can be vividly compared especially after the 25th of January revolution that opened the door for religious parties, to which Aboulfotouh belongs, to step up in the political arena.

Through the use of media, the candidates are seen to have utilized the different mediated forms in their campaigns. Mousa-Aboulfotouh the first and only debate carried out represents a precedence that needs to be focused on especially when it comprises two civil candidates with two opposite political backgrounds, that is the ousted regime and Muslim Brothers (MB). The study utilizes the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse proposed by Benoit seeking to answer the following questions:

1. What functions the candidates frequently use to try to persuade their voters?
2. How do candidates portrait their self-images and depict the image of the other?
3. What is the distribution of functions in the debate?
4. How will candidates emphasize the policy and character of the self and the Other?

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN EGYPT

The history of the Egyptian politics may take us back thousands of years. The length of this study remains an obstacle for getting in depth with its presentation. A vast number of scholars are concerned with such topic from prehistory until the near present (Doran, 1999; Fahmy, 2002; Thompson, 2008).

In the twentieth century, namely in 1952, the first president of Egypt Mohamed Naguib and his fellows of the Revolutionary Command Council came in power after the end of a long monarchy. Those Liberal officers, as they called themselves, took control of the Egyptian state. Since then, and until year 2011, Presidents of military background ruled and it is only the death of the president is the path to the change of presidency. Gamal Abdel Naser is followed by Mohamed Anwar El Sadat, who was assassinated in 1981.
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