

The Elephant Will Kick the Donkey: An Attitudinal Analysis of Online Comments on the GOP Letter to the Iranian Supreme Leader

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Abstract

With the growth in sociality and interaction around touching national and international topics, news sites are increasingly becoming places for communities to discuss and address issues spurred by news articles. Proponents of cyberspace promise that online discourse will increase political participation and pave the road for a democratic utopia (Papacharissi, 2004). Comment writers, according to Nagar (2011), essentially represent a well informed community that is highly involved in the political process (p.23). On March 9, 2015 Republican Senators (GOP) wrote a letter to the leaders of Iran telling them that they would not honor the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) after Obama leaves office. This study explored the on-line comments put by Americans dealing with the GOP letter to provide space for that sort of public attitude. This attitude was analyzed through two different perspectives; on one side, it focused on the ways in which participants utilized the markers of Appraisal to interact directly with on-line readers and express their attitude towards the GOP letter. On the other side, the attitude toward the letter was coded as either "agree" for comments showing support; "disagree" for comments showing disagreement with the letter in terms of denouncing it or condemning it; or "neither agree nor disagree" for comments neither rejected nor supported the GOP letter.

Keywords: Appraisal, Attitudinal Analysis, Online Comments.

1. Introduction

Although Critical Discourse Analysis as *Dick Ng'ambi (2008)* mentioned has been used to provide social critique (Thompson, 2002; Willig, 1999), assist in developing appropriate social interventions (Willig, 1999), empower people (Panteli, 2003; Willig, 1999), and unravel "how language conspires to legitimate and perpetuate unequal power relations" (Willig, 1999), the potential of CDA for analyzing online artifacts has not been explored.

The appearance of the World Wide Web and its capability for human communication and thus for digital democracy resulted in significant changes in the ways people view and communicate with the world, particularly in the use and perception of news reporting. Online news' potential for instant global access and interactivity with users—among other traits— has made the Internet a possible candidate for the next leading media channel. Today, the news industry is going through a change from paper to digital format in which the Internet has already

outshined newspapers and radio broadcasts as an informant of news consumption with only television still more popular (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosentiel, & Olmstead, 2010).

The role of internet is not confined to information providing; it is a source of interaction and community as well. This way, readers participate in a more active role by providing their comments and opinions. Like newspapers' "letters to the editor" section, comments present readers a reaction space to news stories and different topics. These comments can be in the form of opinions, narratives, additional facts, or any other written response.

Comment sections which originally were reaction sections to different topics and news stories, now developed to social networks in which users debate and discuss issues as well. However it should be mentioned that, although those who engage in public opinion expression may not accurately represent the general population as a whole, "they essentially represent a well informed community that is highly involved in the political process" (Nagar, 2011, p.23).

Commenters today not only respond to the articles, but also to the other commenters and the comments they post, creating a space for social (or to some, antisocial) interaction. A survey of more than 2,000 adults by Princeton Survey Research International published in 2010 showed that although an estimated one-fourth of U.S. Internet users had already participated in comment features on news articles or blogs, 72 percent of news consumers reported that they "follow the news because they enjoy talking to others about what is happening in the world" (Purcell et al., 2010, p. 4).

On March 9, 2015 freshman Republican Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas wrote a letter — co-signed by 46 of his GOP colleagues — to the leaders of Iran. Congressional Republicans who don't like the deal President Obama is trying to negotiate to end Iran's nuclear program are now trying a new tactic: telling Iranians that they won't honor it after Obama leaves office. The letter was written by freshman Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton and co-signed by 46 of his GOP colleagues, including Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

The missive is addressed "to the Leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran" and starts out by explaining how the Constitution works, how Congress ratifies international treaties, and how while the president serves a four-year term, members of the Senate serve six.

"For instance, President Obama will leave office in January 2017, while most of us will remain in office well beyond then — perhaps decades," the letter reads. "What these two constitutional provisions mean is that we will consider any agreement regarding your nuclear-weapons program that is not approved by Congress as nothing more than an executive agreement between President Obama and Ayatollah Khamenei. The next president could revoke such an executive

agreement with the stroke of a pen and future Congresses could modify the terms of the agreement at any time."

Meanwhile some American politicians and even local Americans saw this letter as an unprecedented act for one political party to directly intervene in an international negotiation with the sole goal of embarrassing the president of the United States. The Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a press release that the letter has no legal value and is mostly a propaganda ploy. Many Americans, like their politicians, hurried to broadcast their opinions through online comments.

This study explored the potential for these on-line comment threads to provide spaces for that sort of public attitude. This attitude then was analyzed through two different perspectives; on one side Martin and Rose (2005) model of appraisal analysis guided this study of online comments from the perspective of those attitudinal features in the political comments. Specifically, it focuses on the ways that participants utilize the "appraisal" features to interact directly with other commenters in the forum. On the other side Attitude toward the 47 GOP Senators was coded as either "agree" for comments showing support for any possible justification, rationalization, or excuses for the letter; "disagree" for comments showing disagreement with the letter in terms of denouncing it, condemning it, disapproving of the act, classifying the act as a crime or an act of terrorism, offering sympathy to the Iranians and/or their leaders; or "neither agree nor disagree" if the comment not being able to make up their minds or adopt a viewpoint regarding the 47 GOP Senators' letter.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Theoretical Background: On Appraisal

Appraisal, involvement, and negotiation are the three major discourse semantic resources construing interpersonal meaning (Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal is concerned with evaluation: attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned (Martin & Rose, 2003). Appraisal is a system of interpersonal meanings for negotiating our social relationships by telling our listeners and readers how we feel about things and people.

The appraisal theory suggests that emotions are extracted from our evaluations (appraisals) of events and persons that lead to specific reactions in different people. Hence, our appraisal of a situation might draw on an emotional, or affective, response that is going to be based on that appraisal (Scherer, Shorr & Johnston, 2001). According to Roseman and Smith (2001), there are two basic types of appraisal models. The first is a structural model which concentrates on picking apart the evaluations we make and helps to explain the relation between appraisals and the emotions they elicit. This model involves examination of the appraisal

process as well as examination of how different appraisals influence which emotions are experienced. Structural-based appraisals rely on the idea that our appraisals cultivate the emotional responses. The second is a process-orientated model which concentrates on the actual operation of emotional processes. This model is rooted in the idea that it is important to specify the cognitive principles and operations underlying these appraisal modes.

Appraisal theory provides an analytical tool “to better understand the issues associated with evaluative resources and the negotiation of intersubjective positions and opens a new area of interpersonal meaning” (Liu, 2010, p.133). It “examines evaluative lexis expressing the speaker’s or writer’s opinion on, very broadly, the good/bad parameter” (Liu, 2010, p.133). The overall system of choices used to describe this area of meaning potential is called appraisal (Liu, 2010). The whole point about evaluative devices is that they are a way of enriching a narrative, of grabbing and holding attention (Chen, 2004). By analyzing the use of appraisal elements -in a cross-cultural study- we can learn much about the cultural context within which a linguistic exchange takes place. Such elements help, in a sense, to fix the immediate linguistic exchange within a much richer and deeper cultural context. They also reveal a great deal about the relationship between speaker or writer and listener or reader, and about their expectations and perceptions of each other. Appraisal elements are usually adopted by speakers and writers to persuade their audience (Bednarek, 2006). Appraisal is made of three interacting domains: attitude, engagement, and graduation (Martin & Rose, 2003).

Attitude is also realized into three subtypes: affect, judgment, and appreciation. By affect (emotion) the speakers/writers indicate how they are emotionally willing to approve of the person, thing, happening, or state of affair. Judgment (ethics) is when the writers/speakers make assessments of human behavior, and appreciation (aesthetics) is shown by assessing the form, appearance, composition, impact, and significance of individuals, natural objects, and artifacts (White, 2001). People express their affect in two general ways (positive or negative) and each of them can be direct or implied. On the other hand, judgment, in addition to the above-mentioned aspects for feeling, can also be personal judgment of admiration or criticism and moral judgment of praise and condemnation.

One distinctive feature of attitude markers is that they are gradable. This means that we can say how strongly we feel about someone or something. This feature is called graduation. It deals with the strength and weakness of the feelings. Some choices turn the volume up (e.g., *extremely*, *sharply*) and others tone it down (e.g., *fairly*, *somewhat*) (Martin & Rose, 2003). Some scholars suggest that in English there are more resources for turning the volume up than down and that the former are used more frequently (Martin & Rose, 2003). Two kinds of resources of amplifiers are force and focus. The former is for turning the volume up and down.

This includes words that intensify meanings, such as *very*, *really*, and *extremely*, and vocabulary items that have a degree of intensity such as *happy* and *ecstatic*. The latter involves sharpening or softening categories of people and things, using words such as *about/exactly* or *real/sort of/ kind of*.

The final part of appraisal which is not of concern in this study has to do with the sources of attitude. It is concerned with the doer of the evaluation. In other words, it is concerned with the one who is doing the evaluation. If the source of an attitude is the speaker/writer him/herself, it is called monogloss, and where the source of attitude is other than the writer/speaker, it is defined as heterogloss (Martin & Rose, 2003).

2.2 On on-line Comments

Commenting as a way of social on-line interaction has been the subject of plethora of studies recently. Researchers sometimes studied it as an indicator of popularity for sites or weblogs (Gilad, M., & Natalie G., 2006) or as a medium for racist opinions (Matthew M. Hughey & Jessie Daniels, 2013). Some studies investigated its deliberative properties of social interactions (Suzan R. McMillen 2013) while others scrutinized the functions of comments on socio-political crises. The following is a short summary of the mentioned studies:

Gilad Mishne and Natalie Glance (2006) in a paper presented a large-scale study of weblog comments and their relation to the posts. Using a sizable corpus of comments, they estimated the overall volume of comments in the blogosphere; analyzed the relation between the weblog popularity and commenting patterns in it; and measured the contribution of comment content to various aspects of weblog access.

According to their analysis, comments constitute a substantial part of the blogosphere, accounting for up to 30% of the volume of weblog posts themselves. In terms of the contribution of comment content to current weblog access, they show that usage of comments improves weblog retrieval (in terms of number of results), and is beneficial for ranking weblog posts in new, potentially useful ways. They discussed comments as an indicator of the popularity of weblog posts and weblogs themselves, and found that a wealth of comments in a weblog is a good indication for the significance of the weblog. Finally, they offered a novel way to determine the level of controversy caused by a weblog post by analyzing the type of comments written in response.

Hughey and Daniels (2013) in an article laid out the methodological pitfalls for the systematic investigation of the prevalent pattern of racism in online comments in the public sphere and suggested steps by which scholars may deal with those methodological intricacies. They concluded by pointing to the broader implications of online content moderation. They concluded that nowadays

newspapers as a dying medium try to disallow comments to avoid considerable time, money and energy on racial gate keeping.

McMillen (2013) in an unpublished thesis made an exploratory study into the deliberative properties of social interaction in online comments. The comments analyzed in this study showed three popular themes of social interaction besides being an evidence of formal conversational style: tolerance for hostility, encouraging quality debate, and value of information exchanges.

This study showed that there is also an underlying aspect of public deliberation taking place in comment threads that provides a constructive and appreciated space for discussing current events and communicating with other individuals. In that space users are able to express their views, consider other viewpoints (both agreeing and opposing), ask questions of others, and exchange information with other users.

In a study of the functions of feedback comments on online reports Ajiboye (2013) showed that within comment systems, ideological strategies were employed by readers and these comments both represented individual bias or sentiment and suggested that readers construct other readers' perceptions of news discourse intentionally and discursively. This way comments lead to more comments from other readers and therefore sustain the subject.

This study furthermore suggested that comments and feedbacks are based on the commenters' shared knowledge of the society especially when they tend to mean more than they say. This study noted that in a social crisis commenters linguistic choice is controlled by their emotions.

In a critical discourse analysis of online comments, Bowness (2012) draw the work of Norman Fairclough in analyzing comments responding to three Winnipeg incidents from the summer of 2008. His main research questions were asking about the factors characterizing those discourses, the evident processes of social struggle, and the facts it reveals about power relations and ideology in society. The analysis of 3342 comments demonstrates power dynamics in discursive struggles over the definition of the relationship between racialized group-members and the police. Specifically, a conservative discursive formation was found to have three interrelated 'stages': support for the police, denial of racism and mediating discourses of responsabilization/criminalization. The conclusion considered how a transformative discourse of racialized policing might mitigate prevailing justifications of racial privilege and inequality.

2.3 Political Ideologies in the United States

Political ideologies in the United States vary considerably. Persons in the U.S. generally classify themselves either as adhering to positions along the political spectrum as liberal-progressive, moderate, or conservative. Modern American liberalism aims at the preservation and extension of human, social and civil rights as

well as the government guaranteed provision of positive rights. It combines social progressivism and to some extent, ordoliberalism and is highly similar to European social liberalism. American conservatism commonly refers to a combination of economic liberalism and libertarianism, and to an extent, social conservatism. It aims at protecting the concept of small government, while promoting traditional values on some social issues.

The ideological position a person or party takes may be explained in terms of social and economic policy. The ideological positions a person assumes on social and economic policy issues may differ in their position on the political spectrum. In the U.S., the Democratic Party generally represents liberal ideals, while the Republican Party commonly represents conservative ideals. Smaller parties such as the Libertarian Party play a minor role in American politics. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_ideologies_in_the_United_States)

2.3.1 Military

Republicans prefer increasing military spending and have a more hard line stance against countries like Iran, with a higher tendency to deploy the military option. (http://www.diffen.com/difference/Democrat_vs_Republican).

Republicans believe in a strong national defense. The elephant party knows that defending the USA against its enemies must be a fundamental commitment of the federal government and this requires the best-trained, best-equipped and most effective military in the world. With America as the world's only superpower, Republicans believe that true security comes from the strength of character to act collaboratively, when possible, and alone when necessary. Republicans think in the past years, Democrats have advocated for scaling down the US military and reducing the money spent on military intelligence.

Their formal site announces their national defense policy as follow:

America must not let down her guard. We believe that our national defense system must remain vigilant in confronting the threat of **global terrorism** and nuclear proliferation. We must maintain our strong **missile defense** system for our allies and ourselves. Our military personnel must remain the most equipped, trained and sophisticated soldiers in the world. We support a robust military that defends the freedom of American citizens. And as threats morph from the battlefield to cyberspace, our military must adapt. The Republican Party promotes innovation in the area of cyber security. (<https://gop.com/issue/national-defense/>)

On the other hand, Democrats Prefer lower increases in military spending and are comparatively more reluctant to using military force against countries like Iran, Syria and Libya.

Democrats believe that true security comes from negotiations with foreign nations, even if they harbor or have financial ties to terrorist groups. The Donkey party believes that they must ask other nations for permission before they act to protect their own security.

Their official site announces their policy toward national security as follow:

As the threats facing our country have evolved over the years, so too has our ability to respond to them. Our national security personnel are the most dynamic and well-trained in the world, and we must never forget the solemn duty that they fulfill for our nation. Democrats are committed to ensuring our troops have the training, equipment, and support that they need when they are deployed and the care that they and their families need and deserve when they return home.

Defending America is not just a question of defending our borders. We must continue to support and train our military to meet the challenges of 21st-century threats. That's why President Obama and congressional Democrats have made modernizing our military a top priority while also eliminating outdated programs and unnecessary spending.

Democrats are focused on preventing terrorism across the globe. This means continuing to invest heavily in intelligence and information sharing and promoting those networks among our allies. We will continue to strengthen our ability to keep nuclear and biological weapons out of the hands of terrorists, promote efforts to better ensure border security, and augment defense of our national infrastructure.

We've already made real progress on one of our key long-term national defense objectives: stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and preventing vulnerable nuclear materials from falling into the hands of terrorists.

President Obama has made significant steps to restore America's image around the world by rebuilding strategic alliances with countries that share our values and face common threats. (<http://www.democrats.org/issues/national-security>)

3. Methodology

3.1. Dataset

The data investigated in this study is a set of on-line comments made by Americans about the 47 GOP senators telling Iran they may not honor a nuclear deal signed between Iran and Obama government. From 750 comments 140 main threads were selected. The 140 selected comments were explaining main options while other

sub-threads were presenting a follow up discussion of the main thread. The comments were published on <http://www.npr.org/> on March 9, 2015. There are some reasons why this genre was chosen for this analysis. Mainly, since its main purpose is very obvious, it can be distinguished easily from other genres. However, although it has clear purposes which is to show reactions to and opinions about political decisions it seems to be an unfamiliar context, especially to the novice in the field. Importantly, it has rarely been investigated by appraisal analysis. And finally it is general text that can be easily retrieved from the internet.

3.2. Instrument

In this study, we applied the work on appraisal theory by Martin and Rose (2003) and Martin and White (2005) which provide important theoretical bases for a comprehensive study of evaluative stance. In this system, the semantic resources made for evaluating human behavior ethically (judgment), evaluating and assessing the form, phenomena and appearance (appreciation), and indicating and constructing emotions (affect) were exploited. The main categories of affect, according to Martin and Rose (2003), which we encapsulated, are as follows:

Table 1. *The Main Categories of Affect (Martin & Rose, 2003)*

Categories	Sub-categories	Examples
Happiness/unhappiness	Cheer/affection/misery/antipathy	Laugh, hug, cry, hate
Security/insecurity	Confidence/trust/disquiet/surprise	Declare, trusting, uneasy, surprised
Satisfaction/dissatisfaction	Interest/admiration/ennui/displeasure	Curious, reward, fidget, cross
Inclination/disinclination	Emotions relating to desire	Request, desire

The attitudinal sub-system of judgment encompasses norms about how people should and should not behave. Like affect, this taxonomy has positive and negative dimensions corresponding to positive and negative judgments about behavior.

Table 2. *The System of Judgment (Martin & Rose, 2003)*

Social esteem	Positive (admiration)	Negative (criticize)
Normality: fate, Is s/he special?	Lucky, fortunate, charmed, normal, average, fashionable	Unfortunate, pitiful, odd, dated, retrograde, peculiar,
Capacity: Is s/he capable?	Powerful, insightful, gifted, balanced, robust, clever	Weak, wimpy, slow, stupid, thick, flaky, neurotic
Tenacity: resolve Is s/he	Plucky, brave, heroic, reliable, tireless, dependable	Rash, cowardly, unreliable, undependable, distracted

dependable?		
Social sanction	Positive (praise)	Negative (condemn)
Veracity: truth Is s/he honest?	Truthful, honest, credible, authentic, real, frank	Dishonest, deceitful, glitzy, fake, deceptive, manipulative
Propriety: ethics Is s/he beyond reproach?	Good, moral, ethical, caring, law abiding, fair, just	Bad, immoral, evil, corrupt, unfair, unjust, mean

The appreciation sub-system, like affect and judgment sub-systems, has positive and negative dimensions corresponding to positive and negative evaluation of texts, things, processes and natural phenomena as shown in the following table.

Table 3. *The System of Appreciation (Martin & Rose 2003)*

	Positive	Negative
Reaction: Did it grab me, did I like it?	Arresting, absorbing, striking, lively, beautiful	Dull, boring, dry, ugly, unremarkable, monotonous
Composition: Did it hang together, was it hard to follow?	Balanced, harmonious, unified, simple, rich, detailed	Unbalanced, unfinished, extravagant, puzzling
Valuation: Was it worthwhile?	Challenging, significant, deep, profound, fruitful	Shallow, insignificant, conservative, forgettable

Alongside these three subcategories of attitude, we also employed the graduation category of appraisal system to grade the strength and the weakness of the explicit feelings and attitudinal meanings. This category was employed under the overall sub-categories of force and focus.

3.3. Procedure

The comments were first downloaded from an American official site (<http://www.npr.org/>). They were saved in Rich Text Format (RTF) and the comments were counted. After that the main threads were kept and the sub-threads which were acting as following discussions of the main threads were omitted. The reason for this omission is reduction of complexity and redundancy. Denzin (1999) explained the structure of online conversations on message boards: "One person makes a statement, another person comments, and then another person comments, perhaps on the comments of the second person, and so on" (p. 109). Thus are formed *threads* of online discussion. The discussion might then grow into different directions or threads that might overlap on occasions, posing another problem or opportunity to the researcher trying to analyze a message board. The researcher is then faced with the choice of either following the main (original) thread, ignoring

whatever relevant messages are posted to another thread, or following multiple interrelated threads and dealing with a much more complex sampling procedure. This study presents a content analysis of main threads ignoring the messages posted to other threads.

The data were then analyzed to identify attitudinal meanings and resources used for grading them. To simplify computerized analysis the attitudinal meanings were color-coded in which each category was coded in a different colors. In order to avoid any bias or arbitrariness, a colleague linguist reanalyzed the comments and inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. The slight differences did not affect the result and conformity was achieved. The Cronbach's alpha proved 0.95 of reliability.

Each instance of attitude in the data was coded as affect (of emotion), judgment (of characters and behaviors), or appreciation (of things), and their sub-classifications were explored with reference to Martin and Rose (2003). After presenting a qualitative analysis and identifying preferences of attitudes in the on-line comments made by American commenters, the frequencies of explicit attitudinal meanings and graduation resources were counted to detect any possible direction in the comments made by American comment writers.

4. Results and discussion

According to this analysis, as can be seen in Table 1, judgment had the lion share among other discourse markers.

Attitude	Affect	Judgment	Appreciation
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
	252 (37)	287 (42)	144 (21)

Accordingly, while judgment made 42 percent of the whole appraisal markers, Affect and Appreciation recorded 37 and 21 percent respectively.

4.1 Judgment

In judgment subcategory, capacity with 40 percent was the most used in commenters' discourse, most of which was negative. Table 2 shows Judgment subcategories.

Judgment	normality		capacity		tenacity		veracity		propriety	
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
	33(11.5)	40(13.9)	51(17.7)	64(22.3)	7(2.4)	12(4.2)	2(0.7)	41(14.3)	4(1.4)	33(11.5)

In this part the institutionalization of feeling about peoples' behavior has been reflected through different subcategories. Most of the commenters found that the congressmen were incapable to represent the United States. The following

examples show how commenters used Capacity markers to discuss this point with the readers.

...these people are insane....
immature children and babies....
look impotent and foolish....
blocked by the GOP idiots on the hill.....
 ...these knuckleheads are deliberately sabotaging.....
maybe these congressional idiots out to read.....
 ...senators don't have the right to negotiate treaties.....
 ...they have demonstrated their lack of basic understanding of how our government works...
 ...these freshmen need to go back to school...
 ...they no longer have anything to offer the country....they aren't good for anything....

These examples and much more other examples tried to show that these people are not in whole mind and do not have legal power to interfere with such treaties. On the other hand, positive judgment-capacity-attitude markers tried to show that Iranian Politicians are smart and know about the American constitution more than the congressmen. Beside, through using capacity attitude markers, commenters wanted to show that Iranians knew their congressmen rivals are in short of legal and mental capabilities:

Eg; ...the Irani leadership can recognize stupid...
 ... Iran's response, "“This proves that [the senators] are not only strangers to the norms of international rights and regulations, but they also are not familiar with the intricate details of their own Constitution regarding the authority of the President of the United States " ...
 ... the good Senators started out by bringing them up to speed on how the US government is structured -- as if the educated Iranian diplomatic corps do not already have a handle on that...

All these Judgment capacity markers, which are only some of many, tried to demonstrate Iranians positively and the American congressmen negatively.

The other significant subcategories utilized by commenters are Propriety markers which tended to depict the congressmen's ethics negatively and question the possibility of their being beyond reproach. Veracity markers are another subcategory of Judgment markers used by commenters to question the congressmen's honesty and truthfulness. The following are just some examples:

...Can we bring Snowden home and send these traitors to Moscow?...
 (veracity-)
 ...they are treasonous and unpatriotic... (veracity-)

... and pretend that it is they that are, and will be running this country...(veracity-)

...Romney came off as a warmonger with...(propriety-)

... the party of Sedition...(propriety-)

... they are willing to go to war they are criminal...(propriety-)

...these creatures of opportunity live for personal advancement...(tenacity-)

... Edward Snowden is a hero compared to most of Congress...(tenacity+)

Through proper use of Judgment markers, whether a single word or a group of words, speakers/writers tried to show how congressmen are undependable, evil, deceitful and mean. The commenters even used positive judgment markers to show how enemies and traitors are more dependable than congressmen. To find about the motive for such accusations we may refer to part of the letter signed by the congressmen. In this part they somehow mentioned that they will not support the United States president's actions and decisions. The letter reads...

...we will consider any agreement regarding your nuclear-weapons program...as nothing more than an executive agreement between President Obama and Ayatollah Khamenei. The next president could revoke such an executive agreement with a stroke of pen...

4.2 Affect

Commenters tended to express their feeling through three main branches of Affect. Each of these branches includes four columns two of which cover good feelings and two embrace bad feelings. Table 3 explores good and bad feelings pronounced by commenters.

Affect	Un/happiness				In/security				Dis/satisfaction			
	misery	antipathy	cheer	affection	Disquiet/fear	surprise	confidence	trust	ennui	displeasure	Interest/desire	Admiration
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
	22 (8.7)	82 (32.5)	8 (3.1)	12 (4.7)	12 (4.7)	10 (3.9)	2 (0.8)	13 (5.1)	2 (0.8)	15 (5.9)	45 (17.5)	29 (11.5)

The most significant marker used in this category was Antipathy which scored 32 percent of the Affect category. Almost all comments were in disagreement with the letter and its singers. Since commenters decided that the congressmen are

more enemies than an enemy and more treasonous than a traitor, they tried to pronounce their hatred through ultimate use of antipathy subcategory. The following are some examples...

...if almost half of the Senate were sentenced to three years in prison for...
 ... charges will be filed against these 47 GOP's...
 ... These 47 really need to be put into their place, and that is in prison...
 ...every co-signer should be prosecuted for it...

The second eye-catching subcategory in this group is interest and desire. It needs mentioning that the researcher preferred merging desire and interest in one single column. All desire markers were used both against the 47 co-signers and to

Appreciation	Reaction impact		Reaction quality		Compo balance		Compo complex		Valuation	
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
	5(3.5)	4(2.8)	12(8.3)	18(12.5)	5(3.5)	6(4.2)	10(6.9)	10(6.9)	46(31.9)	30(20.8)

depict their evil wishes. The following are some examples...

... Why do the Republicans think the American public wants another war?
 ... We look forward to selling you weapons in the future to fight...
 ...they are willing to go to war...
 ... and please publish the names of the republicans who signed this...

4.3 Appreciation

Appreciation scored the least among other attitude markers. In fact in this kind of online comments appreciation was mostly evaluation which made more than 70 percent of this category. Table 4 shows Appreciation with its branches.

Commenters presented their opinions in such a way to question the value of the letter. Most of the comments devaluated the signers opinion both politically and legally especially from Iran viewpoint. The following are some plus/minus value comments...

... The letter was a partial solution to the toilet paper shortage in Iran...
 ...Petty politics is more important than world peace ???
 ... the letter "has no legal value...

...Republican voters are so accustomed to lying that they accept crappy Orwellian lies like that one...

In general it seems that in such topics, comments tend to be more judgments especially capacity focused. Affect makes the second preferred attitude

subcategory with antipathy as the main player of this category. Appreciation which was the least utilized category focused more on the value of the phenomena discussed. In general since the people who signed the letter are the most important in this debate the outperformance of Judgment must not be so unexpected.

4.4 Toning up and down

Commenters, in order to persuade readers, tended to use a good amount of graduation markers. Comparing the amount of toning up and toning down markers no significant difference could be found. However an outstanding point to mention is the nature of intonation used in some toning up comments. In this kind of comments, commenters intentionally wrote some words or parts of them in capital letters to tone up those proposals. In these comments instead of using a hedging or boosting adjective before the part to be toned up, the commenters capitalized the same words without any proceeding tone changing word. The following are some examples of this kind...

...Netanyahu arrives in the U.S LEADING in the polls by 10 points at home, and leaves disgraced and LOSING by 3 points. Obama's immigration EO is fully funded because the GOP cannot agree on ANYTHING. Keystone goes down in flames...

...Republicans were wrong about trickle down economics, they were wrong about Wall Street being trusted to police itself, they were wrong about polluters being trusted to police THEMselves...

LADING in the above example stands for – surely leading, undoubtedly leading and etc. And the same for LOSING and ANYTHING. THEMselves in the second example means exactly themselves and nobody else. The reason for such integration instead of using separate toner is the nature of chat-like texting. The chat partner tries to say the most possible using the least space. Capitalization stands for shout out loudly in text form.

Another significant point to state is the commenters use of down-toners to mention right actions, if any, taken by the congressmen and the Republican party and toning up markers to highlight their wrong doings and insane actions. The following are some comments of this type:

...I think the last time they were right was when we fought a war over using slave labor...

... I knew that the Republicans were more interested in playing political games than in seeing a democratic president be successful...

In the first example the commentator hedges about the Republicans being right more than that last time. In the second example the commentator intentionally tended to boost the Republicans selfish nature.

5. Conclusion

Professional speeches made by candidates or politicians always tend to be highly studied and accurately designed to have the deepest possible effect on listeners and readers. According to Jalilifar and Savaedi(2012) winners of the election are aware of the fact that an accurate use of language is a key factor in winning the public opinion; hence, the exploitation of the appropriate linguistic resources became crucial for them. Winning the acquiescence of the masses depended largely on the language they employ. However, for comments the case seems to be different since comments are in fact conversation like announcements which sometimes pronounced by local people offhand. This makes attitudes and feelings more real and at the same time more prominent than any other context.

What is prominent in this type of comments is the evident use of attitudinal markers especially negative capacity judgment subcategory. Graduation markers also did their best to down-grade the antagonist of the whole story. A common procedure noted in this context was grading up attitudes through Capitalizing a whole proposal or part of it.

For affect, local commenters announced their feelings of antipathy clearly and loudly without considering any political or ethical conventions as those taken in to account by politicians, what makes them more natural and alive.

Appreciation seems to be the least applicable category in this kind of context. The reason for this down-usage can be found in the target of the whole story. Maybe if the topic of the comments was the letter itself not its signers, appreciation could make better scores in general. This can help us conclude that the animate or non-animate nature of the target can unscramble the categories in many different ways. However the de-valuation markers used in this category were completely in line with those used in judgment and affect categories. While the earlier categories de-capacitated targets and de-valuated their capabilities, appreciation markers de-valuated the letter written and signed by them.

This study could be done better if a contrastive analysis had been made between comments made by Iranian and American local people. We could also trace the general genre of such context to provide commenters especially novice comment writers with a generally accepted skeleton.

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