Instantaneous Errors and Body Gestures in Some American Political Contexts

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to give a psycholinguistic investigation of some of Trump's smiles, zone distances, handshaking styles, and speech errors. It is carried out under the framework of contextual congruence, which states that what speakers say, and their body movements should be compatible. To create a personal sketch for Trump, 73 short movies and 119 pictures were meticulously scrutinized. 81.4% of images and more than 65.3% of videos indicated phony grins provided to specific people, including Michael Flynn, Mike Pence, and John Kelly. Trump's genuine smile was only noticed when he was with one of his family members, particularly his daughter. With the exception of Nancy Pelosi, the results also suggested that Trump tended to breach his political foes' intimate zones as a form of nonverbal political counterattack. The results also revealed that Trump's recursive handshake style was a double-handed handshake. He employed this method to demonstrate the sincerity of affection toward the recipient. He regularly gave this handshaking approach to various Asian politicians, who felt irritated by it, since Trump used to perform this handshaking in 30 seconds. Donald used all of his body language and facial clues to control not only his adversaries but also his allies and his speech errors reflected the same facts.

Keywords: instantaneous errors, body gestures, political contexts, palm power, zone distance

1. Introduction

Like George Bush, Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, is a highly controversial figure. He received much criticism and flattery in American social media immediately in the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak (Garcia, 2018). Trump received much criticism from his opponents for being unable to put an end to this crisis that has deeply struck the American economy and infirmed the health system. Further, he was exposed to scathing quibble for paving grounds for racism and violence against non-American citizens and for his constant humiliation of third-world countries (Baird, 2019). However, his supporters eulogized him for saving 16 American captives without releasing any of the terrorist leaders or sending huge amounts of money to rogue regimes, as his predecessor has done. He was also praised, Blount (2018) contended, for having manufacturing jobs hastily grow, the most rapidly it has ever in the last 23 years. This led the unemployment rate to go down to the lowest it has ever been in America. He was deeply applauded by his promoters for setting criminal justice reforms and putting an end to opioid abuse and sex trafficking.

Some psychologists, political commentators, and analysts, such as Okonski (2017), Benjamin (2020), Heesacker (2018), and Pettigrew (2017) asserted that Donald Trump attempted to place himself as a legendary American politician who evoked incidents to urge the Americans to support his economic plans even if they are going to sacrifice their values of liberty and democracy. Others such as Bekafigo, Stepanova, Eiler, Noguchi, and Ramsey (2019) contended that Trump has been a manipulative cunning person who attempted to attain his goals under any circumstances. It was quite clear when he gave his approval to the Russian President to assassinate a political dissident using banned chemical weapons.

The contrasted controversial views concerning Trump's ideologies and values stirred the researcher to examine the aspects of his personality from a psycho-linguistic perspective, using Trump's body and facial gesticulations. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

(1). How were Trump's grins psycho-linguistically indicative?

(2) What are the psycho-linguistic messages conveyed by Trump's palm gestures?

(3) What are the psycho-linguistic interpretations of Trump's handshake styles?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Contextual Congruence

Psycholinguistics, one of the branches of applied linguistics, is an interdisciplinary field as it combines psychology and linguistics (Sedivy, 2019; Pinker, 2007; Traxler, 2011). Psycholinguistics is the study of how people produce, understand, and acquire language. Therefore, psycholinguistics involves three main domains: language production (verbal and non-verbal production), language comprehension, and language acquisition (Traxler, 2011; Warren, 2012; Sedivy, 2019). Psycholinguistics investigates (1) how words are stored in the mental lexicon, (2) how meaning is represented in the lexicon, (3) how our minds convert an idea into an utterance, and (4) how children acquire their mother tongue in a very brief span (Menn & Dronkers, 2015; Conklin, 2020; Gilquin & Cock, 2013; Meredith, 2012).

Contextual congruence (Pease & Pease, 2006; Hall, 2019; Moniz, Batista, Mata & Trancoso, 2014) is one of the trending theories in the psycho-linguistic interpretation of body gestures. Congruence means the compatibility between what the interlocutors utter and their body gestures. The thumb, for example, points upward the cheek in the critical evaluation gesture cluster, which is also known as the hand-toward-face gesture, while the middle one covers the lips, and the index supports the chin. The audience is defensive and critical of the speaker, as indicated by this gesture. This nonverbal gesture conveys the message, 'I don't agree with what you're saying'. If this listener is asked to give his opinion and declares that he agrees with you, the listener's non-verbal signals will be in*congruent* with his verbal language. The opposite of congruence is hunch (Ratner, Gleason & Narasimhan, 1998). In addition to focusing on gesture clusters and congruence, all gestures should be considered in the context in which they take place (Warren, 2012).

3. Review of Literature

Hammack (2010) examined some of Barack Obama's political speeches, shedding some light on the errors produced in these speeches and Obama's body gestures. He conducted qualitative research, trying to explain the difference between speech errors and lying in Barack Obama's political speeches. He asserted that sincerity is the real distinction between misspeaking and lying. By sincerity, Hammack meant that speech errors are made when the speakers talk about their beliefs, but lying is detected when they talk about their suppositions. Hammack, therefore, concluded that Obama's speech errors have reflected his sincerity as he has been talking about his beliefs rather than his suppositions. Hammack's conclusions were supported by Obama's recursive use of genuine grins and open palms that indicated openness and sincerity.

Kintisch (2008) investigated the psychological implications of the repeated cues employed by some eminent political American figures, focusing on Hillary and Bill Clinton. Kintisch revealed that *the critical evaluation gesture* is one of Hillary Clinton's repeated body gesticulation. Hillary Clinton frequently used this gesture to suggest that she was not totally persuaded by what she was hearing. Pease and Pease (2004) investigated the recurrent body gestures employed by Bill Clinton before the Grand Jury while being questioned about his out-of-marriage affair with Monica Lewinsky. Clinton has frequently employed the *mouth - covering* gesticulation.

Unlike Kintisch (2008), who concentrated on the repeated body gestures of political figures, Kyrala (2010) believed that the impact of the body gesticulations of American politicians is much more significant than their repeated body gestures. Adopting a quantitative approach, Kyrala investigated the impact of the body gesticulations of Obama and McCain on their voters in the presidential elections. Kyrala found out that the voters negatively perceived John McCain's prompt blinking and Obama's swift head movements. Kyrala anticipated that McCain not Obama would lose the voters' confidence because all the U. S. Presidential candidates who produced swift blinkers in the debates lost the elections.

Hömke and Levinson (2017) contended that the blink rate is an indication of restlessness or deep stress, particularly when it exceeds 60 blinks per minute. They pointed out that the normal blink rate ranges between 35 to 60 blinks per minute; consequently, a blink rate over 60 implies that one is going through a state of discomfort; any blink rate below 36 reveals a sheer comfortable state. Hömke and Levinson, investigating the blinking rate of Obama and McCain in their final presidential elections, concluded that Obama felt more comfortable and less stressed than McCain.

4. Problem Statement and Research Objectives

The controversial aspects of Donald Trump perplexed psychologists, political analysts, and linguists. To delineate the dimensions of Trump's personality, this study attempts to answer the following question: What can a psycho-linguistic investigation of Trump's body gestures reveal about the inner aspects of his personality? To answer this question, the researcher intends to do the following:

1. To define the types of grins produced by Trump in different interactions via analyzing 21 videos and 25 photos in which Trump psycho-linguistically sent many indicative messages.

2. To analyze Trump's palm gestures by investigating 26 videos and 28 photos in which Trump unconsciously revealed different attitudes through his palm gestures.

3. To clarify and set a psychological interpretation of Trump's most frequent handshake style, via analyzing 22 videos and 63 photos.

4. To finally draw a comparatively accurate character sketch for Donald Trump.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

In this study, the researcher used the mixed research design (i.e., qualitative, and quantitative research designs) to approach the research questions and problem raised above. The researcher employed the qualitative design to detect Trump's deceptive messages and to describe his fake smiles and handshake styles. The deceptive messages were investigated by describing the body cues indicating lying, and the fake smiles are studied by observing the body signals revealing the non-authenticity of smiles. As for the quantitative method, it was employed when the researcher began to implement some statistical procedures to define Trump's most recurrent type of handshaking and palm attitudes.

5.2 Data Collection and Procedures

The body language data comprise 68 videos and 116 photos in which Trump was attacking his political opponents (e.g., Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Joe Biden), giving weird handshakes to many political leaders and presidents, making awkward movements, giving statements about coronavirus pandemic, and producing unreasonable actions. Some of the photos and videos psycho-linguistically analyzed have been downloaded from the following websites.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlxmiFF85yU

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yCMy4xpF6U

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7gDXtRS0jo

https://www.shortlist.com/news/most-ridiculous-trump-quotes-ever,

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/03/how-to-talk-trump/550934/

https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/11/the-155-craziest-things-trump-said- this-cycle-214420

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Fake and Genuine Smiles

A genuine smile is characterized by (a) the presence of crow's feet (i.e., wrinkles outside the edge of the eyes), (b) the presence of closed eyes, and (c) the absence of bottom teeth. Thus, the fake smile is marked by (a) the absence of closed eyes (b) the absence of crow's feet (i.e. the wrinkles outside the edge of the eyes), and (c) the appearance of bottom teeth. In a collection of 21 videos and 25 images, 71.4% of the photos and more than 62.3% of the videos showed phony grins delivered to specific people, comprising Michael Flynn, Mike Pence, and John Kelly. Michael Flynn, Mike Pence, John Kelly, Steven Miller, Anthony Scaramucci, and Kellyanne Conway were all seen sporting phony smiles.

Photo [1] below was taken to Vice President Mike Pence and President Trump during the first day of the 2020 Republican National Convention in Charlotte, N.C. It represented one of many photos in which Trump gave fake smiles when being with Pence. Rarely could one get a photo to Trump with Pence with a real genuine smile? It reflected Trump's state of restlessness and discomfort even when being with his favorite supporters. Trump was only seen with a genuine smile when he was with one of his family members, particularly his daughter Ivanka, as shown in the photo [2]. Trump's open eyes and clear bottom teeth were quite apparent in the first photo with Pence, but with Ivanka, he emitted closed eyes and hid his bottom teeth.

| Photo [1] | Photo [2] |

Photo [1]: Mike Pence with Trump during the 2020 Republican National Convention

Photo [2]: Ivanka Trump sitting on the American President's Chair raised eyebrows: CBS News

6.2 Zone Distances before and after Coronavirus Outbreak

Body gestures were interpreted side by side with zone distances. There are four zone distances, which non-verbalists should take into consideration when interpreting body cues: (1) intimate zone, (2) personal zone, (3) social zone, and (4) public zone. Intimate Zone extends from 15 to 45 centimeters. It is by far the most important zone distance, which is used by people who are emotionally close, such

as lovers, parents, spouses, children, close friends, and relatives. Trump was noticed, in more than 26 videos and 28 randomly selected, using his intimate zone with his close friends and family members. The only exception was with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau; in spite of the political and economic problems that have come to the surface between the two countries since Trump assumed power, Trump used to violate Justin's intimate zone [See Photo 3]. The latter seemed happy with such a zone violation, regarding that not as a lack of felicity, but as a way of breaking the ice between the two countries.

Photo [3]   Photo [4]

Photo [3]: Trump's violation of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's intimate zone.

Photo [4]: Trump violating Hilary Clinton's personal zone in 2016 debate.

Personal Zone extends between 46 centimeters and 1.22 meters. Trump used this zone with the persons whom he knew. This zone is generally employed at parties, offices, social functions, and friendly gatherings. Trump repeatedly observed his personal zone with others. The only exception was in his debate with Hilary Clinton in 2016. He violated Clinton's personal zone three successive times when she accused him of promoting and enhancing violence and racism among the Americans [See Photo 4]. Trump used to violate his opponents' personal zone, the matter that has never tried with Nancy Pelosi. It seemed that Trump really realized the strength of his opponent that time; it was quite clear in photo [5] when he rejected to shake hands with her. The social zone, extending from 1.22 to 3.6 meters, means keeping a space between yourself and other people who are not from your family. Trump urged Americans to practice social distancing in combination with other everyday preventive actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. However, he himself as photo [6] shows did not observe the social distance in the press conference in which he asked the Americans to do so.

Photo [5]   Photo [6]

Photo [5]: Pelosi winning the personal zone battle with Trump in the House of Representatives

Photo [6]: Trump urging the Americans to keep social distance to avoid Covid-19

6.3 Trump and the Palm Power

According to many non-verbalists, the open palm is linked to truth and allegiance. They contended that one of the best ways to discover whether someone is honest is to look for the palm position. When someone begins to open up or be truthful, they will expose their palms. The palm gesture is an unconscious sign. When children are telling a lie, their palms are hidden behind their backs. Trump was rarely noticed with open palms. However, after probing more than 26 videos and 28 photos, it was clearly noticed that this gesture was repeatedly used when he was speaking about the border security, accusing the Democrats of being responsible for the government shutdown because they refused to fund a wall at the American Mexican borders. He accused the Democrats of promoting human trafficking and drug dealing for refusing to fund the wall. It seemed that Trump really believed in the indispensability of this wall. In photo [7] below, Trump used his open palms to convey a message to the Democrats, saying that he was truly doing that for the sake of America.

Trump's palm-up gesture was one of the rare gestures he emitted. He seemed that he never liked to appear submissive and week. None the less, this body gesture was just noticed for one time [see photo 8] when he preposterously rejected losing the elections and decided to ask the Supreme Court to intervene and stop voting in the 2020 election. Trump's palm-up gesture showed him as a submissive, helpless, and antidemocratic person.

Trump's palm – down gesture was observed repeatedly when he was talking about racial affairs. In photo [9], he used this gesture when addressing the protesters in the awake of the murder of George Floyd and nationwide outrage over police violence and aggression against Black African Americans. The palm-down gesture portrayed him as a racist president who does not care for the Black lives. This gesture was recursively employed by Trump when addressing Nancy Pelosi who used to oppose all Trump's decisions including the government shut down [See photo 9]. As for the palm-closed-finger-pointed position, it is Trump's all-time used gesture. In a survey of 26 videos and 28 photos, this gesture was repeated in over 63%. It showed Trump as aggressive person who sought domination over others. It added to his personality as a dictator who usually gives orders and commands. This gesture was used over 35 times in his debate with Joe Biden in 2020 elections. The candidates running for president are trained by professional debate coaches to learn how to dodge questions and how to defend themselves. However, their body language gives away what a person is hiding. While Trump and Clinton were arguing about if Russia had taken a part in hacking the emails of Democratic National Committee, Donald Trump awkwardly pointed his right index finger toward the sky, thumb and middle finger lightly pinched together, but he also pointed his left index finger to Hillary Clinton [See photo 10]. Trump seemed to be very much grumpy. The right-hand index finger conveyed the message: 'pay attention to what I am going to say;' it seemed like a yell supported by the left-hand index finger. He seemed to convey a message of admonishment, delivered in a super angry way. Unlike Trump, the Canadian Prime Minister, has developed his finger pointed irritating gesture into a more assertive non-irritating thumb-on-index gesture. Trump could conveyed the same message with less aggression and rudeness just like the Canadian Prime Minister, but he failed.

| Photo [7] | Photo [8] | Photo [9] | Photo [10] |

Photo [7]: Trump with open palms blasting Democrats for not funding a wall on the southern border.

Photo [8]: Trump declaring with a palm-up gesture that he would go to the Supreme Court

Photo [9]: Trump with palm-down gesture attempting to suppress Pelosi who seemed resistant

Photo [10]: Trump's peculiar finger-pointed gesture indicating extreme anger

6.4 Attitudes Transmitted via Handshaking

The palm-up and palm-down stances are both important in handshaking. The handshake conveys one of three basic attitudes: (a) dominance, (b) submission, or (c) equality. Actually, dominance means that you feel that you can dominate the person you are shaking hands with. You feel that this person will do as you wish. Dominance is transmitted by turning your hand downwards in the handshake. Submission, unlike dominance, means that you get the feeling that the person you are shaking hands with is trying to submit you to his will; and therefore, you would better be cautious. Submission is transmitted when you shake hands with your palm upwards. Equality means that you feel that you and this person can get on well together. Equality is transmitted when the palms remain in the vertical position. These three attitudes are transmitted unconsciously.

6.4.1 Trump and the Handshake Styles

The most violent handshake style is the palm-down handshake. It is due to the fact that the recipient has no possibility of developing an equal relationship with this handshake method. A simple countermovement to palm-down handshaking is to clasp the person's hand on top and shake it. Another maneuver is to penetrate the giver's intimate zone and to turn his palms to the vertical position. The palm-down handshaking is Trump's favorite style. He used to adopt this style with his political opponents. In photo [11], Trump gave Obama a palm-down handshake; the two parties seemed to adopt defensive postures while shaking hands. This photo portrayed the deep lack of trust for both of them. Trump pulls Obama towards him to tell him that he was the one in charge.

The glove handshaking is also known as the politician's handshake. The initiator attempts to convey to the receiver the impression that he

is truthful. When this method is utilized with someone the initiator has recently met, it has the opposite impact. The receiver is suspicious and wary. Trump gave the glove handshake to his political supporters and to whom he could depend on them. For example, Trump gave this vigorous style of handshaking to Gorsuch, whom Trump was nominated to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court; Trump gave him this type of handshaking to tell him that he was going to depend on him in the 2020 presidential elections. Gorsuch kept a distance throughout the handshake as if he were saying, "No, I would not help you" [See photo 12].

The dead fish handshake is extremely uninviting. It is universally unpopular. Actually, most people relate it to a weak character, mainly because the palm can easily be turned up. Rarely did Trump appear with this kind of handshaking; however, he gave this style of handshaking once to the French President in G20 Summit in 2017[See photo 13]. This photo revealed the huge differences in viewpoints between the two countries on world issues, such as climate change, wars in Syria and Libya, and Trump's decision to halt many economic treaties with France.

The double-handed handshake style shows sincerity, trust or depth of feeling towards the receiver. The left hand is used to communicate the extra feeling that the initiator wishes to transmit. The left hand takes one of four positions: wrist hold, elbow grasp, upper-arm grip, or shoulder hold. The elbow grasp transmits more feelings than the wrist holds. The upper-arm grip transmits less sensations than the shoulder holds. The left hand of the initiator signifies an invasion of the receiver's private zones. As a result, the wrist hold, elbow grasp, upper-arm grasp, and shoulder hold are only appropriate between close friends. Trump used this handshaking technique on the Japanese Prime Minister several times, which annoyed him because Trump used it for more than 30 seconds. [See photo 14]

| Photo [11] | Photo [12] | Photo [13] | Photo [14] |

Photo [11]: Trump giving Obama a palm-down handshaking showing lack of trust

Photo [12]: Gorsuch rejecting Trump's glove-handshaking by observing his personal distance

Photo [13] Trump give the French President the dead fish handshaking showing deep differences in viewpoints

Photo [14] Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan felt upset with double-handed 30-minute handshaking style

7. Conclusion

The psycholinguistic examination of Trump's grin, palm gestures, zone distances, and handshake techniques revealed several facets of Trump's personality with absolute contextual congruence. Except for his daughter Ivanka, he has never shown a genuine grin; all of the grins he gave were wholly phony, especially with National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, Vice President Mike Pence, and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly. With the exception of Nancy Pelosi, Trump utilized to infiltrate his political opponents' private and personal spaces as a form of nonverbal political retaliation. Trump's recursive handshake style was the double-handed handshake. He employed this method to demonstrate sincerity, trust, or depth of affection toward the recipient.

Acknowledgments

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