PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF MANIPULATIVE LINGUISTIC DEVICES IN SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL DISCOURSE: EVIDENCE FROM UZBEK AND ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SEGMENTS

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Abstract: This article examines the pragmatic features of manipulative linguistic devices in political discourse on social media, focusing on Uzbek- and English-language segments. It explores how lexical choices, emotional appeals, presuppositions, rhetorical questions, repetition, metaphor, and pronoun use can influence the interpretation of political messages and shape relationships between speakers and audiences. Particular attention is given to the communicative intentions underlying these devices, including persuasion, legitimization, delegitimization, and the construction of collective identity. The article proposes a comparative framework for analyzing language use in Uzbek and English social media environments, taking into account cultural context, platform-specific communication, and audience expectations. It argues that manipulative potential cannot be determined by individual words alone; rather, it emerges from the interaction of linguistic form, communicative context, implied meaning, and the speaker's relationship with the audience. The study highlights the importance of pragmatic analysis and critical digital literacy in understanding contemporary political communication.

Keywords: political discourse, social media, manipulation, pragmatics, Uzbek language, English language, persuasion, framing, presupposition, emotional appeal, digital communication, comparative linguistics.

Introduction

Social media has become an important environment for political communication, enabling politicians, public institutions, journalists, activists, and ordinary users to circulate political messages rapidly and interact directly with audiences. Unlike traditional political speeches, social media communication often combines short texts, images, videos, hashtags, and user comments. These features encourage concise expression, emotional engagement, repetition, and the rapid circulation of particular interpretations of political events.

Within this environment, linguistic choices play a significant role in shaping how political information is presented and understood. Manipulative linguistic devices may include emotionally charged vocabulary, selective framing, rhetorical questions, presuppositions, metaphor, repetition, and the strategic use of personal pronouns. Such devices can foreground particular interpretations, encourage group identification, or present contested claims as if they were already accepted. Nevertheless, not every persuasive statement is manipulative; interpretation depends on context, communicative purpose, evidence, and the degree to which alternative perspectives are represented (van Dijk, 2006).

The Uzbek- and English-language segments of social media provide a useful basis for comparative pragmatic research. Their analysis can reveal how similar communicative functions are expressed through different linguistic resources and cultural conventions. However, differences should not be attributed to language alone, since political institutions, platform practices, audience composition, and the specific topic also influence discourse.

The purpose of this article is to identify the principal pragmatic features of manipulative linguistic devices in Uzbek- and English-language political social media discourse and to propose a framework for comparing their communicative functions.

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Main part

The article uses a comparative pragmatic and discourse-analytical approach based on concepts developed in political discourse studies and critical discourse analysis. The theoretical framework draws on research into ideology, power, context, and the relationship between language and political communication (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006).

The proposed analytical framework examines five categories of linguistic devices: emotionally evaluative vocabulary, pronouns and group identification, presuppositions, rhetorical questions and repetition, and metaphorical framing. Each category is assessed according to its linguistic form, implied meaning, communicative function, and potential effect on audience interpretation.

A full empirical investigation would require a defined corpus of public Uzbek- and English-language social media posts collected within the same time period and, where possible, on comparable political topics. Posts would need to be documented with dates, platform information, and relevant context. Coding criteria should distinguish observable linguistic features from interpretations of their pragmatic function.

The present article is a conceptual comparative analysis and does not claim to report a completed corpus study or original statistical findings. The examples below are illustrative analytical constructions rather than quotations from real politicians or actual social media posts.

1. The pragmatic nature of manipulation in political social media discourse. Pragmatics examines how meaning is produced and interpreted in context. In political social media communication, the meaning of a statement depends not only on its literal content but also on its implied assumptions, emotional tone, intended audience, and relationship to preceding messages.

Manipulative potential may arise when linguistic devices direct attention toward a particular interpretation while obscuring uncertainty, excluding relevant alternatives, or encouraging an unsupported conclusion. Van Dijk (2006) explains that political discourse can reproduce or challenge power relations through the ways social groups, identities, and events are represented. This perspective makes it possible to investigate manipulation without assuming that every persuasive political message is necessarily deceptive.

For example, the statement “Only responsible citizens support this decision” establishes a connection between support for a decision and responsible citizenship. Pragmatically, it may imply that disagreement is irresponsible, although the statement itself provides no evidence for that conclusion. The device therefore operates through evaluation and group identification rather than through explicit argument alone.

2. Main linguistic devices and their pragmatic functions

Table 1. Manipulative linguistic devices in Uzbek- and English-language political social media discourse

Linguistic device	Illustrative Uzbek example	Illustrative English example	Pragmatic function
Emotional evaluation	“Bu qaror xalq manfaatlariga tahdid soladi.”	“This decision threatens the public interest.”	Encourages an emotional interpretation of an issue
Collective pronouns	“Biz bu muammoni birgalikda hal qilamiz.”	“We will solve this problem together.”	Constructs solidarity and shared identity
Presupposition	“Nega bu muammo hanuz hal etilmadi?”	“Why has this problem still not been solved?”	May presuppose that the problem remains unresolved
Rhetorical question	“Bunga kim befarq qarashi mumkin?”	“Who could possibly remain indifferent?”	Encourages agreement by presenting an answer as obvious

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Repetition and slogans	“Ishonch, birlik, taraqqiyot!”	“Trust, unity, progress!”	Reinforces selected concepts through repetition
Metaphorical framing	“Islohotlar — kelajak sari ko‘prik.”	“Reform is a bridge to the future.”	Frames an issue through a familiar conceptual image

Source: Compiled by the author. All examples are illustrative and are not quotations from real political figures.

The examples demonstrate that similar pragmatic functions can be expressed in both languages. Emotional vocabulary directs attention toward positive or negative evaluations; pronouns construct relationships between the speaker and the audience; presuppositions embed assumptions within questions or statements; and repetition increases the prominence of selected concepts.

These devices are not inherently manipulative. Collective pronouns may express genuine solidarity, metaphors may clarify complex policies, and rhetorical questions may be legitimate stylistic choices. Their manipulative potential depends on how they are used, whether their underlying claims are supported, and whether they restrict or distort the audience’s understanding.

3. Comparative pragmatic features of Uzbek and English segments. In Uzbek-language political communication, expressions involving xalq (the people), yurt (homeland), birlik (unity), and taraqqiyot (development) may be used to construct collective identity and emphasize shared responsibility. In English-language political communication, expressions such as the people, our future, national unity, and freedom may perform comparable functions. These are analytical possibilities, not universal characteristics of either language.

A valid comparison must consider the immediate communicative context. For instance, the Uzbek pronoun biz and the English pronoun we may both establish solidarity, but the exact group included in the pronoun can remain ambiguous. It may refer to citizens, a political party, a government, or a particular community. This ambiguity can encourage identification without explicitly defining who is included or excluded.

Presupposition is another important pragmatic device. A question such as “Why has the reform failed?” presupposes that the reform has failed, even if this has not been independently established. A more neutral formulation — “What results has the reform produced?” — leaves the outcome open to examination. In both Uzbek and English, the analysis must distinguish a linguistically encoded assumption from a fact verified by external evidence.

Metaphors also frame political events by highlighting selected associations. Describing reform as a “bridge” emphasizes connection and progress, whereas describing it as a “battle” foregrounds conflict and opposition. Such framing can guide interpretation, but its effects depend on the wider message and audience response (Fairclough, 1995).

4. The role of social media platforms and audience interpretation. Social media platforms facilitate the circulation of short, emotionally salient messages. Hashtags, repeated slogans, brief video captions, and reposted statements can detach a message from its original context. As a result, users may encounter a claim without access to its supporting evidence or the full discussion in which it appeared.

The pragmatic interpretation of a post therefore requires more than identifying individual words. Researchers should consider the author’s communicative role, the post’s intended audience, the surrounding discussion, and the distinction between factual assertions and evaluative language. The number of likes, shares, or comments does not independently establish that a message is manipulative or that its audience has been persuaded.

A systematic analysis should consequently record both linguistic features and contextual evidence. This approach supports a more reliable distinction between ordinary political persuasion, emotional expression, and potentially manipulative communication.

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Conclusion

Manipulative linguistic devices in political social media discourse operate through the interaction of linguistic form, implied meaning, emotional evaluation, and communicative context. Emotional vocabulary, collective pronouns, presuppositions, rhetorical questions, repetition, and metaphor can direct attention, establish group identity, and encourage particular interpretations of political events.

The comparison of Uzbek- and English-language segments offers an opportunity to identify shared pragmatic mechanisms while examining differences in vocabulary, cultural references, and discourse conventions. However, such differences should be established through systematic analysis rather than assumed on the basis of language alone.

The proposed framework can support future corpus-based research by providing categories for identifying linguistic devices and interpreting their communicative functions. A larger empirical study should use comparable datasets, transparent coding procedures, and verified examples from public posts. Ultimately, pragmatic analysis can contribute to a clearer understanding of digital political communication and strengthen critical media literacy by helping audiences distinguish evidence-based argumentation from language that encourages unexamined assumptions.

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