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MANIPULATIVE SPEECH TACTICS IN POLITICAL MEDIA DISCOURSE AND THEIR COGNITIVE MECHANISMS: EVIDENCE FROM UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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Abstract: This article examines manipulative speech tactics in Uzbek and English political media discourse, focusing on the cognitive mechanisms through which linguistic choices may influence public interpretation. Particular attention is given to evaluative labelling, framing, conceptual metaphor, presupposition, implicature, emotional appeals, and collective identity construction. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and pragmatics, the study explores how these tactics activate prior beliefs, direct attention, encourage particular inferences, and shape representations of political actors and events. A comparative perspective is used to identify shared communicative mechanisms and potential differences in their linguistic realization across Uzbek- and English-language contexts. The analysis suggests that manipulation cannot be identified solely by the presence of persuasive expressions; rather, it must be examined in relation to context, communicative intention, information selection, and the distribution of interpretive possibilities. The article proposes an analytical framework for studying the interaction between linguistic form, cognitive processing, and political influence. As the study is theoretical and illustrative, its observations require further validation through systematic corpus-based research.

Keywords: political media discourse, speech manipulation, cognitive mechanisms, framing, presupposition, implicature, conceptual metaphor, emotional appeal, Uzbek, English, critical discourse analysis.

Introduction

Political media discourse plays a significant role in shaping how citizens interpret public events, evaluate political actors, and understand competing ideological positions. News reports, political interviews, public statements, opinion articles, and social media posts do not simply transmit information. Through choices of vocabulary, narrative structure, emphasis, and omission, they also establish interpretive frameworks within which political events become meaningful.

Manipulative communication is particularly important in this context because it may influence an audience without explicitly revealing the assumptions or persuasive objectives underlying a message. Van Dijk conceptualizes manipulation as a phenomenon involving social power, discourse, and cognition, arguing that manipulative discourse can influence the mental models and social representations through which people understand political reality [1]. This approach makes it possible to examine manipulation not merely as a collection of rhetorical devices but as an interaction between language, knowledge, ideology, and audience interpretation.

Cognitive mechanisms are central to this process. Audiences do not interpret political messages independently of their previous experiences, social identities, expectations, and emotional responses. A headline that describes a policy as a "necessary reform" activates a different interpretive perspective from one that presents the same policy as a "controversial intervention." Although both expressions may refer to the same event, they direct attention toward different aspects of its meaning.

The comparison of Uzbek and English political media discourse provides an opportunity to investigate how broadly shared mechanisms of political influence are realized through different linguistic resources. Recent research on Uzbek and English political discourse has examined implicature, pragmatic strategies, metaphor, and the construction of political meaning across the two languages [2; 3]. Research on English and Uzbek online headlines has also highlighted the importance of presupposition and implicature in the communication of implicit meanings [4].

However, linguistic differences should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of different cognitive capacities or fixed national communication styles. Their significance must be established through contextual analysis of actual media texts.

The purpose of this article is to identify the principal manipulative speech tactics used in political media discourse and explain the cognitive mechanisms through which they may influence interpretation in Uzbek- and English-language contexts.

The study addresses three research questions:

1. Which linguistic tactics can contribute to manipulative meaning in political media discourse?
2. Through which cognitive mechanisms may these tactics influence audience interpretation?
3. How can the linguistic realization of such tactics be compared in Uzbek and English?

Materials and Methods

The study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven approach combining critical discourse analysis, cognitive-linguistic analysis, and pragmatic interpretation. Its theoretical foundation draws on van Dijk's socio-cognitive account of discourse and manipulation [1], Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor [5], and Entman's framework of framing in communication [6].

Critical discourse analysis is used to examine how linguistic choices represent political actors, establish distinctions between social groups, and legitimize particular interpretations of political events. Cognitive-linguistic analysis focuses on conceptual frames, metaphors, categorization, and the activation of prior knowledge. Pragmatic analysis examines presuppositions, implicatures, indirect evaluations, and the relationship between utterance meaning and communicative context.

The analysis focuses on six categories of potentially manipulative speech tactics:

- evaluative labelling and ideological polarization;
- framing and selective presentation of information;
- conceptual metaphor;
- presupposition and conversational implicature;
- emotional appeals and threat construction;
- collective identity and the strategic use of personal pronouns.

The Uzbek and English examples included in the article are constructed illustrations designed to demonstrate how the identified mechanisms may operate. They are not presented as authentic quotations from political leaders, news organizations, or verified media publications. Consequently, the study does not claim to establish the frequency of these tactics in either language.

The comparative procedure consists of three stages. First, a linguistic expression is identified and its literal meaning described. Second, the cognitive assumptions or interpretive pathways potentially activated by that expression are examined. Third, comparable Uzbek and English formulations are analyzed to identify shared functions and differences in linguistic realization.

This procedure distinguishes between the observable linguistic form and the interpretation proposed by the analyst. It also recognizes that a persuasive expression is not necessarily manipulative: the classification depends on contextual factors, including whether information is

distorted, relevant alternatives are obscured, or the audience is encouraged to accept an inadequately supported conclusion.

Results

Evaluative Labelling and Ideological Polarization. Evaluative labelling is one of the most visible tactics in political media discourse. It involves assigning positive or negative characteristics to political actors, policies, institutions, or social groups through carefully selected lexical expressions.

For example, the English expressions "responsible leadership," "failed policy," and "radical agenda" communicate evaluations rather than merely identifying political entities. Comparable Uzbek expressions include "mas'uliyatli rahbarlik," "muvaffaqiyatsiz siyosat," and "keskin siyosiy dastur."

Such expressions may influence interpretation by activating evaluative categories before readers have examined the underlying evidence. A policy described as "responsible" is framed as compatible with social expectations of competence and accountability, whereas a policy described as "reckless" is associated with risk and poor judgment.

Van Dijk's account of ideological discourse draws attention to the tendency to emphasize the positive characteristics of an in-group and the negative characteristics of an out-group [1]. In political communication, this pattern can be realized through contrasting descriptions of "our achievements" and "their failures."

Consider the following illustrative examples:

English: *"Our administration has delivered meaningful progress, while the opposition continues to obstruct essential reforms."*

Uzbek: *"Bizning boshqaruvimiz sezilarli natijalarga erishdi, muxolifat esa zarur islohotlarga to'sqinlik qilishda davom etmoqda."*

Both examples establish a contrast between a positively represented political group and a negatively represented opponent. The expressions "meaningful progress" and "sezilarli natijalar" construct a favorable image, while "obstruct essential reforms" and "zarur islohotlarga to'sqinlik qilish" attribute responsibility for difficulties to the opposing group.

The cognitive mechanism involves categorization and evaluative association. Readers may connect the positively described group with competence and progress while associating the negatively described group with obstruction. If the text does not provide sufficient evidence for these evaluations, the linguistic contrast may encourage an oversimplified understanding of a more complex political situation.

Nevertheless, evaluative language is not inherently manipulative. Its function must be assessed in relation to the accuracy of the claims, the evidence provided, and the availability of alternative interpretations.

Framing and Selective Presentation of Information. Framing refers to the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of reality in ways that make certain interpretations more prominent than others. Entman explains that frames can define problems, identify causes, make moral evaluations, and suggest remedies [6].

In political media discourse, the same event may be framed through different conceptual perspectives. An increase in public expenditure, for example, can be presented as an investment in social development or as an expansion of government costs.

English frame A: *"The government is investing in the future of public services."*

English frame B: *"The government is increasing the financial burden on taxpayers."*

Uzbek frame A: *"Hukumat davlat xizmatlarining kelajagiga sarmoya kiritmoqda."*

Uzbek frame B: *"Hukumat soliq to'lovchilar zimmasidagi moliyaviy yukni oshirmoqda."*

These formulations may refer to the same general policy but foreground different dimensions. The first emphasizes long-term benefits, while the second highlights immediate financial costs. Neither formulation is necessarily false; each may be justified by different aspects of the policy.

The manipulative potential arises when one frame is presented as the complete account while relevant evidence, competing consequences, or alternative explanations are systematically excluded.

The underlying cognitive mechanisms include selective attention, accessibility, and the activation of existing interpretive schemas. By making one dimension of an event more salient, a frame can influence which considerations readers use when evaluating it. The framing effect therefore concerns not only what information is communicated but also how that information is organized and made prominent.

Conceptual Metaphor as a Mechanism of Political Interpretation. Metaphor allows abstract political processes to be understood through more familiar conceptual domains. Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphor is not restricted to decorative language; it can structure how people conceptualize and reason about experience [5].

Political discourse frequently uses metaphors associated with journeys, conflict, construction, health, and movement. Such expressions provide simplified conceptual models for understanding complex institutions and policy decisions.

For example:

English: *"The country is moving toward a brighter future."*

Uzbek: *"Mamlakat yorug' kelajak sari intilmoqda."*

Both expressions conceptualize political development as movement toward a desirable destination. The metaphor highlights direction and progress, while potentially giving less attention to disagreement about the destination, the costs of the journey, or the distribution of its benefits.

Another illustrative example involves conflict metaphors:

English: *"The government is fighting economic instability."*

Uzbek: *"Hukumat iqtisodiy beqarorlikka qarshi kurashmoqda."*

The conflict frame represents economic instability as an opponent that must be defeated. It can make government action appear urgent and necessary, but it may also simplify a complex economic process into a struggle between opposing forces.

Metaphors can therefore influence political interpretation by organizing information into familiar conceptual structures. They may direct attention toward particular causal relationships, foreground some actors, and make certain policy responses appear more natural than others.

However, metaphor alone does not establish manipulative intent. Its interpretation depends on the surrounding discourse, the evidence presented, and the alternatives available to the audience.

Presupposition and Implicature: The Construction of Implicit Meaning. Presupposition and implicature are important pragmatic mechanisms because they allow political messages to communicate meanings beyond their explicit propositional content.

A presupposition is information treated as already established or accepted within an utterance. Consider the following examples:

English: *"The government has finally addressed the problem."*

Uzbek: *"Hukumat nihoyat muammoni hal qilishga kirishdi."*

The word "finally" and its Uzbek counterpart "nihoyat" may suggest that action was delayed or that previous efforts were inadequate. This background assumption can influence how

readers evaluate the government, even though the sentence does not explicitly state why action was delayed.

Presuppositions can become manipulative when questionable assumptions are embedded in a message and presented as if they were already established facts.

Implicature, by contrast, refers to an additional meaning that readers infer from an utterance in context. Consider:

English: *"The opposition has made promises before."*

Uzbek: *"Muxolifat ilgari ham va'dalar bergan."*

Neither sentence explicitly states that the opposition has failed to fulfill its promises. Nevertheless, in a context where political reliability is under discussion, readers may infer that the opposition should not be trusted.

The distinction is significant: the literal statement reports a previous action, whereas the inferred interpretation questions the credibility of the political actor.

Research on English and Uzbek political discourse has specifically examined implicit meaning and pragmatic implicature as components of political persuasion [2]. Related work on Uzbek and English online news headlines identifies presupposition and implicature as mechanisms through which meaning can be conveyed indirectly [4].

These mechanisms may be effective because audiences actively interpret messages rather than simply receive their literal content. Readers use background knowledge, contextual expectations, and assumptions about the speaker to infer meanings. Manipulative communication can exploit this interpretive activity by encouraging conclusions that appear self-generated but are not adequately supported by the information provided.

Emotional Appeals and Threat Construction

Emotional appeals are used to associate political issues with feelings such as fear, hope, pride, anger, or solidarity. They are especially relevant when political messages concern uncertainty, security, national identity, economic difficulties, or the future of a community.

Consider the following constructed examples:

English: *"Our future is at stake."*

Uzbek: *"Kelajagimiz xavf ostida."*

Both formulations frame an issue as a threat to a valued collective future. This may encourage readers to treat the issue as urgent and consequential.

The cognitive mechanisms potentially involved include threat appraisal, emotional salience, and attentional prioritization. Information associated with perceived danger can become especially prominent in readers' judgments. Under conditions of uncertainty or strong emotional engagement, some audiences may devote less attention to evaluating alternative explanations or checking supporting evidence.

A related tactic is the construction of a stark choice between two possible outcomes:

English: *"We must act now, or the consequences will be irreversible."*

Uzbek: *"Biz hozir harakat qilishimiz kerak, aks holda oqibatlar qaytarib bo'lmas darajada bo'ladi."*

Such statements establish a binary structure in which immediate action is associated with safety and inaction with severe consequences. This framing may be justified in situations involving genuine urgency. It becomes potentially manipulative when the threat is exaggerated, uncertainty is concealed, or reasonable alternatives are excluded.

The relevant analytical question is therefore not whether a political message evokes emotion, but whether emotional intensity is proportionate to the evidence and whether it obstructs a balanced assessment of the issue.

Collective Identity and Pronoun Use

Personal pronouns and collective expressions help establish relationships between political speakers and their audiences. The pronouns "we," "our," "biz," and "bizning" can construct a shared identity and imply common interests, responsibilities, or goals.

For example:

English: *"Together, we can build a more secure future."*

Uzbek: *"Biz birgalikda yanada xavfsiz kelajakni barpo eta olamiz."*

These statements create a sense of collective agency. The audience is positioned not merely as a recipient of information but as a participant in a shared political project.

Collective identification can encourage solidarity and civic participation. However, it may also obscure differences within the group or imply that disagreement represents disloyalty.

Consider the contrast between "we all support this decision" and "many citizens support this decision." The first formulation implies a much broader consensus than the second. If the available evidence does not support the claim of universal agreement, the inclusive pronoun can contribute to a misleading impression of social consensus.

The cognitive mechanism involves social categorization: individuals interpret political messages partly through their understanding of group membership and shared identity. Political communication can activate these categories by distinguishing an in-group from an out-group and associating each with different moral or social characteristics.

Although collective pronouns occur in both Uzbek and English political discourse, their pragmatic force depends on the immediate context, the identity being invoked, and the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Claims about systematic national differences require evidence from comparable texts rather than assumptions based on language alone.

Table 1. Manipulative Speech Tactics and Their Potential Cognitive Mechanisms

Speech tactic	Linguistic realization	Potential cognitive mechanism	Possible effect on interpretation
Evaluative labelling	Positive and negative adjectives	Categorization and evaluative association	Favorable or unfavorable judgments of political actors
Framing	Selective emphasis and information ordering	Selective attention and schema activation	One interpretation becomes more prominent
Conceptual metaphor	Journey, conflict, construction, or health imagery	Mapping abstract issues onto familiar conceptual domains	Certain explanations and responses appear more natural
Presupposition	"Finally," "again," change-of-state expressions	Acceptance of background assumptions	Unverified assumptions may be treated as established
Implicature	Indirect criticism and contextual hints	Pragmatic inference	Readers infer meanings not explicitly asserted
Emotional appeal	Threats, urgency, hope, and fear	Emotional salience and threat appraisal	Increased attention or urgency

Collective identification	"We," "our," "biz," "bizning"	Social categorization and group identification	Solidarity or perceived consensus

Source: *Compiled by the author on the basis of van Dijk [1], Lakoff and Johnson [5], Entman [6], and the comparative studies cited in [2–4]. The mechanisms are analytical interpretations, not experimentally measured effects in the present study.*

Comparative Analysis of Uzbek and English Political Media Discourse

The examples demonstrate that Uzbek and English political media discourse can employ comparable tactics to construct political evaluations, direct attention, activate background assumptions, and establish collective identity.

The shared mechanisms include evaluative categorization, framing, metaphorical representation, pragmatic inference, emotional appeals, and group identification. Their presence reflects general features of human communication rather than mechanisms unique to a particular language.

Differences may occur in the grammatical and lexical resources used to realize these strategies. Uzbek can express evidential, inferential, and interpersonal nuances through its available morphological and lexical resources, while English may realize comparable functions through different combinations of lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level features. The exact distribution of these forms, however, must be established empirically.

A useful comparison therefore distinguishes three analytical levels:

1. **Linguistic realization:** the words, grammatical constructions, pronouns, and discourse markers used in a text.
2. **Cognitive interpretation:** the assumptions, conceptual frames, emotional associations, and inferences that the expression may activate.
3. **Sociopolitical context:** the institutional setting, media genre, audience expectations, and political circumstances in which the message appears.

This distinction helps prevent an overly simplistic comparison in which linguistic differences are automatically treated as evidence of cultural or cognitive differences. It also makes it possible to identify cases in which different linguistic forms perform similar pragmatic functions.

Discussion

The analysis suggests that manipulative speech tactics should be understood as components of a broader relationship between language, cognition, and political power. Individual expressions may appear persuasive because they activate familiar conceptual structures, foreground particular aspects of an event, or encourage readers to draw conclusions beyond the explicit content of a message.

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is particularly relevant because it connects discourse structures with mental models and social representations [1]. From this perspective, manipulation does not occur simply because a speaker uses emotionally charged vocabulary or a metaphor. It becomes a concern when linguistic choices contribute to distorted understanding, unjustified assumptions, or an asymmetrical presentation of political reality.

The findings also underline the importance of distinguishing persuasion from manipulation. Political communication inevitably involves selecting information, explaining events, and defending particular positions. These activities are not automatically manipulative. A more defensible assessment considers whether the message is adequately supported, whether important

counterevidence is omitted, whether background assumptions are questionable, and whether the audience is given a reasonable opportunity to consider alternative interpretations.

The comparison of Uzbek and English materials further demonstrates the need for context-sensitive analysis. The same strategy may be expressed through different linguistic forms, while an apparently similar expression may have different pragmatic implications depending on its political setting. Cultural expectations, institutional relationships, audience knowledge, and media conventions should therefore be considered alongside lexical and grammatical features.

The framework developed in this article can be used in political media literacy and linguistic analysis. Readers can be encouraged to ask four questions when examining a political headline or statement:

- What information is explicitly stated, and what is merely implied?
- Which words or metaphors guide the evaluation of the event?
- What assumptions does the message treat as already established?
- Which relevant facts or alternative interpretations are absent?

These questions do not automatically prove that a text is manipulative. Instead, they provide a systematic basis for identifying potentially misleading framing and checking whether the message is supported by evidence.

The main limitation of the present study is the absence of an independently compiled, balanced corpus of Uzbek and English political media texts. The examples are illustrative, and the analysis does not measure the frequency of individual tactics or establish their psychological effects experimentally. Further research should examine comparable media genres and publication periods, apply transparent coding criteria, and test whether identified linguistic patterns are associated with differences in audience interpretation.

Conclusion

Manipulative speech tactics in political media discourse operate through the interaction of linguistic form, cognitive interpretation, and sociopolitical context. Evaluative labelling, framing, conceptual metaphor, presupposition, implicature, emotional appeals, and collective identity can influence how political actors and events are understood.

The comparative analysis indicates that Uzbek and English political media discourse can employ similar communicative mechanisms while realizing them through language-specific resources. These similarities should not obscure the importance of contextual and cultural factors, but neither should linguistic differences be treated as proof of fixed national cognitive styles without sufficient evidence.

The central conclusion is that manipulative potential cannot be established by identifying a particular word or rhetorical device in isolation. It must be assessed through the relationship between linguistic choices, the assumptions they activate, the information presented or omitted, and the interpretations encouraged in the audience.

The proposed analytical framework contributes to the study of political media discourse by connecting linguistic tactics with their potential cognitive mechanisms. It may also support critical media literacy by helping readers distinguish explicit claims from implied meanings, recognize selective framing, and evaluate political messages against independent evidence.

Future research should apply the framework to a systematically collected Uzbek-English corpus of political news, headlines, public statements, and social media posts. Quantitative frequency analysis, qualitative discourse interpretation, and audience-based experiments could then provide a stronger empirical basis for comparing the distribution and effects of manipulative speech tactics across the two languages.

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