

"Dominance in Motion: The Semiotic Performance Discourse of Trump"

Dr FERRAH Faouzia

University of Lounici Ali Blida-2 , Blida, (Algeria) , fa.ferrah@univ-blida2.dz

Received: 20/03/2025

Accepted: 03/07/2025

Publication:05/07/2025

Abstract:

This study investigates the use of body language as a semiotic device for reinforcing hegemony within political discourse, with a particular focus on Donald Trump's discourse. It adopts a semiotic framework informed by Gramsci's and Bourdieu's theories of hegemony, as well as the semiotic models of Saussure and Peirce. Trump's body movements are deliberately orchestrated to project authority whether by conveying confidence or by visually diminishing his opponents. From Bourdieu's perspective, such symbolic violence facilitates the subtle imposition of power, rendering dominance naturalized and socially legitimate. The study concluded with several findings, the most significant of which is that Trump's personality exhibits narcissistic and authoritarian behavioral tendencies. Nonetheless, he possesses a bold and strong character, along with high self-confidence, which enables him to inspire followers and domination political discourse.

Keywords: The Semiotics of Domination; Symbolic Violence; Body Language; Discourse; Donald John Trump.

ملخص :

تبحث هذه الدراسة في استخدام لغة الجسد كأداة إشارية لتعزيز الهيمنة داخل الخطاب السياسي، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على خطاب دونالد ترامب. وهو يتبنى إطاراً سيميائياً مستوحى من نظريات غرامشي وبوردديو في الهيمنة، بالإضافة إلى النماذج السيميائية لسوسير وبيرس. إن حركات جسد ترامب مصممة بشكل متعمد لإظهار سلطته - سواء من خلال نقل الثقة أو التقليل من شأن خصومه بصرياً. ومن وجهة نظر بوردديو، فإن هذا العنف الرمزي يسهل فرض السلطة بشكل خفي، مما يجعل الهيمنة طبيعية وشرعية اجتماعياً. وخلصت الدراسة إلى عدة نتائج، أهمها إن شخصية ترامب تُظهر نزعات سلوكية نرجسية واستبدادية. ومع ذلك، يتمتع بشخصية جريئة وقوية، إلى جانب ثقة عالية بالنفس، مما يُمكنه من إلهام المتابعين و الهيمنة على الخطاب السياسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية : سيميائية الهيمنة؛ العنف الرمزي؛ لغة الجسد؛ الخطاب؛ دونالد جون ترامب.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political discourse operates as a central mechanism for establishing and sustaining hegemony not only through language, but also through non-verbal communication such as body language. In this context, body language serves as a semiotic tool that subtly conveys authority, reinforces power dynamics, and contributes to the naturalization of dominance. Gestures, posture, facial expressions, and spatial positioning are strategically employed by political figures to embody confidence, superiority, and control. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, these embodied performances impose authority without direct force, making hierarchical power structures appear legitimate and 'natural' in the eyes of the public.

As a vehicle for constructing meaning, asserting authority, and shaping public perception, political discourse has become a central focus in semiotic studies. From this perspective, the semiotics of hegemony offers valuable insight into the symbolic mechanisms through which political discourse seeks to influence, guide, and normalize specific worldviews. The intersection of semiotics with the concepts of power and hegemony as theorized by Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault reveals how signs, symbols, and discursive practices produce legitimacy and foster societal compliance. Political discourse, therefore, is not limited to the transmission of information; rather, it actively constructs social reality by regulating language and meaning. Through this process, certain ideas are naturalized and accepted as common sense, while alternative perspectives are marginalized or systematically excluded from public consciousness.

The semiotics of hegemony is based on the idea that language is not merely a means of conveying meaning but rather a tool of power and influence, used to impose a particular intellectual paradigm and control the available interpretations of reality. This vision overlaps with Michel Foucault's concept of "knowledge-power," which argues that discourse not only reflects power relations but also contributes to shaping and consolidating them. Among the symbolic mechanisms relied upon by political discourse to exercise hegemony are the redefinition of political terms, such as the use of terms such as "reform," "modernization," or "stabilization" as alternatives to concepts such as "control," "repression," or "restriction." Hegemony through repetition, whereby the constant repetition of slogans and concepts entrenches them in the collective unconscious, making them appear as "natural facts" rather than mere political viewpoints. The production of the "us/them" binary is based on the dichotomy of good and evil. The ruling political group is presented as representing positive values (progress, security, stability), while opponents are portrayed as a threat to the regime or society (anarchists, traitors, terrorists). All of these practices, and others, have shaped and continue to shape politicians on the international arena. However, we might wonder what makes some politicians stand out, or more precisely, what makes some of them make a difference.

Michel Foucault argues that Language and discourse are not the only ways that power is used; bodies, actions, and common gestures are also used to replicate power. (Foucault, 1975, pp. 25-26). And **Gramsci**, on the other hand, shows how cultural hegemony processes employ body gestures, wherein political leaders' physical actions serve as a way to reproduce power without necessarily using physical force. (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 245-246).

Based on the researchers' perspective, our research papers aim to answer the following question: **"To what extent does Donald Trump's use of body language reflect genuine political skill versus an obsession with power and an intent to manipulate the masses?"** This question

allows us to explore how politicians use body language consciously and intelligently to enhance their power and how some leaders may overuse it irrationally, which can make them appear obsessed with power or even psychologically unstable.

2. Study Sub -Questions: This main question leads to the following sub-questions:

- To what extent does body language contribute to the legitimacy and authority of political leaders?
- What social and psychological repercussions result from overly dramatic or dramatic body language in political discourse?
- How do cultural and historical contexts influence the interpretation of political body language?
- How does Donald Trump use body language as a tool of symbolic violence to assert dominance and manipulate public perception?

3. Importance of the study:

Our study is particularly significant because it sheds light on the use of body language as a means of symbolic violence and political dominance, an area that has not gotten enough attention in the analysis of political discourse, particularly in modern settings. The following points encapsulate the research's significance:

- 3.1.A deeper understanding of the strategies of political domination:** This study helps reveal the nonverbal methods used by politicians to consolidate their power and influence the masses. Rather than focusing solely on verbal discourse, the study demonstrates how gestures, facial expressions, and physical distance can play a fundamental role in the reproduction of power.
- 3.2.Expanding the perspective of semiotic studies of domination:** Semiotic studies often rely on the analysis of written or spoken texts and discourses, but this study expands the scope of research to include bodily and kinetic elements, contributing to the development of domination theory according to schools such as Foucault, Gramsci, and Bourdieu.
- 3.3.A Critical Analysis of the Image of Political Leaders and Their Influence on Public Opinion By focusing on prominent political figures such as Donald Trump:** the study demonstrates how the use of body language can be a tool for mass manipulation. It raises questions about the extent to which people are aware of these mechanisms and the extent to which they influence their political decisions.
- 3.4.Illuminating the Gap Between Professionalism and Obsession with Body Language:** The research helps differentiate between the strategic use of body language to enhance political power and the excessive, irrational use of it, which may make a politician appear unbalanced or obsessed with power. This opens the door to psychological and social studies on the impact of this on a leader's image.
- 3.5.Enhancing Political and Media Awareness:** The results of the study can help political analysts, journalists, and even voters understand how body language is used to influence public opinion. It can also inform decision-makers about how to use body language in a way that enhances credibility rather than arouses suspicion.

4. Research Methodology

- 4.1.Definition of Method :** The method is regarded as the impartial approach a researcher takes while examining a phenomena. Without a defined methodology, no scientific study can be carried out. The technique is the skill of arranging concepts, whether it is to prove a known fact or to disclose a truth we do not. (Al-Sawi & Mubarak, 1992, p. 26). The present study is

dependent upon the Semiological analysis.

4.2. Definition of Semiological Analysis: Ferdinand de Saussure defines semiological analysis as the study of signs within the structure of social life. He argues that semiology is a science that "studies the role of signs as part of social life," and he considers linguistics to be a branch of this broader field. (Saussure, 2011, p. 16). While, Charles Sanders Peirce defines semiotics as the formal study of signs and sign processes. He states that: "A sign... is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity". (Peirce C. , (1931–1958), p. 228)

4.3. Semiotic Model: From a semiotic model, body language operates as a system of signals that produce meaning. The following table explains the concept of the sign according to De Saussure and Peirce.

Table 1. The Semiotic Analysis Draws on The Models of Saussure and Peirce.

Scholar	Model Type	Model Components
Ferdinand de Saussure	Dyadic (Two-part) . (Saussure, 1916, p. 66)	1. Signifier: The physical form of the sign (e.g., spoken or written word)
		2. Signified: The mental concept associated with the signifier
Charles Sanders Peirce	Triadic (Three-part) (Peirce, 1931, p. 228) .	- Iconic Signs: Resemble what they represent (e.g., acting out drinking to indicate thirst).
		- Indexical Signs: Have a clear relationship to their meaning (for example, sweating as a sign of "nervousness")
		- Symbolic Signs: Rely on cultural traditions (for example, a handshake as a show of respect). Gestures might be iconic (directly depicting an action), indexical (leading to a related meaning), or symbolic (culturally accepted meanings).

4.4. The Semiological Approach According to Roland Barthes: The semiological approach developed by **Roland Barthes** is one of the most prominent frameworks for analyzing visual discourse. Barthes distinguished between **denotation**, which refers to the literal or explicit meaning of a sign, and **connotation**, which refers to the cultural and ideological meanings layered on top of the literal meaning. According to Barthes, an image does not carry a single, fixed meaning but instead offers multiple layers of interpretation depending on the viewer's cultural context (Barthes R. , 1977, p. 38). Barthes famously illustrated this through his analysis of the *Black soldier* on the cover of *Paris Match* magazine, where he showed how the image seemingly promotes patriotic inclusion, yet subtly reinforces a colonial ideology that presents imperialism as natural and humane (Barthes R. , 1977, p. 39). The strength of this approach lies in its ability to expose what appears natural or self-evident in visual messages, revealing the hidden ideological dimensions embedded in media discourse. It includes two levels of analysis:

- **Denotative Level** (zero degree of meaning) : It is the initial level that deals with what the image directly shows , its literal or "surface" meaning, which usually corresponds to what the eye perceives without interpretation or analysis.
- **Connotative Level** : This level concerns the cultural symbols, connotations, and social values conveyed by the image. It reflects our personal or cultural interpretation of the image, based on our backgrounds and experiences.

5. Study terms:

5.1. Semiotics : According to **Ferdinand de Saussure**: Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols, and their significance in communication systems. It investigates how meaning is formed and perceived using various modes of representation (Saussure, 1916, p. 16). Semiotics, sometimes known as "semiology" in his writings, is "a science that studies the life of signs within society (Saussure, 1916, p. 16). Similarly, Charles Sanders Peirce describes semiotics as "the doctrine of signs," emphasizing its importance in understanding how humans perceive signs in a variety of settings (Peirce, 1931, p. 58).

5.2. Linguistic Semiotics: This discipline studies how language operates as a system of signals. It investigates how words, syntax, and language influence meaning-making. Saussure (Saussure, 1916, p. 67) contends that language is an organized system in which meaning is derived from distinctions among signs rather than fundamental features.

5.3. Visual Semiotics : Visual semiotics investigates how pictures, symbols, and visual representations convey messages. According to Roland Barthes visual texts, such as ads and images, include both denotative (literal) and connotative (implied) meanings that influence cultural perceptions (Barthes, 1977, p. 33).

5.4. Cultural Semiotics : This area looks at how cultural behaviors and ideas serve as sign systems. Yuri Lotman (1990, p. 125) defines culture as a "semiotic space" in which traditions, rituals, and conventions serve as communication codes to define social relationships. (Lotman, 1990, p. 125)

5.5. Media and Digital Semiotics : This field examines how digital technology and mass media shape meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p. 89) contend that multimodal communication, in which text, pictures, and sound interact, generates multiple levels of meaning that impact public discourse (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 89)

5.6. Body language as a semiotic system: Body language is the nonverbal communication that occurs via gestures, facial expressions, postures, and motions. It expresses emotions, attitudes, and intentions, sometimes supplementing or opposing spoken language. Birdwhistell (1970, p. 23) defines body language as a systematic system of nonverbal cues that, like spoken language, influences interpersonal communication and cultural relations (Birdwhistell, 1970, p. 23). Body language is a type of nonverbal communication that uses bodily gestures, facial expressions, posture, and movement to transmit emotions, attitudes, and intentions. It is extremely important in interpersonal interactions because it reinforces, contradicts, or replaces spoken signals. According to Knapp and Hall body language is " the transfer of meaning by nonverbal signals that work alongside or independently of spoken language, impacting perception and interpretation in conversation (Knapp & Hall, 2010, p. 35).

7. Theoretical background:

7.1. Hegemony and semiotics are the home of synergism:

- **The semiotics of hegemony:** it investigates how signs and symbols are used to develop and sustain dominant power systems in societies. This technique combines semiotic analysis with hegemonic theories to better understand how meaning-making processes contribute to societal control and marginalization of opposing viewpoints. Peeter Selg and Andreas Ventsel In "An Outline for a Semiotic Theory of Hegemony," the authors offer a framework that integrates

discourse theory with cultural semiotics. They contend that hegemonic authority creates and stabilizes meanings within a society, thereby marginalizing rival ideologies. This process entails the ongoing negotiation and reinforcement of dominant signifiers that influence collective understanding and social norms (Selg & Ventsel, 2010-October, p. 346)

Similarly, in "Hegemony and Mass Culture: A Semiotic Approach," John Fiske explores how the media functions as a vehicle for hegemonic forces by distributing chosen meanings that are consistent with prevailing ideology. Fiske adds that this transmission is not a one-way street; audiences actively interpret and occasionally fight these messages, demonstrating the dynamic character of hegemonic behavior (Fiske, 1987, pp. 1-20).

Fairclough notes in his book *Discourse Analysis: Textual Analysis in Social Research* that dominance manifests itself in the way discourses influence social interactions, advancing dominant groups' interests while marginalizing others. Fairclough argues that discourse not only reflects reality, but also contributes to its formation and reproduction in ways that reinforce existing power systems (Fairclough & Norman, 2009, p. 62)

Pierre Bourdieu, a well-known French sociologist, did not define "hegemony" in the same way as Antonio Gramsci. However, his concept of symbolic power is strongly related to that of hegemony. Bourdieu defines symbolic power as the ability to impose interpretations and present them as legitimate while hiding the power relations that underpin its force. This type of power is wielded through implicit, sometimes unconscious, practices of cultural and social dominance that occur within ordinary social habits held over aware persons. It guarantees that the arbitrariness of the social order is seen as natural, legitimizing current social institutions and preserving the dominance of specific groups. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 170).

Based on the previous definitions, the following table summarizes the most important observations.

Table .2 Gramsci's and Bourdieu's Perspectives on the Semiotics of Hegemony.

Elements	Gramsci and Bourdieu's point of view
Indirect Exercise of Power:	- Both Gramsci and Bourdieu contend that power is wielded not simply through coercion or force, but also through indirect ways that alter perception, culture, and social norms.
Influence on Collective Consciousness	- Gramsci sees hegemony as manifested via cultural institutions such as schools, media, and religion. And Bourdieu's symbolic power is shown via social habits and implicit behaviors that unwittingly reinforce social hierarchies
The Function of Culture in Maintaining Dominance	- Gramsci emphasizes the importance of the "organic intellectual" in forming and sustaining the prevailing ideology. And Bourdieu emphasizes how symbolic power pervades language, education, and everyday social interactions, making inequality look normal.
Conscious as opposed to unconscious reproduction of power	- Gramsci's definition of hegemony includes active intellectual leadership, in which the ruling class intentionally creates and disseminates prevailing ideas. But Bourdieu's symbolic power is more unconscious, operating via deeply entrenched social practices that cause individuals to unconsciously contribute in the reproduction of their own subordination
Institutions vs.	- In Gramsci's paradigm, hegemony is not absolute; it may be opposed

Social Practices	by counter-hegemonic forces and alternative ideologies. Resistance is more difficult under Bourdieu's paradigm because symbolic power is internalized and functions intuitively, making it difficult for people to detect and resist.
-------------------------	---

7.2.Hegemony and political discourse : Hegemony and political speech are inextricably linked, since political discourse serves as the fundamental means by which hegemonic authority is founded, sustained, and challenged. Antonio Gramsci created the notion of hegemony, which refers to a certain social group's supremacy over others achieved not by force but via consensual acceptance of its ideology. Political speech shapes and reinforces this domination by creating narratives, influencing public opinion, and legitimizing power structures.

The Role of Political Discourse in Hegemony:

- **Naturalizing Ideologies :** Political discourse normalizes specific beliefs and portrays them as common sense. Dominant groups alter public views and strengthen their legitimacy by repeatedly using certain language, symbols, and rhetorical methods. (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 43)
- **Marginalization of Alternative Voices:** Hegemonic discourse suppresses or delegitimizes counter-hegemonic narratives by presenting them as extreme, impractical, or dangerous. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12)
- **Discourse as a Site of Struggle:** While hegemonic forces utilize discourse to sustain dominance, marginalized people employ counter-discourse to contest and modify power dynamics. (Fairclough, 1995, p. 67)
- **Symbolic Power and Discursive Control :** Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic power is consistent with hegemony, highlighting how language and speech perpetuate social hierarchies. Political elites influence discourse through media, education, and institutional communication, influencing how people see reality. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 170)
- **Critical Discourse Analysis :** According to Norman Fairclough, political speech actively builds and sustains power relations, rather than just reflecting them. He uses linguistic analysis to explain how political discourse influences social structures and ideologies. (Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language, 1995, p. 90)

8. Analysis within the levels of Multimodal Communication:

Kress & Van Leeuwen say that Body language combines with speech, visuals, and sound to produce complex meanings, particularly in digital communication and media (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 45). The body language of political leaders, particularly presidents, is a potent semiotic tool for conveying authority, confidence, sincerity, and even deceit. Presidents send signals that go beyond what they say via gestures, facial expressions, posture, and movement. Politicians can adopt and utilize various forms of body language to enhance their communication. There are some examples can be cited in the following table.

Table 3. Semiotics perspective on the use of body language by some leaders

N°	Body language manifestations	examples	Semiotic Perspective
01	Gesture-Based Public Communication	John F. Kennedy's Hand Movements in Speeches (gestures) .	These multimodal indicators increased emotional effect. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 45)

02	Facial Expressions as Iconic Signs	Vladimir Putin's Neutral Expression (Putin's deadpan face conveys a sense of power and unpredictability.)	His absence of facial emotions serves as an iconic symbol of strategic detachment (Hall, 1966, p. 105). (Ekman, 2003, p. 56)
03	5. Cultural Interpretation of Gestures	Richard Nixon's "V" Sign (Nixon's "V for Victory" gesture upon his resignation was comically misconstrued due to context.)	While meant as a sign of perseverance, it was viewed as detached from reality (Knapp & Hall, 2010, p. 66).
04	Open vs. Defensive Posture	Barack Obama's Relaxed Body Language (Obama's wide posture and forward-leaning attitude conveyed participation and confidence.)	This acts as an indicator of approachability (Knapp & Hall, 2010, p. 112).
05	Power Handshake as a Symbolic Sign	Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron (2017) : (Their extended and strong handshake represented a power struggle.)	The handshake is one of symbolic sign expressing power and competitive diplomacy (Peirce C. , 1931, p. 228).

Based on the table above, we can highlight key insights into body language as a communication method among politicians:

- Body language as a semiotic system: Gestures, facial expressions, and posture serve as signals that transmit deeper meanings than spoken words.
- Peirce's triadic model and Saussure's sign theory: Body language may be studied using icons, indices, and symbols, as well as the signifier-signified connection.
- Gestural communication: Hand gestures complement spoken words, heighten emotional impact, and improve argumentative effectiveness.
- Facial expressions as iconic symbols: Controlled facial expressions add strategic ambiguity, shape trust perception, and reinforce authority.

9. Study Sample :

According to the current study, which selects a specific segment of the research population due to its large size, this decision in scientific research is called the “sampling procedure”, and aims to collect a “sample” that represents the entire research population.

9.1. Definition of Purposive Sample : Purposive sample is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher intentionally selects units that are deemed most suitable for the objectives of the study. This method is especially useful when the aim is to conduct an indepth analysis of specific content, such as in studies focusing on visual discourse or semiotic analysis. It is used when not all elements of the population are of interest to the researcher, who instead selects the units that best serve the research goals particularly in qualitative studies or content analysis.” (Ben Mersli, 2005, p. 220)

The images analyzed in this study were sourced from various media outlets that depict diverse communicative events and contexts. These images were featured in articles on news websites and attracted significant attention and engagement across social media platforms. They reflect different

phases of Donald Trump's media presence, including moments from debates, press conferences, and the election campaign.

The purposive sample consists of (03) three images, considering that In qualitative research, the number of samples is generally small, not because of statistical representation, but because the aim is depth, and sampling continues until theoretical saturation is reached. (Silverman, 2013, p. 141)

9.2.Reasons for choosing Donald Trump images:

- **Symbolism of the Character:** Donald Trump is considered a controversial political figure who carries a strong symbolic load, reflecting concepts such as power, provocation, charisma, and conflict.
- **Extensive Media Presence:** His images are widely circulated across media outlets and digital platforms, reflecting the impact of visual discourse in shaping public opinion.
- **Visual Representation of Symbolic Violence:** His images embody practices of symbolic violence and dominance as explained by Pierre Bourdieu, through control over visual space and the use of the body as an instrument of authority.
- **Controversy and Trend:** These images were selected because they were featured in articles published on news websites and widely circulated on social media, where they sparked controversy due to Donald Trump's physical gestures and body movements.

10. Levels of analysis:

10.1. Denotative analysis: This initial level, which might be called "the denotative state of the image," is where the reference in the topics it represents is sufficient since the message will not be written. In this instance, the iconic picture will stand for the "zero degree of clarity in meaning," as it is far distant from the deep semantic notion and includes the components of similarity and the functional referential, direct scenic representation with its sensory and cognitive dimensions.

- **Meta data of Fig. 1**

Fig. 1: The photo was featured in an article published by Al-Arabiya CNN on January 11, 2021



Source: (News Analysis: How Trump Led the Republican Party to Historic Losses Unseen in 90 Years, 2025)

- **Denotative and connotative analysis of Fig. 1**

Table 4. Semiotic Analysis of Fig. 1 according to Roland Barthes' Approach

The number of iconic messages in the image.	Denotative Level	Connotative Level
01	Fake Smile : It is often observed that the eye muscles do not contract, indicating that the smile is merely a communicative tool rather than a genuine expression of emotion.	Gestures are employed to display excessive self-confidence, populism, and dominance over the scene.
02	Raising both thumbs	- Frequent thumb-raising is used as a message to his audience to signal that 'everything is fine,' even in the face of criticism or major challenges. - Raising both thumbs reflects a desire to assert control over the audience and to construct the image of a strong, victorious leader, even in moments of crisis. - In media coverage, these movements are sometimes framed as exaggeration or a play on power.

Meta data of Fig. 2

Fig. 2: The photo was featured in an article published by Alqahera News on January 19, 2024



Source: (Askar, 2024)

- Denotative and connotative analysis of Fig. 2

Table 5. Semiotic Analysis of Fig. 2 according to Roland Barthes' Approach

The number of iconic	Denotative Level	Connotative Level
----------------------	------------------	-------------------

messages in the image.		
01	Furrowing the eyebrows	• A facial expression that suggests anger, concentration, or annoyance. • In the case of a figure like Trump, furrowing the eyebrows does not merely indicate anger; it is read as a sign of firmness and confrontation. • This expression aligns with the image Trump seeks to project: a strong man, untouchable, and combative toward his opponents. • In media contexts, such gestures are often used to reinforce the populist narrative, in which the leader is constantly portrayed as being in conflict with “the system” or “the elites
02	Thumb gesture toward the audience	• The thumbs-up gesture directed at the audience functions as a symbolic affirmation, reinforcing a sense of connection, approval, and confidence. • For Trump, the thumbs-up gesture is not merely a spontaneous act, but a symbolic tool of visual communication: • It is used to reinforce his image as a “man of the people.” • It sends a message that says: “I’m fine, you’re fine, and together we stand against the other.” • It helps simplify political discourse and transform it into a direct, personal visual interaction. • Within the populist narrative, it is understood as a gesture of both defiance and support

-Meta data of Fig. 3

Fig. 3: The photo was featured in an article published by Aljazeera.net on November 06, 2024



Source: (Aljazeera.net, 2024)

-Denotative and connotative analysis of Fig. 3

Table 6. Semiotic Analysis of Fig. 3 according to Roland Barthes' Approach

The number of iconic messages in the image.	Denotative Level	Connotative Level
1	Thumbs-up accompanied by a broad smile.	- The thumbs-up gesture is commonly interpreted as a sign of agreement or approval essentially, a nonverbal “yes”. - The thumbs-up gesture transforms into a symbol of personal victory and dominance over the political scene, not merely an expression of approval. - It functions to reinforce the image of a strong, unshakable leader, even in moments of intense tension or challenge - Trump's thumbs-up gesture at the moment of his election victory is interpreted as a symbolic sign of political triumph. - It is used to embody strength, achievement, and to affirm an emotional, direct connection with his supporters—while implicitly framing his opponents as losers. "Trump's broad smile signifies the joy of victory while simultaneously reinforcing the symbolic message of confidence, triumph, and personal charisma."

Based on the preceding analysis, several key observations can be drawn, the most significant of which are as follows:

- An analysis of Donald Trump's body language clearly demonstrates how he uses physical gestures as a tool for influence and persuasion, which is consistent with the idea of symbolic violence and political dominance. By analyzing the connotative level of his movements and images, several key elements can be observed:

- Synchronization between body movements and speech Trump is known for coordinating his hand movements with his pronunciation of words, making his speech more clear and powerful. This strategy is particularly used when emphasizing an idea or conveying an impression of assertiveness and authority.

- Excessive and theatrical gestures Trump's movements often resemble the hyperactivity seen in young children, as he tends to use broad, exaggerated gestures, which attract the audience's attention and make his speech more visually impactful. These movements may be intentional to enhance his emotional impact on the audience.

- Interaction between hands and other body movements It is striking that Trump's hand movements are not independent of his head movements, facial expressions, and general body language, but rather complement each other to reinforce the message he is trying to convey. For example: When he raises his eyebrows and widens his eyes, this is often accompanied by a hand

gesture to emphasize surprise or sarcasm. When he leans forward and points, he wants to appear as if he is attacking or asserting control over the conversation.

- **Occupying Space to Promote Dominance** Photographs of Trump show that he prefers to use expansive body gestures, such as opening his arms or gesturing forcefully, which helps him occupy more space in the scene. This tactic gives him a stronger presence and conveys an impression of power and dominance, according to Bourdieu's analysis of symbolic violence.
- **Body Language Reinforces the "Us/Them" Dichotomy** Trump often uses polarizing body language to reinforce the binary between himself and his opponents.

10.2. Implicative analysis: At this level include "Text", "The Genius of Meaning", and "The Symbolic Context." This is mostly accomplished by returning to the intellectual concepts and different rhetorical aspects to comprehend them, as well as by bringing secondary and cultural implicative meanings to the denotative level.

a. Analysis of Dominance in Trump's Body Language Through Bourdieu's Lens: Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital, and field provides an effective framework for examining Donald Trump's body language as a tactic for establishing dominance. Trump's nonverbal communication, which includes strong gestures, hard handshakes, expansive stance, and hostile facial expressions, may be analyzed using Bourdieu's sociological notions.

- **Habitus within Embodied Dominance:** Trump's body language reflects his habits, which are formed by his history in business and media. His violent movements and exaggerated expressions reflect a pattern of competitiveness and power assertion.
- **Symbolic Capital and Power Projection:** Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital relates to power gained via social recognition.
- Trump uses his physical presence, handshakes, and interruptions as nonverbal cues to build symbolic capital and reinforce his control.
- **Field and Political Performance:** Politics is a discipline in which power struggles are expressed via language and physical conduct. Trump's strong attitude, direct pointing, and lengthy handshakes all serve as strategic tools in this arena, establishing him as an authoritative person.
- **Body Language ; a Symbolic Struggle:** His motions and postures serve as symbolic aggression, discreetly asserting dominance over opponents. This is visible in his powerful handshakes (for example, Macron), which physically demonstrate the fight for supremacy.

b. Analysis of Dominance in Trump's Body Language Through Saussure's Lens: Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, based on the signifier-signified connection and the arbitrary nature of signals, provides a useful foundation for evaluating Donald Trump's body language as a technique of domination. His motions, posture, and facial expressions serve as semiotic indicators that generate meanings about power and authority.

- **Trump's Body Language: A System of Signs:** Saussure defined signs as consisting of a signifier (physical form) and a signified (idea or meaning). Trump's broad motions, protracted handshakes, and strong stance serve as signifiers, with the signified meanings being dominance, confidence, or intimidation.
- **Symbolic Meaning of Gestures:** In Saussure's terminology, Trump's body language has a relational meaning, determined by comparison with others. His strong handshake (signifier) is

perceived as a representation of control and authority (signified), but in other settings it may reflect violence or insecurity.

- **Arbitrariness through Contextual Interpretation:** Saussure claimed that signals receive their meaning from context rather than intrinsic properties. Trump's thumbs-up gesture, for example, may indicate approbation in certain situations but arrogance in others, demonstrating how dominance is built through context-specific interpretations.
- **Binary Oppositions within Political Semiotics:** Trump's body language uses oppositions (e.g., open vs. closed stance, energetic vs. passive motions). His forward-leaning attitude contrasts with his opponent's more restrained posture, emphasizing a visual dichotomy of authority and surrender (submission) .

c. Analysis of Dominance in Trump's Body Language Through Peirce's Lens: Based on the triadic concept of the sign (icon, index, and symbol), Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory examines Donald Trump's body language as a sign of dominance, with an emphasis on gestures, posture, and facial expressions serving as semiotic markers.

- **Trump's Body Language: A Triadic Sign:**
 - **Icon (Resemblance):** Trump's severe facial expressions and forceful attitude evoke the typical picture of a powerful, authoritative character.
 - **Index (cause-and-effect relationship):** His extended handshakes, pointing movements, and forward-leaning attitude all communicate authority by physically establishing control over space and interaction.
- **Symbol (Culturally Accepted Meaning):** His thumbs-up sign, applauding, and exaggerated motions have been linked with leadership and confidence owing to their frequent usage in the media.
 - **Indexical Signs of Power Projection**
 - Trump's handshakes serve as indexical indicators of power dynamics.
 - His tight grasp and lengthy duration show an attempt to exert control over the relationship, highlighting his physical authority.
 - According to Peirce, indexical cues generate immediate connections, therefore Trump's strong body language naturally conveys authority to the audience.
- **Symbolic Significance of Gestures**
 - Trump's gestures have gradually taken on symbolic significance in political debate.
 - His thumbs-up sign, which he frequently uses in public, conveys confidence and approbation, bolstering his leadership role.
 - His exaggerated gestures and passionate motions have become cultural emblems of his political approach, so they no longer need explanation and are readily recognisable.

d. Donald Trump's Personality Analysis: A Multidimensional Perspective : Analyzing Donald Trump's personality entails looking at a variety of variables, including psychological characteristics, nonverbal communication, and behavioral patterns. This thorough approach reveals details about his leadership style and public demeanor:

Psychological Perspective through the Big Five Personality Traits: The Millon Index of Personality Styles categorizes personalities into Asserting, Controlling, and Outgoing. Ambitious personalities are bold, competitive, and self-assured, easily assuming leadership roles. Dominant

personalities are tough, unsentimental, and intimidating, while outgoing personalities are dramatic, popular, and easily bored (Aubrey & Marie Griebie, 2020, July, pp. 10-50)

- **Extraversion** : Trump has high levels of extraversion, which is characterized by boldness and passion in public encounters.
- **Agreeableness**: He scores poorly on agreeableness and frequently exhibits a competitive and combative personality.
- **Conscientiousness** : rump's approach implies weaker conscientiousness, with a preference for spontaneity and adaptability over precise planning.
- **Neuroticism** : He has poor emotional stability, with frequent outbursts of dissatisfaction and sensitive to criticism.
- **Non-Verbal Communication within Body Language Analysis**: (Aubrey & Marie Griebie, 2020, July, pp. 19-50)
- **Handshakes**: His hard and extended handshakes are frequently perceived as attempts to show authority and dominance.
- **Posture and Gestures**: Trump exudes confidence and leadership by using wide gestures and standing straight.
- **Facial Expressions**: Frequent pursing of lips and stern expressions may indicate disagreement or discomfort.
- **Behavioral Patterns as a Narcissism and Authoritarianism**: (Aubrey & Marie Griebie, 2020, July, pp. 19-50)
- **Narcissistic Traits**: such as grandiosity, a desire for praise, and a lack of empathy, have been linked to his public behavior.
- **Authoritarian tendencies**: are characterized by a predilection for concentrated power and a lack of tolerance for criticism.
- **Openness to Experience**: Trump has poor openness, favoring old techniques and being resistant to new ideas.

11. CONCLUSION

Through our qualitative analysis, we can derive several answers that we adapt to the partial questions of the study.

11.1. Results of the first sub-question:

a. According to Bourdieu's analysis, body language plays a key role in building the symbolic capital of political leaders, helping them demonstrate strength, assertiveness, and charisma, which enhances their legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

b. Politicians strategically use body language to reinforce their aura of authority. Wide gestures, firm handshakes, and a dominant body tone are all tools used to reinforce their authority. In Trump's case, his body language clearly aligns with his populist political rhetoric, making him appear confident and decisive, which contributes to strengthening his legitimacy among his supporters.

c. From a Saussurean perspective, body language can be viewed as semiotic signals reflecting dominance, as leaders' movements are politically associated with meanings of power, confidence, or even oppression.

11.2. Results Of The Second Sub-Question:

a. The dramatic or excessive body language can lead to social polarization, as some audiences may view these movements as a sign of charisma and power, while others view them as

exaggeration or a threat.

b. According to Bourdieu's analysis, this language can reinforce dominance through symbolic violence, used as a tool to consolidate control over public opinion. Psychologically, excessive theatrical movements can arouse feelings of fear, anger, or sympathy in the audience, influencing their emotional response to the leader.

c. According to Peirce's semiotics, these movements can become political symbols charged with meaning, such as the association of a firm handshake with dominance, or sharp gestures with aggression, creating a long-lasting psychological impact on the collective perception of the leader.

11.3.Results of The Third Sub-Question:

a. Saussure's analysis suggests that the semiotic meaning of bodily gestures depends on the cultural and historical context, as the same gesture can be interpreted differently depending on the society.

b. In some Western cultures, a firm handshake is considered a sign of confidence and firmness, while in other contexts it may be interpreted as aggressive or disrespectful of personal space.

c. Political body language depends on the rhetorical and historical traditions of each country, and its interpretation is influenced by inherited cultural stereotypes and symbols.

d. In Trump's case, his theatrical physical approach fits within American culture, which celebrates strong, individualistic leadership, but it may be perceived differently in other countries with more conservative political orientations.

11.4.Results of The Fourth Sub-Question:

a. Trump relies on physical gestures as a tool to control the political landscape, using gestures such as a sharp gesture, a long handshake, and a wide stance to reinforce his authority.

b. According to Bourdieu, his body language can be considered a form of symbolic violence, as he asserts his control without direct force, but rather through powerful gestures that intimidate opponents and influence the public.

c. From Peirce's perspective, his body language can be analyzed according to icons, indicators, and symbols:

- Icon: His strong facial expressions suggest a resolute leadership personality.
- Index: His long, strong handshake demonstrates his desire to assert control over diplomatic encounters.
- Symbol: His frequent use of gestures such as the thumbs-up or the finger-pointing creates political meanings associated with confidence or defiance.

d. Considering Saussure's analysis, Trump can be considered to be using the "us/them" dichotomy through body language, dividing the world between his supporters and opponents through body signals that suggest confrontation.

11.5.Results and Implications of Donald Trump's Personality Analysis: Based on the multidimensional perspective analyzing psychological traits, nonverbal communication, and behavioral patterns, the following key results emerge:

a. Trump's disposition fits well with extroverted, domineering, and aggressive attitudes. Because of his audacity, self-assurance, and extroversion, he is a powerful public personality who can inspire followers and shape political debates. While his low agreeableness and aggressive attitude lead to frequent disputes with opponents and the media, his strong extraversion and competitive spirit enable him to attract spectators. His poor conscientiousness, or tendency for

spontaneity over meticulous planning, results in unpredictable decision-making that may either inspire followers or sow political instability.

b. **Extraversion & Dominance:** Trump is best suited for high-energy situations and frequently uses forceful handshakes, dramatic facial expressions, and authoritative gestures to establish his dominance.

c. **Low Agreeableness & Competitive Nature:** He is a charismatic but divisive leader because of his combative tone and words, which polarizes people.

d. **Neuroticism & Emotional Instability:** He comes out as erratic and reactive due to his frequent outbursts and sensitivity to criticism, which damages diplomatic ties and public trust.

e. **Poor Openness to Experience:** He is resistant to change and favors conventional approaches, which results in strict decision-making that may win over conservative supporters but turn off progressive audiences.

f. **Using Nonverbal Communication as an Influential Tool:**

- Handshakes: His extended, hard handshakes, like the one he had with French President Emmanuel Macron, are employed as power plays to establish authority in meetings.

- Gestures & Posture: He comes across as powerful and aggressive due to his wide hand gestures and straight posture, which support his authoritative demeanor.

- His frequent smirks, pursed lips, and frowns convey dissatisfaction, skepticism, or defiance, which affects how he is viewed at news conferences and discussions.

g. **Support Base:** Because of his character, he is quite popular with people who value nationalism, strong leadership, and decisiveness, while alienating people who seek cooperation and diplomacy.

h. **Media and Opposition Reactions:** His combative approach guarantees continuous media attention, which is advantageous and detrimental to his political clout.

i. **Policy & Governance:** He frequently avoids typical bureaucratic procedures in favor of direct action and impetuous decision-making, which can lead to swift policy changes.

Finally, Trump's leadership style, public interactions, and political effect are shaped by his personality profile, which is characterized by dominance, extraversion, low agreeableness, and a combination of narcissistic and authoritarian inclinations. These characteristics increase his appeal and influence, but they also fuel controversy and political conflict.

12. Bibliography List :

Books

1. Al-Sawi, M., & Mubarak, M. (1992). *Scientific Research, Its Foundations and Method of Writing*. (1, Éd.) cairo: Academic Library.
2. Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.
3. Birdwhistell, R. (1970). *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
4. Ben Mersli, A. (2005). *Scientific Research Methods in Media and Communication Sciences*. Algiers: National University Publishing Office.
5. Birdwhistell, R. (1970). *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
6. Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
7. Ekman, P. (2003). *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*. New York: Henry Holt.
8. Fairclough. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman.

9. Fairclough, & Norman. (2009). *Discourse Analysis: Textual Analysis in Social*
10. Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (T. b. Sheridan, Trad.) Vintage Books.
11. Gramsc. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. (T. b. Smith, Trad.):New York: International Publishers.
12. Hall, E. (1966). *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Doubleday.
13. Knapp, M., & Hall, J. (2010). *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. Boston: Cengage Learning.
14. Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold,.
15. Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.
16. Lotman. (1990). *A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. London: I.B. Tauris: Universe of the Mind.
17. Peirce, C. (1931). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirc*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
18. Saussure, F. (1916). *Course in General Linguistics*. Paris: Payot,.
19. Saussure, F. (2011). *Course in General Linguistics*. (W. Baskin, Trad.) New York: Columbia University Press.
20. Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing Qualitative Research* (éd. 4th). London: SAGE Publications.

Journal article

1. Selg, P., & Ventsel. (2010-October). An Outline for a Semiotic Theory of Hegemony. *Semiotica*(182), 443-474.

Seminar article

1. Aubrey , I., & Marie Griebie, A. (2020, July). The Personality Profile and Leadership Style of U.S. President. *Paper presented at the 43rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the International July 14–16, 2020*. Berlin, Germany: College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University.

Internet websites:

1. Aljazeera.net. (2024, 11 6). *In pictures: Trump and Harris supporters react between joy and disappointment*. accessed on 3/ 2/ 2025, link: <https://www.aljazeera.net/gallery/2024/11/6/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A8>
2. Askar, A. A. (2024, 01 19). *Trump's finger sparks controversy, with doctors saying he has a serious illness*. accessed on 03/ 05/ 2025, link: <https://alqaheranews.net/news/64266/%D8%A5%D8%B5%D8%A8%D8%B9-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A3%D8%B7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%B5%D>
3. *News Analysis*: (2025, 04 06). *How Trump Led the Republican Party to Historic Losses Unseen in 90 Years..* (Arabic.CNN) .accessed on January 11, 2021, link: <https://arabic.cnn.com/world/article/2021/01/11/how-trump-led-republicans-to-historic-losses>.