

Donald Trump's Facial Expressions With Different Kinds Of Emotive Interpretations Before, During And After Usa's 2020 Presidential Election

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Abstract

This study examines Donald Trump's facial expressions before, during and after USA's 2020 Presidential election with different kinds of emotive meanings. The study adopts a social semiotic approach to the analysis of the data and employs a theoretical framework in visual communication drawing insights from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006), Multimodal Discourse Analysis theory. The data comprised of purposively selected Donald Trump's pictures downloaded from the internet before, during and after the USA's 2020 presidential election for the primary data. The study reveals that facial expressions are rich in meaning potential and are governed by visual grammar structures which can be utilized to decode the meanings of the different facial expressions. Sadness expressed through frowns, lowered eyes and lowered heads, are icons and represent the emotions of president Donald Trump. The analysis contributes to our understandings of the use of facial expression, gesture and posture from social semiotics field. The study concludes that the facial expression features of human faces are important to our interpersonal interactions since they suggest to us who the viewed and viewers are, whether they agree with one another or not. In addition, the study shows that the president's visual 'invitation' is a 'demand' picture with a beckoning hand and a smiling expression; while his visual 'summons', is a 'demand' picture with a beckoning hand and an unsmiling expression; and his visual 'warning', is a 'demand' picture with a raised forefinger and a stern expression; and so on.

Keywords: facial expressions, emotive meanings, gestures, visual.

Introduction

The use of facial expression, gestures and postures is done naturally without being forced or practiced and without any regular pattern or well organised patterns. The coherence of facial expression, gestures and postures arise from the acceptability and the meeting of expectations of the viewers. Facial expressions as a non-verbal language can help people to express their feelings and attitudes completely which interact with or without verbal language. The functions of the facial expressions, posture or gesture are to communicate meaning through a choice of integrated modes.

Facial expressions entice people to engage with other (or not), they work hand in hand with what people say to one another in their discussion, and they expose our emotions (or hide them) from each other. They are common and somewhat contentious-involving relations between people which reveal their communication behaviour. The

vigorous facial motion are the result of our intention for sending a certain message (e.g., showing Sadness or happiness), others messages may be sent without awareness and even, sometimes, against our will (e.g., showing the fact we wish to hide). Facial expression and postures are interrelation in disposition. People may not understand the text coexisting with a picture, but they can easily understand gestures and facial expressions. According to Forceville (2005) the iconicity of happiness and sadness represented in facial expression is indexical. Feng & O'Halloran (2012) state that the use of facial expressions to mark emotions in images can be very effective and easy for viewers to relate to. The facial expressions in this study namely; sadness expressed through frowns, lowered eyes and lowered heads are pictorial representation emotions of President Donald Trump.

Our facial movements are referred to as facial expression and they are seen primarily to be

expressions of our emotions. Ekman, (1985) identifies facial illustrators (facial cues that provide a sort of model for what is being discussed verbally), regulators (cues that help guide the pace of a conversation), emblems (symbolic and socially agreed-upon movements, such as a wink, that mean something very particular to a set of speakers) etc. Judith Hall (2006) says we have stereotypes that men smile less, gaze less, and are emotionally less expressive than women. Women laugh more, smile less authentically, they are better at recognizing faces, and better expressers overall than men.

Facial expressions can serve certain communicative functions that are in line with a more general view of what nonverbal communication means for us within our interpersonal interactions. Facial expressions are part of many interpersonal “charges”, such as providing the basis on which we may determine another person’s emotional characteristics. Our facial expressions reveal a particular group of people’s habits, beliefs, traditions and other social uniformity, suggest our attitude to and about another, and aid the smoothness of interaction through the way we use some parts of our body. Facial expressions are consistently seen as the entryway for interpersonal interactions. They help us to invite people to engage in interactions (or not), display emotions and allow us to cruise through our communication with another.

The face is where we “meet” other people. That is, we look to others’ faces and their expressions to identify and engage with them, as they do with us. (Manusov, V. 2015).

Modes other than speech are not ‘extra linguistic contextual factors’ but all modes are part of the communicative process. The effects of our social world in shaping our choices in meaning-making of visual texts can be applied to all modes and not restricted to language. All modes are potentially available for making meaning, within the constraints of our social world. The mode selected by the communicator is the one judged by them to be the most apt and expedient at that moment in time.

Communicating through Facial Expressions

The human face is significant to a considerable extent. Through facial expressions, individuals can express different sorts of feelings, without words of expression. Unlike some forms of non-verbal communication, facial expressions are universal

that is, they have general acceptable interpretations from one culture to another. This is because facial expressions for gladness, sorrow, fury, fear, tension, agitation, concern, worry and amazement are the same for all the individuals, either rich or poor, young or old, educated or illiterate and irrespective of their categories and backgrounds. Our facial expression can be regarded as different feelings or dispositions of the muscles beneath the skin of human faces. Facial expressions are regarded as the form of non-verbal communication modes of getting messages across to the target audience. They are regarded as the primary means of conveying information among individuals. Apart from human beings, animal species also have different forms of facial expressions and they also communicate through them. The individuals usually form their facial expressions depending upon the situations that they find themselves. It is necessary for all individuals to generate information in terms of aspects that need to be implemented to control one’s facial expressions. These are, ensuring that the face is relaxed and neutral, one should not possess any kinds of ill feelings against anybody, one should form positive thinking and a constructive approach towards life, when one is serious, one should not frown, learn to control the feelings of anger and frustration, possess an approachable nature, obtain feedback from others regarding facial expressions, reinforce positive aspects and eliminate limitations and negative aspects, implement agreeable attitude and put into practice the traits that are necessary to have normal facial expressions on a regular basis. The implication here is that when the individuals learn to control facial expressions, they will be able to communicate effectively.

Communication is the operation of broadcasting information to other people and we communicate with other people by employing varied communicative tools. Apart from language, many other tools such as gestures, facial expressions, sounds are often used as communicative tools. In order to integrate modalities in our communication, the tight link between language and facial expressions is unnecessary.

Communicative facial expression refers to when we communicate with other people in a private occasion or informal situation and the usage of facial expression may be natural and casual. Kress, (2010) explains that at times, communication is a response to a ‘prompt’: a gaze might produce a spoken comment that leads to an action. All modes in texts are potentially available for making meaning, within the constraints of our social world.

So, the different kinds of modes in texts are part of the communicative process. In visual communication, images, apart from being aesthetic and expressive, have the structured social, political and communicative dimensions (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). They further assert that images are used to do things to or for people. In other words, represented images can be used to show or express certain processes of interactions or social relations within a particular visual space. The 'gaze', 'gesture', 'type face', facial expression', 'lay-out' etc. are the illocutionary force or communicative functions that are used to negotiate communicative acts in visual communication.

Kress and Leeuwen (1996) believe that images can also either make an 'offer' or make a 'demand'. While in the English language, offer and demand are realized linguistically; in images, they are realized by the gaze system. Modes such as gesture, gaze or facial expressions and posture are viewed as additional contextual information about a particular text. This study examines the nature of Donald Trump's facial behaviour expressions before and after USA's 2020 presidential election.

Theoretical Framework

To arrive at an accurate and meaningful analysis of the data, insights was drawn from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006). It is very important and necessary to highlight and review the theoretical framework.

Speech Acts, Gaze and Facial Expressions

Kress and van Leeuwen extend Halliday's (1985) definition of 'speech functions', or, 'speech acts', beyond the domain of language alone. They argue that these speech acts can be realised in the direction of the gaze of the figure in an image. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) assert that 'the offering of information, or goods and services' and 'the demand of information, or goods and services' are realised by the indirect and direct gaze of the figures respectively. The direction of the gaze of the figures in the image, whether at the viewer, upwards, downwards will define the interactive relationship with the viewer, for example, direct gaze gives power to the figure to address the viewer, therefore, as with verbal interaction; a response is required. In cases where there is no eye contact with the viewer, the image is offered to the viewer as information, not for scrutiny and analysis. In a sense we can say that the viewer is directed to think about the information given or the message in a variety of different ways

according to the type of 'interactional' exchange the gaze initiates with them. Kress and van Leeuwen assert that images have the potential to extend their semantic reach into areas occupied by language, but they also emphasise that speech acts in images do not work in exactly the same way as they do in language. van Leeuwen (2005) refers to the potential of images to be studied as multimodal communicative acts saying that the nature of 'offers' and 'demands' come through a '...combination of different visual and contextual features, just as in the case of the speech act' (2005, P.120). Analysing the communicative potential of an image as an interaction rather than a representation necessarily involves interpreting the pose a figure adopts. As Kress and van Leeuwen point out: A visual 'invitation' is a 'demand' picture with a beckoning hand and a smiling expression; while a visual 'summons', is a 'demand' picture with a beckoning hand and an unsmiling expression; and a visual 'warning', is a 'demand' picture with a raised forefinger and a stern expression; and so on. (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006 P.123).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argue that there are two kinds of meaning potential that work as systematic semiotic principles. One is provenance, where the sign comes from; the other is experiential meaning, what people do with this sign. Both are relevant to the picturing of facts. We may take a picture as fact because it comes from a scientific laboratory, or a teacher, or a news photographer or people may make a picture a fact in the way they use it, to fabricate a regulator, to represent a series of experiments in the most telling way, to recall terms for an examination.

Greg Myer (2015) also view pictures as an approach that looks at visual practices, not just coded images, challenges some common misconceptions about the relations between words and pictures:

- that pictures have a grammar, like language, that can allow meanings to be read off,
- that pictures are more factual than words,
- that pictures are associated with play, or aesthetic pleasure, or younger readers, or less serious readers, and words are for information,
- that pictures (especially photographs) refer in an objective way to what is there,
- that visual culture is inherently postmodern, while print culture is inherently modern,
- that visual culture arises from new technologies like the World Wide Web or third generation mobile phones.

In one set of practices (television documentaries) metaphorical and everyday images may be a way of luring less committed viewers into engagement with difficult abstract concepts, while in another set of practices (preparing an article for publication) the images may be the data, and a particularly striking image may be reproduced as support for a claim.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research method which is qualitative data analysis in nature. The qualitative method allows for flexibility and enables the researcher to cover a wide number in order to obtain a general overview from the sample. The study relies on Donald Trump's pictures downloaded from the internet before, during and after the USA's 2020 presidential election for the primary data. Books, articles and scholarly writings on multimodal discourse served as sources of secondary data for the study.

The pictures/images were analysed using Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) MDA.

The various modes brought to the fore, the messages of the different facial expressions of President Donald Trump's pictures in the data.

Analysis, Results, Findings and Discussion of Findings

Excerpt 1 and 2 below reveal visual configuration that create a visual form of direct address. They also acknowledge the viewers explicitly, addressing them with a visual 'you'. The implication of this is that the president here is given a direct address to the viewers. The viewers here will respond to the instructions given to them since it is a direct address to them. The way the president raises his hand in excerpt 1 and holds the newspaper in excerpt 2, the facial expressions in the two excerpts expressed the fact that he is serious about the issue raised.



Excerpt 1



Excerpt 2

In addition, the pictures on the newspaper in excerpt 2 reveals factual information that the president has been acquitted from a particular case. The facial expressions of the president with the caption on excerpt 2 shows that the president is demanding that the viewers should behold and reason along with him on what has just happened to him and it also emphasises on the factual information that he has been set free from any kind of offence(s) that has been charged against him before now.

Besides, as the president looks at the viewer, vectors, formed by his eye lines, connect him with the viewers and contact is established. In addition, there may be a further vector, formed by the gesture and facial expressions in the same direction, as seen in the two pictures are for the reason that we can call a kind of image of 'demand', according to Halliday (1985). The president's gaze (facial expression and the gesture) demands something from the viewer, demand that the viewer's enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him.



Excerpt 3



Excerpt 4

In excerpts 3 and 4 above, the smile of the president here shows that he wants the viewers to have the same believe that he will certainly win the election and he is asking the viewers to enter into a

relation of social affinity with him. There is a kind of sure hope on his face that whatever happens there is hope for him. Also, the visual demand in president Donald Trump's facial expression here is an invitation and a summon to the voters and the general populace to believe in him and accept him for second time in office as their elected president.



Excerpt 5



Excerpt 9

The president in excerpt 5 and 9 stares at the viewers with cold disdain, in which case the viewers are asked to relate with him, perhaps, as an inferior relates to a superior. Meaning that he still holds the power and authority and they have to follow or obey his orders and instructions. In addition, his facial expression picture here is with a stern expression which demands for warning in a way. That is, he is trying to warn his opponent Joe Biden and others not to dare him in any way.



Excerpt 6

Observing excerpt 6 critically shows that the president seductively points at the viewers, in which case the viewers are asked to desire him and not any other person as there next president. The same applies to his facial expression and his gesture in the pictures. The hand pointing at the

viewers, in this picture means: 'Hey, you there, I mean you', or invite the viewers to come closer, or hold the viewers at bay with a defensive gesture. Apart from this, his demand in this picture is a kind of warning to the viewers with a raised forefinger and a stern expression, this also reflects in his facial expression apart from the hand raised.



Excerpt 7

The facial expressions above in excerpt 7 indicates, 'Stay away from me'. In each case the pictures want something from the viewers – wants them to do something (come closer or stay at a distance) or to form a pseudo-social bond of a particular kind with him. One can also infer that the president is trying to say that all hope seems lost with the results of the election released at that point in time. Furthermore, picture defines to some extent who the viewers are. (e.g. the voters, contestants, winner or loser, male, female, young, old, inferior to him etc.).



Excerpt 8



Excerpt 9

In excerpts 8 and 9 above, President Donald Trump's facial expression and raising of his hand shows he had finally admitted defeat after the election and agreed to leave the white house for Joe

Biden to come in as the new elected president of USA after 2020 general election. His waves of hands show that he is vacating the White House for newly elected candidate to come in and continue from where he stopped.



Excerpt 10



Excerpt 11



Excerpt 12

Excerpts 10, 11 and 12 show that facial expression is a crucial element in the meaning making. In excerpt 12, his facial expression while giving his farewell speech, one can easily deduced that his feelings were bad, that if it is possible or if he had his way he will not leave the White House nor the post. This reflects in his gloomy, cold, dull and sorrowful expression on his face.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the president’s facial expression has the power to draw the viewer into an imaginary relationship with himself, his eyes

are capable of transmitting messages to the viewer which reveals the intention of the viewers if they will be compelled to act accordingly or do otherwise. The study reveals that facial expressions are rich in meaning potential and are governed by visual grammar structures which can be utilized to decode the meanings of the different facial expressions. Sadness expressed through frowns, lowered eyes and lowered heads, are icons and represent the emotions of president Donald Trump. The study concludes that the facial expression features of human faces are important to our interpersonal interactions since they suggest to us who the viewed and viewers are, whether they agree with one another or not. The study shows that the relationship between President Donald Trump and the viewers. The relationship is not one of equality; the president has dominance over the viewer. In which case, the viewers were able to interpret the message being transmitted by him as subordinate responds to a superior.

In addition, the study shows that the President’s visual ‘invitation’ is a ‘demand’ picture with a beckoning hand and a smiling expression; while his visual ‘summons’, is a ‘demand’ picture with a beckoning hand and an unsmiling expression; and his visual ‘warning’, is a ‘demand’ picture with a raised forefinger and a stern expression; and so on.

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