Climate Change under the Context of Neoliberalism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Leaders’ Speeches on the Paris Agreement.

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Abstract. The aims of the Paris Agreement are against the threat of climate change. On 1st June 2017, American President Donald Trump made a speech show his stance on the Paris Agreement. On 4th November, America officially announced the process of withdrawal from the agreement had begun. It raised attentions globally. Political leaders, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Former- Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Former- British Prime Minister Theresa May, Chinese leader Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron responded to the actions of the withdrawal action of the United States. This research examines the political leaders’ speeches to explore the embedded ideology and rationality towards the Paris Agreement under the context of neoliberalism.

Keywords: Paris agreement, Climate change, Carbon reduction.

1. Introduction

On 4th November, 2019, Mike Pompeo, Secretary of the United States, announced that ‘the United States began the process to withdraw from the Paris Agreement’[1] . According to the agreement, the notice of withdrawal has to be three years after the date into force, 4th November, 2016. It means that America gave the notice of withdrawal on ‘the first day’ that is allowed to do. In fact, while Donald Trump ran for the 2016 presidential campaign, He
promised to withdraw from the agreement. After being elected, he made a speech in Rose Garden on 1st June, 2017 and announced to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. It is reported that after Trump’s speech, ‘the decision to get out of Paris has proved to be wildly popular with the entire range of Trump supporters’ [1]. However, Trump’s withdrawal decision is criticized or judged by many political leaders [2] [3]. This research reviews the concepts of the Paris Agreement, climate change and neoliberalism and conducts critical discourse analysis as an approach and method to study the ideology and rationality that political leaders stand on.

2. The Paris Agreement, Climate Change and Neoliberalism

2.1 The Paris Agreement

On 12 December 2015, at COP 21 in Paris, the Paris Agreement is built against global climate change. The aims of the Paris Agreement connect the global against the threat of climate change for maintaining the global temperature rise below 2 degree Celsius this century and then achieving 1.5 degree Celsius [4].

It is argued that whether the Paris Agreement is the specific ‘determined contribution’ of states or states may pledge their plans may occur the issues of ‘responsibility’ or ‘capability’ of states [5]. Furthermore, the finance ‘responsibility’ or ‘capability’ of the Paris Agreement is concerned due to increasing fund through 2025 based on the commitment previously made. It is doubted that ‘there is no enforcement mechanism to assure compliance’ [5]. Due to ‘no enforcement mechanism’, the practice of the Paris Agreement may encounter diverse situations depending on the stances of different nations.

2.2 Climate change

It is argued that ‘climate change is eroding and reversing development gains and exacerbating gender inequality and social and economic injustices across the world’. Five key demands are stressed; for example, governments are asked for achieving the 1.5 degree Celsius limit, promoting sustainable agriculture, addressing impacts of climate change, and respecting equality in climate action [6].

Research shows that the opinions of Americans on climate change are diverse and changing [7][8][9] [10][11]. Compared with Former-Vice President Gore and Former President Obama stressed the threat of climate change and asked Americans for fighting against global warming [12], President Trump has different stance on climate change, especially ‘rolled-back dozens of environmental regulations’, including climate change ones [11]. The deregulation approach that Trump adopts may refer to the rationality of neoliberalism.

2.3 Neoliberalism
Neoliberalism may characterize the roles of states and private sectors [13]. Due to deregulation and privatization are stressed in neoliberal era. The notion of ‘public good’ and ‘public sector’ is declined; instead, the notion of ‘private sector’, individual role and responsibility is stressed [12]. It is argued that neoliberal ‘market-based approaches to environmental governance’ stresses the role of private sectors and individuals [5]. As Giroux indicates, ‘market- driven’ ideology applied in a neoliberal context, and the idea of ‘public values and the public good’ is disdained [12][14]. Under the influence of neoliberalism, ‘government playing a role in the protection and preservation of nature’ is ‘rejected’ [12].

According to Bourdieu, neoliberalism may destroy ‘collective structures which may impede the pure market logic’ [5][15]. Nonetheless, it is argued that the ‘libertarian principle of justice’ is to share responsibility to ‘all actors’ rather than polluters. The so-called ‘responsibilization’ process is to ‘fill the moral gap “left behind by the retreat of the neoliberal state from assuming its socio-moral duties”’ [5][16]. It is indicated that ‘libertarian ideology’ may share the responsibility to all; on the contrary, ‘neoliberal ideology’ may defy the ‘socio-moral, collective duties’.

3. Critical Discourse Analysis as Approach and Method

Discourse is a way of interpretation to understand the world [17]. It is a ‘general idea that language is structured’ in accordance with ‘different domains of social life’ [18]. The analysis of discourse draws attention to the relations between discourse and power [17][19]. Jørgensen and Phillips state that ‘discourse analysis as theory and method’ is lean to the philosophical stance of ‘social constructionism’ and the concepts of ‘power’ and ideology are in an account [18].

Discourse analysis provides coherent meanings relating to the representation of language or system [20]. As van Dijk mentions, discourse analysis ‘systematically’ illustrates ‘the various structures and strategies of text or talk, and relate this to the social or political context’ [21]. Nonetheless, critical discourse analysts, such as van Dijk and Fairclough, link discourse to ‘power and social interests’. More specifically, ideology embedded in is concerned [22]. For van Dijk, ‘many ideologies develop precisely in order to sustain, legitimate or manage group conflicts, as well as relationships of power and dominance’ [23]. Although van Dijk’s ideological square, as a critical discourse approach, may apply to examine the emphasis of our good/ their bad actions or mitigation of our bad/their good ones, it is concerned that under some circumstance, ‘contradiction’ and ‘variation’ may not be explained [22]. It is criticized that van Dijk’s approach is more ‘text-based’ and ‘potential meanings’ may not be identified [22]. Therefore, Philo adopts the combination of thematic analysis, Fairclough’s approach and van Dijk’s ideology square to analyze texts [22].

According to Fairclough, ‘an analytical framework for CDA’ includes five stages. The first is to start from a ‘social problem’ rather than a ‘research question’. The second is to identify
the core issues embedded in the social problem with ‘structural’, ‘interactional’, ‘interdiscursive’, ‘linguistic and semiotic’ analysis to understand how the problem is rooted in the society. The third is to indicate the relations between the beneficial ones and the problems. The fourth stage is to identify the possible change of the problem in the society. The final stage is ‘reflection’ on the problem [24]. Furthermore, three levels of analysis are text (micro-scale), discursive analysis (meso-scale), and social practice (macro-scale), including ‘linguistic structure’, ‘consumption of the text’ and reconstructing discourse with social change. Due to the main purpose of CDA is to explore the relations between language and social practice, social and cultural theory is suggested [17][18]. Fairclough specifically points out the problem connecting with ‘globalization and democracy’[24] and the problem in the society under the influence of neoliberalism. The ‘negative effect of neo-liberal globalization’ is shown and ‘neo-liberal order’ is widely accepted [24]. This research adopts Fairclough’s approach and van Dijk’s ideology square to analyze political leaders’ speeches to understand the ideology, power relations, and social practice.

4. The Political Leaders’ Speeches

President Trump made a speech about the Paris Agreement at Rose Garden on 1st June, 2017. His speech may be seen as the stance of America towards the agreement. On 4th November, 2019, America formally noticed to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Political leaders, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Former- Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Former- British Prime Minister Theresa May, made speeches to respond. On 6th November 2019, Chinese leader Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron united for supporting the Paris Agreement [2]. The research examines the political leaders’ speeches to explore the embedded ideology and rationality under the context of neoliberalism.

In a synthesis report from Schramek and Harmeling, the United States of America is portrayed as ‘inadequate ambition’ after President Trump announcing a withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. It urges Americans to fight against Trump’s decision due to the reason that the Paris agreement is against the threat of climate change [6]. However, Trump’s advocation of withdrawal from the Paris Agreement gained supports from most Trump’s supports [1]. This research found that Trump’s speech uses diverse approaches to convince Americans with different aspect. First, it is argued that Trump’s speech distinguishes between ‘we and they’, and connects ‘me’ with ‘us’. In Trump’s speech, the contrast between ‘we’ and ‘they’ are adopted. For example:

“The rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris Agreement — they went wild; they were so happy — for the simple reason that it put our country, the United States of America, which we all love, at a very, very big economic disadvantage’ (Trump 2019)[34].
‘So we can’t build the plants, but they can, according to this agreement’ (Trump 2019)[34].

Trump uses ‘we’ to refer to ‘Americans as a whole’; meanwhile, he points out ‘they’ referring to ‘the rest of the world’. Furthermore, ‘we all love’ America, but ‘they’, ‘the rest of the world’, make America’s economy in disadvantage. According to van Dijk, ideology is applied to legitimize the specific stance; furthermore, ideology square stresses our good and their bad actions [23]. In Trump’s speech, our good action is to ‘love’ America; on the contrary, the bad action from ‘the rest of the world’ is to disadvantage American economy. Trump also points out that the Paris Agreement hurts the economy of the United States. It portrays ‘the Paris Agreement’ as bad action. For example:

‘The Paris Agreement handicaps the United States economy in order to win praise from the very foreign capitals and global activists that have long sought to gain wealth at our country’s expense. They don’t put America first. I do, and I always will’ (Trump 2019)[34].

‘This includes 440,000 fewer manufacturing jobs — not what we need — believe me, this is not what we need’ (Trump 2019)[34].

It is indicated that Trump connects the Paris Agreement with ‘foreign capitals’ and ‘global activists’ as ‘they’. Meanwhile, Trump connects ‘I’ with ‘we’. As van Dijk’s ideology square mentions, ‘functional moves’ may apply for the development of ideology [23]. Trump especially uses ‘they don’t put America first. I do, and I always will’ to illustrate that comparing with ‘the Paris Agreement’, ‘foreign capitals’ and ‘global activists’, ‘I’ as a member of ‘we’ place America first, and will always do. Trump develops the ideology that Trump, as one of us, loves America and places America first. Therefore, Trump convinces supporters that in order to fight against the bad action from others, it is necessary that Americans ‘believe’ Trump.

Second, it is argued that Trump’s speech is embedded with ‘market-oriented rationality’ under the context of neoliberalism. The language that Trump uses is influenced by the ideology of neoliberalism. As Fairclough suggests, the ‘relating’, ‘representing’, ‘identifying’ and ‘valuing’ of words are worthy of studying and stresses that ‘neo-liberal’ order is widely used [24]. Indeed, Trump uses ‘neoliberal language’ to deliver his concepts. For instance:

As President, I can put no other consideration before the wellbeing of American citizens. The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving American workers — who I love — and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production (Trump 2019)[34].
American family will suffer the consequences in the form of lost jobs and a very diminished quality of life (Trump 2019)[34].

And yet, under the Paris Accord, billions of dollars that ought to be invested right here in America will be sent to the very countries that have taken our factories and our jobs away from us (Trump 2019)[34].

Trump mentions that American taxpayers have to ‘absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production’. Furthermore, Trump indicates that Americans may suffer from ‘lost jobs and a very diminished quality of life’ due to the Paris Agreement may take away ‘our factories and our jobs’. According to Lin, ‘the embedded market-oriented rationality is the approach adopted by a neoliberal government to influence organisations or individual’ [25]. It is indicated that the government makes an influence via the ‘values and orientations of the market’[26]. Trump specifically mentions the possibility of ‘lost job’ and stresses the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is for the ‘wellbeing of American citizens’. The ideology of ‘market-oriented rationality’ is delivered via Trump’s speech against the Paris Agreement.

Third, it is argued that Trump’s speech adopts the neoliberal concept, risk and responsibility. As Lin mentions, the empirical phenomenon of neoliberalism is to shift the ‘risk and responsibility to individuals [25], from ‘governments’ and ‘collective bodies’ to ‘individuals’ [27]. In Trump’s speech, risk and responsibility under the context of neoliberalism is illustrated as follows:

As President, I have one obligation, and that obligation is to the American people. The Paris Accord would undermine our economy, hamstring our workers, weaken our sovereignty, impose unacceptable legal risks, and put us at a permanent disadvantage to the other countries of the world (Trump 2019)[34].

No responsible leader can put the workers — and the people — of their country at this debilitating and tremendous disadvantage (Trump 2019)[34].

Due to the influence of neoliberal ideology, the risk transferring to individuals is mentioned as ‘[t]he Paris Accord…impose unacceptable legal risks…put us at a permanent disadvantage’. Trump points out that risk or disadvantage may be imposed on individuals. Meanwhile, as Dixon [27] stresses, individuals are ‘self-managed’ and responsible for their risks. In Trump’s speech, ‘I have one obligation’ and ‘responsible’ are mentioned, and it illustrates neoliberal concept, risk and responsibility, embedded in Trump’s ideology.

Finally, it is argued that Trump’s speech uses neoliberal ideology to convince individuals the reason of the withdrawal. It is indicated that under the context of neoliberalism, individuals pursue ‘the maximization of their own happiness’ [28] because of the influence of ‘ethics of the self’ [28][29]. Neoliberal rationality is presented in Trump’s speech. For instance:
Thus, as of today, the United States will cease all implementation of the non-binding Paris Accord and the draconian financial and economic burdens the agreement imposes on our country (Trump 2019)[34]. Foreign leaders in Europe, Asia, and across the world should not have more to say with respect to the U.S. economy than our own citizens and their elected representatives. Thus, our withdrawal from the agreement represents a reassertion of America’s sovereignty (Trump 2019)[34].

According to Lin, neoliberal rationality may influence individuals to ‘quit’ from the governmentality [25]. This may explain that the decision-making of Trump, such as ‘non-binding Paris Accord’ and ‘withdrawal from the Agreement’, is based on neoliberal rationality.

After the date, 4th November, 2019, the United States formally noticed to withdraw from the Paris Agreement. Political leaders from the UK, German, Australia, France and China responded to the withdrawal [2][3]. First, it is argued that the speeches of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Former-Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, China Leader Xi Jinping, and France President Macron stress the differences between ‘we and they’, ‘our good’ and ‘their bad action’. For example:

*His* announcement today, from our point of view is disappointing but not at all surprise (Turnbull 2019)[3].

The decision of the United States to pull out of the Paris Agreement is utterly regrettable and that is me choosing very restrained language (Angela Merkel 2019)[3].

We advocate for openness, inclusion and for mutually beneficial cooperation, and are opposed to protectionism and a zero-sum game (Xi 2019)[2].

We are against the attempt to place national interests above the common interests of humanity (Xi 2019)[2].

*I* deplore the choices made by some others, but I want to see them as marginal choices, because when China, the European Union, Russia, which ratified the Paris Agreements a few weeks ago, engage with firmness, the isolated choice of one or another is not enough to change the course of the world, it will only lead to them being edged out marginalisation. (Macron 2019)[2].

The political leaders’ speeches use ‘our point of view’, ‘we’, ‘I’, and ‘China, the European Union, Russia’ to illustrate ‘us’; ‘some others’ is adopted to portray ‘them’. According to van Dijk, ideology square stresses our good and their bad actions [23]. In order to illustrate Trump’s decision as the bad action, ‘his announcement’, ‘pull out of the Paris Agreement’, ‘protectionism and a zero-sum game’ and ‘the isolated choice of one or another’ are mentioned by the political leaders.
Second, it is argued that compared with Trump using ‘a higher level of discursive language’, Former-British Prime Minister Theresa May adopts ‘a lower level of discursive language’. For example:

I spoke to President Trump again last night. I made it clear that the U.K. would have wanted the United States to stay within the Paris agreement and we continue to support Paris Agreement (Theresa May 2019)[3].

May uses ‘we continue to support’ and want ‘the United States to stay’. According to Jørgensen and Phillips, ‘a high level of interdiscursivity’ is applied for higher possibility of ‘change’. In contrast, ‘a lower level of interdiscursivity’ is for reproducing ‘the established order.’ [18]. Compared with Trump urging to change, May looks for the original order. Furthermore, as Bourdieu stresses, neoliberalism may destroy ‘collective structures which may impede the pure market logic’[5][15]. Trump applied neoliberal ideology for the withdrawal of the Paris Agreement; on the contrary, May asks the United States for staying in the ‘collective structure’, which may be destroyed due to the neoliberal rationality embedded in Trump’s action and speech.

5. Conclusion
The research examines the political leaders’ speeches towards the Paris Agreement. First, the distinguishes between ‘we and they’ and ‘our good actions and their bad actions’ are adopted to differentiate our stances from their stances. Second, ‘market-oriented rationality’ under the context of neoliberalism is embedded in. It is indicated that neoliberal ideology is adopted by Trump’s speech, and neoliberal market-rationality may damage the Paris Agreement as ‘collective structure’. Third, the neoliberal concept, such as ‘risk and responsibility’, stresses the issues that the agreement may cause the risk or disadvantage of Americans. Fourth, Trump convinces Americans to withdraw or quit from the Paris Agreement via the influence of ‘ethics of the self’. Compared with Trump, it is indicated that the political leaders with different aspects from Trump may also use ‘we and they’ and ‘our good actions and their bad actions’ to disagree with Trump’s decision. Furthermore, ‘a lower level of interdiscursivity’ is adopted for maintaining ‘the established order’; on the contrary, President Trump uses ‘a higher level of interdiscursivity’ for ‘change’. The political leaders with different stances on the Paris Agreement influence the speeches they made embedded specific ideology. In order to advocate for the withdrawal from the agreement against global climate change, Trump’s speech is embedded with neoliberal ideology and rationality for leaving the issue of climate change behind. It is indicated that the notion of pursuing the Paris Agreement against the threat of climate change is influenced under the context of neoliberalism.

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