



The Imperatives of Postmodernism and the Problematic of Assessing the Agency and Discourses of Donald Trump

Amadi F^{1*}, Konkwo D² and Johnson UU³

¹Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Management Sciences, Rivers State University Port, Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

²Department of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

³Department of Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: Amadi F, Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Management Sciences, Rivers State University Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, Tel: 0703808788; E-mail: amadi.azubuike01@ust.edu.ng

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Abstract

We, in this paper, interpreted postmodernism articulations which hold as ingenious, unconventional discourses of leaders, politicians, researchers and other social agents. With a convenient sample of five Trump's utterances out of so many utterances that his critics consider uncouth, we conducted a critical discourse analysis. Our analysis succeeded in demonstrating how accusations of fake news arise when remarks meant to be fictional, metaphorical, literal or non-serious are reported as serious literal remarks. We also discussed the analytic resources which analysts need in their analysis if they are to avoid the mistake of misreading the unusual discursive practices that come from agents like President Donald Trump. In the light of a raft of postmodernism articulations that promote the extraordinary as ultimately desirable in the contemporary world, we assess the uncommon discourses and discursive practices of President Trump as deserving empathetic consideration instead of uninformed condemnation.

Keywords: Postmodernism; Discourses; Agency; Fictional and metaphorical utterances

Introduction

This paper premises our belief that postmodernism articulations on freedom and human agency are heuristic resources for analyzing a convenient sample of Donald Trump's utterances – especially the utterances that trigger allegations of lying against the President. The analysis is done from a standpoint where discourse is not only understood as “what is said and that which constrains or enables what can be said,” but as “institutionalized rules that govern how certain topics can be meaningfully talked about” [1,2]. The objective of the analysis is to advance the ongoing conversation about the

discourses of President Donald Trump. The effort to advance the conversation is designed to touch on how the choice of words used by a politician and the choice of words used by lay critics to respond to the politician's utterances may, for instance, belong to neither the politician nor lay critics but to something else that both the politician and lay critics may not even be aware of. This essay also aims to identify contexts where remarks which, at a first glance, may seem to be a lie might turn out to be something else.

It is obvious that before the emergence of Donald Trump as the President of the United States, past American presidents and political leaders in other parts of the world had been discharging the functions of presidency and political leadership in ways shorn of Donald Trump's extraordinary discourses and discursive practices. To many postmodern and post structural analysts, the non-emergence in the United States and other parts of the world of presidents and political leaders who discharged their political functions without exhibiting Trump-like behavior could be explained as resulting from the embrace, by such political leaders, of the ethics of “political correctness” [3]. When politicians and presidents are hamstrung by the ethics of political correctness (PC) such politicians and presidents are seen as being afraid of minute controversies on “etiquette and protocol” [3]. Politically-correct or “party-line” politicians and presidents are often in dread of the “thought police” [3]. Politicians who dread the thought police (TP) are forced into an entangled political existence. In addition to lacking “independent self-contained existence” [4] as cited in [5], an entangled politician also lacks “freedom” as conceptualized by Keenan [6]. Freedom as explained by Keenan is possible “only when the subject is not taken for granted or when the subject is not given in advance.”

Butler's [7] explanation of an entangled or a politically-correct president is instructive. Butler uses the concept of “essentialist humanist individual” to describe any individual, politician or even a researcher who is always alert and ready to submit to ‘sacred’ ground-rules and conventions that must not be transcended or spoken against. Butler annotates that

anybody who allows him or herself to be so grounded could be viewed as “buried” or as a person who refuses alterity, who rejects contestation or as a person who declines the call for the self-transformation that is perpetually posed by democratic life” [7]. St. Pierre’s [5] stance on Butler’s point is that an essentialist humanist individual cannot be free, and as a result cannot initiate change or transformation because his/her foundational, organizing essence must stay the same throughout time and across all occasions of living. What the foregoing accentuates is the question of the character-traits that a twenty-first century postmodernist political leader or president should possess in democracies where the democratization process must be seen as an “ongoing process that is subject to redefinitions” [8]. In other words, the question that the ideals of a politically-correct politician raises in this (post)modernist/structural/humanist twenty-first century world is whether a politician should remain an entangled politically-correct politician in order to appease the whims of the thought police or whether a postmodern twenty-first century politician should be free to actualize their agency by means of exhibiting the extraordinary in their political discourse?

Postmodernism, President Donald Trump and His Agency

St. Pierre [5] might have considered it a strategy to avoid the complexity that is incidental to explaining the concept of postmodernism when she cited Rajchman [9] to note that postmodernism “announces a radical break with the humanist, modernist, imperialist, objectivist, rationalist, epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions of Western enlightenment thought and practices.” In a similar vein, St. Pierre cites Flax [10] to explain postmodernism discourses as all the deconstructive efforts that seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning “truth, knowledge, power, the self and language that are often taken for granted within contemporary Western Culture.” One concept that the deconstructive effort of postmodernism promotes is the concept of agency.

In postmodernism thought, the worth of humans is determined by the actions and inactions that define their agency. Agency in postmodernism promotes the idea of an individual who, by taking a non-conformist path, triggers change in social practices [11]. Agency is a call on individuals, researchers, politicians and so forth to be worthy of their freedom by asserting themselves without seeking approval from patrons. Agency promotes the kind of freedom that resides in our “ability not to repeat ourselves but to embrace subversive repetition, to refuse being identical” and to realize that the “agency of an individual must be constructed within everyday living at such junctures where discourse is renewed” [7].

When from political obscurity, Donald Trump burst upon the United States’ political scene with motley of extraordinary remarks, discursive practices and grimaces, such mannerisms do not only define Trump’s agency but make him look as if he

is on a mission not only to fulfill the basic tenets of postmodernism but to renew the junctures of American political discourse. Deliberately or otherwise, Trump’s discursive practices have, from the onset of his political adventure, remained a composite of the extraordinary. To his “essentialist humanist” traducers [5] who gloat as headlines remained filled with allegations of uncouth utterances against Donald Trump, a continuous flow of unprecedented discursive practices from Trump makes it look as if Trump’s overriding interest is the actualization of his initial campaign pledge in which he had enthused that this campaign “wasn’t going to be a campaign on niceness”. Chief among the utterances that sustain the allegation of uncouth utterances against Trump include among others Trump’s “crooked Hillary” mantra, his swipe at Senator McCain’s war services in which Trump suggested that anyone who was taken a prisoner in a battle during a war does not deserve the “war veteran” compliment [12]. Trump also played into the hands of his traducers when it was alleged that he did not only brag about earning millions of dollars each year while never paying income tax but was alleged to have made a gesture suggesting that he was mocking a physically challenged journalist – Serge Kovalski, Arkin [13,14]. Apart from his tweet on “who can figure out the true meaning of corfefe,” other Donald Trump’s utterances that rile his critics include the comment ‘you could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever’ [15]. These comments and many others remain the analytic resource that lay critics often pounce on in ways that betray their analytic incompetence. Incompetence in analyzing remarks, whether Trump’s or not, is betrayed when analysts perform analyses without incorporating verifiable theoretical linguistic operators into the analytic effort. When lay critics impose upon themselves the task of analyzing comments without verifiable operators, they only end up with an impoverished contraption that is devoid of credible intuition. An analysis that is devoid of credible intuition is always marred by lack of supportive touchstones. When somebody makes claims about a speech without supportive touchstone, the person by the absence of such touchstones betrays ignorance of the fact that the texts produced in the world make the world imperfect to the extent that the only measure to remedy such imperfection resides in a style of analysis that is grounded in verifiable evidence [16]. Making groundless comments about a speech also betrays the ignorance that speeches are the same thing as rhetoric where rhetoric is seen as a “mode of altering reality, not by direct application of energy to objects but by the creation of discourses that change reality through the mediation of thought and action” [17]. While lay critics hardly reckon with Bitzer’s views, a knowledgeable critical discourse analyst performs criticism in ways that reflect the two broad perspectives outlined by Kuypers [18]. The two perspectives include the quest to:

- Promote greater appreciation and understanding.
- Present one possible interpretation and judgment that may, in turn, become the basis for other interpretations and judgments.

The relevance of Kuypers’ view is heightened upon the realization that there is a possibility that when one

interpretation about an utterance spouts others, such chain reaction may uncover many insights of the original remark in a way that might help future speech makers and their audiences to appreciate the nuances of the remarks. It is only when an utterance receives verifiable interpretation of critical analysts that the generation of knowledge by means of praxeological re-orientation would have taken place [19]. Praxeological re-orientation creates a special kind of knowledge called "critical knowledge" [20]. Critical knowledge teaches us "ways in which dominant ideas are given force in our lives; it equips us with perceptions of where we have been, and where we as individuals or collectives are heading" [20].

Analytic assessment can only be seen as spouting critical knowledge only when the analysis is performed in ways that will enable other critical scholars appreciate and exactly see how and why the assessment and claims were made about a remark. In describing a critical assessment that meets such standards, Kuypers [18] cited Brockriede [21] to state as follows:

..when an evaluating critic states clearly the criteria he/she has used in arriving at his/her judgment, together with the philosophic or theoretic foundations on which they rest, and when he/she has offered some data to show that the rhetoric experience meets or fails to meet those criteria, he/she has argued.

Metaphorical Utterances and Political Communication

Whether during electioneering campaigns or after an election has been won, the communication task of politicians is among the most challenging communication task in the modern world. In modern democracies, especially in the United States, the imperatives of articulating democratic goods and services in ways that would appeal to, engage and persuade the widely dispersed heterogeneous electorates mount enormous communication pressure on politicians. To outsmart opponents in the articulation game, presidential candidates tap into a repertoire of communication and discursive resources. These resources include exaggerated physical posture as well as a variety of antics and speech acts. Politicians deploy much of these communication resources when they speak. As Searle [22] notes, speaking and/or writing in language consists in "performing illocutionary speech acts." Illocutionary speech acts include "making statements, asking questions, giving orders, making promises, apologizing, thanking" and so forth [22]. In making remarks, presidents and other political leaders, deliberately or otherwise, tap into a variety of speech acts that might be classified as "metaphorical, fictional and ambiguous utterances" [22].

As Searle notes, the seemingly benign act of uttering brings up complications that border on how a speaker's sentence or literal meaning may depart in a variety of ways from his or her utterance. Searle [22] points to how in writing a sentence, a speaker may mean something different from what the sentence means as in the case of metaphor or the speaker may even mean the opposite as in the case of irony or the

speaker may mean what the sentence means but means something else as in the case of conversation implicatures or indirect speech act. To enhance understanding, Searle [22] exemplifies with the simple sentence "it is getting hot here" in order to indicate how that simple sentence could be uttered not only to say that it is getting hot in the place of the utterance (literal meaning), but could also be uttered to request somebody to open a window (indirect speech act), or how the same sentence could be deployed to complain about how cold it is (ironical utterance) or to remark on the increasing argument that is in progress (metaphorical utterance). Since metaphor makes it possible for a speaker to mean and communicate something quite different from what the expression he or she utters mean, Searle [22] is of the view that communicators need to remain alert to the fact that discerning of the literal meaning from an utterance does not exhaust some other possible meanings that are incidental to the same utterance.

Fictional Utterances and Constitutive Rules of Assertion

The discursive dynamics which holds that "metaphorical utterances are non-literal" while "fictional utterances are literal but non-serious" constitute an interesting problematic in the context of the three constitutive rules of assertion which non-serious utterances "are not expected to fulfill" [22]. The constitutive rules of assertion which non-serious utterances are not expected to fulfill as noted [22] include:

- The essential and sincerity rules which commit the maker of an assertion to the truth of the expressed proposition
- The preparatory rule which commits the speaker to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition
- The expressed proposition must not be obviously true to both the speaker and hearer in the context of utterance.

What should be discerned from the foregoing is that it is only in the context of a fictional utterance which is literal but non-serious and about which the maker of an assertion is not expected to fulfill the sincerity rule that a remark like "America has annexed the African continent" which is a literal but non-serious remark can stand but only as an act of "pretending" for comic effect but not for deceptive intention [22]. Pretending for comic effect is instantiated if, for example, someone known not to be a police officer decides to make people laugh by wearing a police officer's uniform and behaving like a police officer as might be observed in a drama. But pretending will morph into deception when someone known not as a police officer pretends to be one for the purpose of enjoying the responsibilities and privileges that are incidental to being a police officer [22].

The foregoing throws up the challenge of determining when, for instance, an utterance by a politician should be adjudged fictional/deceptive and when the same utterance could be adjudged fictional/comical. When journalists misunderstand a politician and go ahead to report the

politician's comical, literal but non-serious fictional assertion as literal and serious assertion, the dissemination of such misunderstanding will not only make the audience to see the misunderstood politician in bad light but will also compel the misunderstood politician to level accusations of incompetence, unprofessionalism and news-faking against the journalists who disseminated the misunderstanding. A politician may, for instance, claim for comical effect, that the 'United States has annexed Africa.' When a politician makes such literal but non-serious assertion for comical effect, such a politician will not be obligated to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition. For journalists whose duty it is to report on remarks of politicians, it will be a mark of high professionalism when they allow the contextual implicates surrounding a politicians remarks to help them discern when a politician's remark is literal and serious to compel the utterer to provide reasons for the expressed proposition and when the contextual implicates of a politician's remark are indicating that the remark is literal but non-serious in a manner that should not warrant compelling the politician to provide reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition. Recent reportorial experiences in the United States, more so those involving Donald Trump's remarks provide insight on how journalists have been disseminating literal serious remarks and remarks that might be literal but not serious. Recourse to President Trump's remarks at this point provides instructive exemplars. There are many sources containing allegations of lying against President Donald Trump [23]. For that reason, a convenient "theoretical construct sample" of five exemplars are analyzed based on the "illustrative" and "negative case" traditions of qualitative data analysis [24,25] (Table 1).

Table 1: Exemplars of Fictional and Metaphorical Utterances Misunderstood as Trump's Lies

S/No	Exemplars of Trump's Utterances	Source
1	It is freezing and snowing in New York – we need global warming.	Claire [15]
2	My fingers are long and beautiful, as, it has been well documented, are various other parts of my body.	Claire [15]
3	I had a great meeting with President Obama. I never met him before. I really liked him a lot. The meeting was supposed to be 10 minutes, 15 minutes max.	Griffiths and Kenna [34]
4	These people (trump's Cabinet nominees) have given up fortunes of income in order to make a dollar a year, and they are so proud to do it.	Griffiths and Kenna [34]
5	We haven't had refineries built in decades, right? We're going to have refineries built again.	Griffiths and Kenna [34]

Data Representation and Analysis

The academic background of an analyst who intends to analyze the exemplars of Trump's utterances displayed in the textbox above will determine how the analyst will read, analyze, interpret and classify the utterances. In the field of

mass communication where the American quantitative research tradition had influenced mass communication scholarship up to the first decade of this century, a journalist who received only the American quantitative research training will read and interpret the remarks in the textbox differently from a colleague who received the critical communication education that the qualitative research method affords.

Quantitative mass communication training defines and upholds the content analysis research method as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest contents of communication" [26] as cited [27]. When journalists whose training is influenced by Berelson's definition read the utterances in the textbox, their reading will betray uncritical embrace of the null context hypothesis which purports that the "literal meaning of a sentence is the meaning the sentence has in zero or null context" [22]. Apart from that, a journalist who received only quantitative communication education will find it difficult to muster the necessary critical "culture capital" [28] that would enable such journalist to grasp the fact that "it is impossible to explicitly say everything one means" let alone "mean everything that is somehow implicitly implied by what one says" [29]. In a similar vein, a journalist/analyst with only a quantitative education background will also be in difficulty with regard to grasping the view that "the semantic contexts of utterances are often alone not reliable guarantors of the meaning of an utterance in a context" [30].

Unlike journalists with only quantitative training, the ones with a commensurate qualitative training can muster the necessary critical acumen to enable them deploy the rich assortment of critical analytic tools in ways that will enhance nuanced interpretation of the texts as displayed. When critical analytic tools are properly deployed, such deployment will, for instance, enable the analyst to start reading exemplar one in the textbox with teeming intensity of critical recollections. The intensity of critical reflection will prompt the reader to recall Goatly's [31] annotation on "exploiting the redundancy in the co-text/context of an utterance." Morgan and Welton [32] have explained redundancy as a communication strategy that is "measured by the degree to which one part of a message can be predicted on the basis of the rest." Another analytic tool which can help in reading for the multiple meaning which exemplar (1) in the textbox calls for is the concept of modality. Modality broadly refers to a "speaker's attitude towards or opinion about the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence" [30]. When Simpson's [30] view is recalled in tandem with his comment that "communication is successful not when hearers recognize the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker's meaning from it" such recall will likely help the analyst to realize that instead of classifying exemplar one as a distortion or as a lie, the best that should be read from it is that the utterer has emitted the remark as a mere tongue in cheek comic utterance which, though literal, should not be taken seriously. A good measure of knowledge of critical interpretation would enable the analyst in the context of that utterance to realize that the "literal meaning of a sentence is determined only by a set of truth conditions relative to a set of background assumptions

which are not part of the semantic content of the sentence” [22]. Such realization would ensure that narrow quantitative thinking does not impoverish how that utterance is interpreted and disseminated.

What is said above about how to read exemplar (1) in the Textbox applies also to how exemplar two should be read. Reading exemplar two in a similar way finds justification when the co-text/context assumptions of the utterance as well as the role of the “expressive modal categorical claim to truth and knowledge” [33] conveyed by the phrase: ‘my fingers are long and beautiful’ are factored in. Another factor lending credence to exemplar two should be like exemplar is the phrase: ‘has been well documented.’ The casting of that phrase in a passive voice without being specific about the persons/agencies responsible for the purported documentation further lends support to why the utterance should be taken as a mere literal but non-serious remark. The reading of exemplars 1 and 2 as literal but non-serious remark finds further support in the reminder that the metaphorical property of utterances makes it possible for a speaker to “systematically mean and communicate something quite different from what the uttered expression means” [22].

The classification of exemplar three (3) in the Textbox as a lie is based on a clarification which faulted Trump’s 10 minute and 15 minute time approximation of his meeting with President Obama. Two words: ‘supposed’ and ‘scheduled’ are of essence in proving the unfairness of classifying as a lie, President Trump’s time-estimation in that utterance. By the word ‘supposed’ in that remark, Trump was implicitly referring to his team with whom he may have arranged to stage the event of meeting President Obama in a way that should not exceed a maximum of 10 to 15 minutes. Even at that, if somebody says that an event that lasted for one hour was supposed to last for a maximum of 10-15 minutes, the fact that the event lasted beyond 10-15 minutes does not contradict the fact that the event was supposed to last a maximum of 10-15 minutes. Moreover, since the allegation of lying is grounded on a claim that the meeting was ‘scheduled’ to be for 1 hour but not ‘supposed’ to be for 10-15 minutes as Trump remarked, the lying charge would have been credible if those leveling it had proved that those who supposed the meeting to last for 10-15 minutes were also the same persons who scheduled one hour for meeting. But since such proof is absent, the absence underscores the overzealousness of classifying that remark as a lie.

Griffiths and Kenna [34] classified exemplar four (4) as a lie based on the argument that it is only Trump who had declared he would not draw the statutory presidential salary during his presidency and not members of his cabinet. But such classification is done without considering the requisite metaphorical affordance which grounds that remark. The failure to consider the metaphorical affordance means that the classifiers paid the price of “describing a metaphorical remark in a way that does not distinguish it from a literal remark” [22]. This failure also betrays the ignorance that metaphor makes it possible for a speaker to use “S is P to say that S is R” [22]. To use S is P to say that S is R agrees with the fact that “in

metaphorical utterance, what the speaker means should differ from what the speaker says” [22]. When applied to the remark under consideration, what Trump meant when he said that his cabinet nominees have given up fortunes of income in order to make a dollar a year should be understood as a metaphorical way of stating that whatever the remuneration his nominees gets as salary for their services would just be like a dollar when compared with what they would have earned if they had not volunteered to serve the American people in Trump’s administration.

Trump’s remark presented as exemplar five (5) in the Textbox is classified as a lie by hasty analysts based on a claim by Trump that ‘we haven’t had refineries built in decades.’ Hasty analysts classified that statement a lie based on their belief that refineries had actually been built in 2014 and 2015 in both Texas and North Dakota. But there are analytic reasons why the claim that refineries had been built in 2014 and 2015 in Texas and North Dakota by Trump’s traducers might not be strong enough to justify classifying Trump’s remark on refineries as contained in exemplar five (5) as a lie.

The reason why classifying Trump’s remark as a lie cannot be justified lies in the ‘we’ which Trump started his remark with and the ‘were built’ used in the clarification that was made in an attempt to prove that Trump’s remark is a lie. By starting his remark with ‘we’, Trump smartly created a measure of uncertainty as to whether by ‘we’ he was referring exclusively to the government of the United States or that by ‘we; he was referring inclusively to the government of the United States as well as the private sector and other interests who, apart from the government of the United States, could go into the business of establishing refineries. So if Trump’s ‘we’ is used “exclusively” [33] to refer to only the government of the United States, it would be wrong to declare Trump’s statement a lie based on the claim that refineries were built in 2014 and 2015 in Texas and North Dakota. Another fact supporting this line of reasoning is the ‘were built’ phrase used by Trump’s traducers in a way that left, unclear, a gap of “attribution of causality and responsibility” [33]. When those who claim that Trump lied created that gap by using the phrase ‘were built’ without specifically saying whether the Texas and North Dakota refineries were built exclusively by the government of the United States or that the refineries were built by other business interests, they weakened their case by such omission. They weakened their case on the ground that Trump’s ‘we’ might just be referring exclusively to the government of the United States and not to other private investors whose investment on refineries could not be seen as American government built refineries.

The Lure of Fictional/ Metaphorical Assertions in Political Communication

Fictional assertions are made possible by non-semantic traditions that make it possible to break the conventions about how words literally signify reality in the world. While the semantic or the literal convention would, for instance, commit a speaker to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of an

expressed proposition, what the non-semantic convention rather does is to “enable the speaker to use words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by those meanings” [22]. The existence of this non-semantic convention which is extensively put to use by comedians is increasingly exploited by politicians who, encouraged by the window offered by the non-semantic convention, “go through the motions of making statements which they know to be not true” so long as they know that their intention is not to deceive [22]. The political-communication benefits that accrue from the non-semantic convention to smart politicians are so crucial that they cannot resist it. These benefits, because of similarity, find convergence with the benefits that a smart politician can derive when his/her speech is peppered with ambiguities. As analyzed by Hahn [35], “ambiguities are useful because they leave the auditors free to supply their own content for the ambiguities and thus persuade themselves.” Where/when journalists lead their audience, wittingly or otherwise, into failing to grasp the communication/discursive possibilities that ambiguity and fictional utterances offer, such failure will not only mean upholding the tenets of the discredited null context hypothesis but will also lead to a situation, as in the case of Trump, where a postmodernist politician who has decided to define her/his agency with discursive practices that are steeped in ambiguity and fictional utterances is unfairly demonized.

Another reason that encourages politicians to utilize fictional utterances is to reject the null-context hypothesis view which purports that the literal meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meanings of individual words used to compose the sentence. Those who oppose this hypothesis build their argument on the reason that for a large class of sentences, there is no such thing as zero or null-context because the meaning of any sentence is understood only “against a set of background assumptions under which the sentence is uttered” [22]. An insight from Spivak [36] as cited [7] accentuates how upholding the null context hypothesis betrays ignorance. The ignorance that the remarks people make does not often originate naturally from them but from hegemonic and ideological conditions of which their utterances are mere product could be cited as a factor in the misrecognitions that confuse some people into embracing the null context hypothesis. The effect of this ignorance will make it difficult for many analysts to grasp the postmodernist stance regarding how somebody may be ignorant of what triggers the remarks they make. As St. Pierre, [7] has cited Spivak, [36] to explain, the utterances people make might not come naturally from them but from “ideological, cultural, historical and hegemonic conditions of which” their voice is “a mere product.” Given this insight, people who criticize President Trump do so in a manner that betrays the ignorance that since Trump’s ideological acumen is not structured by political correctness; such discrepancy could motivate Trump into making utterances in ways that will reflect his ideological foundation. In a similar vein, and against Spivak’s insight as cited, it becomes rather plausible that the voices which criticize Trump’s utterances might not be original fundamentally true speeches of Trump’s critics but a mere

product reflective of the positioning and the subjections of those critics. It is in this regard that St. Pierre [7] cautions that “it is dangerous to believe in what we hear and see without theorizing what enables us to sense as we do.” If St. Pierre’s call for caution is to be heeded in a postmodern world that encourages us to strive for a “world that is unintelligible and unrecognizable within existing categories and practices,” if we are to answer a call to look “for the conditions under which something new, as yet thought arises” [37], then people’s/newsmakers’/reporters/critics knowledge of social reality needs to be rejuvenated with what Birkhead [28] has theorized as “surplus code” or “culture capital.”

The concept of culture capital is developed to account for what news sources/newsmakers and reporters draw on when making and reporting news. It also accounts for what journalists draw on when assessing, re-encoding and sending out as news the utterances, actions, inactions of news makers. The audience are also found to draw on their culture capital or history of ideological existence in their effort to react to and evaluate the news made by news makers as assessed, re-encoded and disseminated by journalists to their audiences [28]. When people/newsmakers/reporters make sense of social reality through the sway of interpretations informed by the wealth of their culture capital, such process of sense-making is known as the interpretation of interpretations [33]. Interpretation of interpretations means that happenings around any of us irrespective of our social identity or position at any time are texts the interpretation and meaning of which are shaped by our social positions, values, power and social experiences [20,38].

Conclusion

Persons who dare to come up with new ideas or act in unconventional way have always been confronted with opposition. For instance, Wulfen [39] reports that when the telephone was invented, a Western Union internal memo dated 1876 had derided the idea by saying “This telephone has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us.” Such has been the trend on how humanity reacts to innovation. Despite the constant opposition that greets new ideas; one truth that counts for innovators is that the stream of social reality has continually nourished the courage of innovators. While the stream of social reality continue to impoverish the conservatism of those who promote traditional rules, methods, recipes “existing categories, the normal, the commonsensical” the stream of social reality remains a tonic for the stance of innovators who uphold the call for the creation of “a different world” where the focus is “not on things already made but on things in the making” a world where humans are urged to “give birth to new modes of existence, a world where everyone is urged to “do something that is unintelligible and unrecognizable within existing categories and practices” [40]. The viability of the stance of innovators furnishes reasons why agents like President Trump with his extraordinary discourses should attract empathetic attention instead of condemnation. Giving empathetic attention

to Trump's discourses will find justification in a postmodern world which prizes "a state of constant unpredictable emergence" [41] as cited [42].

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