

POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND STRATEGY: ANALYZING DISCURSIVE TECHNIQUES IN BERNIE SANDERS' 2020 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN KICKOFF SPEECH

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Abstract

The use of language in any specific political context has power to gain sympathy of the audiences. This is done using different discursive practices by political leaders in a political way. The current research is based on Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) of Bernie Sanders's use of discursive strategies in 2020 presidential campaign kickoff speech. This research is qualitative in nature where textual evidences are taken from the written transcript of Bernie Sanders presidential speech. The main aim of this paper is to do political discourse analysis of the discursive strategies used by Bernie Sanders in his political campaign. The researcher has used van Dijk (1993) Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis and socio cognitive model (1998) as theoretical frameworks. In light of these theoretical frameworks, the researcher has emphasized and highlighted the ideology of Bernie Sanders in his political discourse and use of different discursive strategies to increase number of voters and supporters. The findings of the research reveals that Bernie Sanders's use of discursive strategies is purposeful in creating good image of his party and presenting negative side of the other party.

Key words: Bernie Sanders, presidential campaign, discourse, political discourse, discursive strategies

1. Introduction

Bernie Sanders is an American politician who has been the junior United States Senator from Vermont since 2007. He was the mayor of Burlington, Vermont and he was also the member of U.S House of Representatives from 1991 to 2007 (Skonieczny, 2019). Bernie Sanders was not affiliated with any political party, so he pursued the Democratic nomination in the presidential elections of U.S in 2016 and 2020. He is an advocate of communal democratic, liberal, progressive and enlightened policies. Sanders is mostly known for his disagreement to economic inequality. He is the politician who dislikes the economic equalities in the country and whenever he got the chance he had openly talked about these issues and has many times openly criticized the power behind the cause of economic inequality. He has always supported labor rights, paid parental leave, tuition free tertiary education and racial inequalities in his speeches. (Day & Uetrict, 2020)

This present research is concerned with "Political discourse analysis of the discursive strategies used in Bernie Sanders's 2020 Presidential Campaign Kickoff speech". Bernie Sanders belongs to a Democratic Party, so he did his 2020 presidential speech to favor his Democratic Party and to criticize the powerful institutions and the current President of U.S., Donald Trump. Sanders did his speech on Saturday with a rally in Brooklyn. He spoke to his supporters at Brooklyn College on March 02, 2019 in his hometown of Brooklyn in the city of New York (Day & Uetrict, 2020). In his Brooklyn rally, Sanders bashed the President Donald Trump's background and openly talked about the inequalities, racism, tuition free colleges and confronted climate change. Furthermore, he also highlighted his financial background and shared his views with the listeners. In his 2020 presidential campaign speech, Bernie Sanders has used discursive strategies such as use of pronouns, modality, repetition, positive image of oneself and negative representation of other party, use of

specific terminologies and adjectives. So, the main objective of this research paper is to do political discourse analysis of the strategies used by Bernie Sanders and to know the ideology of the speaker behind these strategies in his 2020 presidential campaign kickoff speech.

This research is a qualitative research study. The researcher has used Political Discourse Analysis as a major tool of this study. For this purpose, the researcher is using descriptive approach to analyze the written text of Bernie Sanders's 2020 presidential campaign kickoff speech. Furthermore, to give this research study a theoretical framework, the researcher has used van Dijk *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis* (1993) and socio cognitive model (1998) as theoretical frameworks.

2. Literature Review

Politics is understood in terms of actions and practices of trained and qualified politicians, official political institutions, and citizens who take part in the political process. Moreover, political practice involves struggle over power, control, authority and actions which are involved in society's or group's goals (Dunmire, 2012). Politics can be defined to exercise power and to add some economic, political and traditional beliefs and principles into practice. Political discourse and politics both are interrelated. It can be seen in numerous forms like speeches, dialogues, debates and political interviews. (Jawad, 2017)

Discourse is usually defined as a speech or a piece of writing on any specific subject or topic. Discourse analysis is a method which is used to study written or spoken language associated to a social setting. It is also involved in the analysis of sign language usage or any major semiotic occasion. Genres such as rhetoric, English for Academic Purposes and systemic functional are used by different speech communities and discourse analysis is an approach which studies these genres in a comprehensive manner (Vergera, 2018). To study and analyze the use of language, discourse analysis is used. It analyzes the text structurally to discover common essential rules of language or communicative function behind the text. To analyze a discourse, first of all there's need to establish the context, arrange material for analysis, study the structure of the text, study discursive practices, identification of linguistics and rhetorical devices and lastly, the interpretation of data. (Hodges et al., 2008)

2.1 Political Discourse Analysis

Political discourse analysis is a field of discourse analysis which rely upon discourse in political settings. These political forums or settings includes debates, discussions, arguments speeches and hearings of political leaders. Political discourse is about the text and talk of proficient and professional political leaders or political organizations. These includes political discourse of presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, chief ministers and many other political actors. Furthermore, it also includes the members of government, parliament or political parties at all levels whether it is at local, national or international level. The way political discourse is defined is different from the medical, legal or educational discourse with respect to the respective members in the fields of medicine, law or education. There are some domains of politics for political discourse that includes societal domain, political systems, political values, political ideologies, political institutions, political organizations, political groups, political actors, political relations, political process, political discourse and political cognition (Dijk, 1997). In domains of politics the most obvious categories are the political systems. Such political systems include democracy, dictatorship and communism. In political systems there are some political values which comprises of political liberty, justice, equivalence or independence. In the same way political leaders have different political ideologies that are related to different facets of a society including the economy, education, health care, labor law and illegal law etc. In the fields of politics the members who belong to any political party are called as political actors. (Dijk, 1997)

Power is intricate and an abstract idea which has greatly influenced our lives. Power is the capacity of any individual to influence beliefs, actions or behavior of others. This is the common knowledge of everybody that power is often associated with the term ‘authority’. Politics is also related to power. In the field of Politics, politicians use power and authority to make decisions, to control people’s behavior and to show their ideologies by using different discursive strategies. To study the discursive strategies and the ideologies of the political leaders, political discourse analysis plays a vital role. (Bayram, 2010)

Political discourse analysis is used to critically analyze the political discourse. PDA focuses on imitation and the use of political power. The focus of PDA on the political power is done through political discourse. Furthermore, PDA also focuses on the structures and features of discourse or dialogue which are in relation with the political process, episode or an event whose discursive dimensions are being evaluated and investigated. (Fairclough, 2012)

Political discourse is highly powerful as it infiltrates the major concerns in public sphere. It shapes the understanding of people for public and political realities and it may also affect the value and eminence of public life. Political discourse includes all national and global arenas. These arenas involves family discussions of political issues in front of the television, or an argumentative exchange between a journalist and a politician in broadcast talk or debates at the United Nations Security Council meetings over the use of military force. (Kampf, 2015)

2.2 Political Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis just like political discourse analysis is the branch of discourse analysis which analyzes the relationships of power, control and dominance as revealed in language. CDA concentrates on written and spoken text in order to highlight inequality and power. The purpose of CDA is to examine discursive sources that are formed within social, political and historical settings (Anwar et al., 2015). In speeches, debates and arguments, the speakers try to control the mind of the listeners through their discourse. CDA is an approach which deals with the ways which are socially, morally or ethically illegitimated by the speakers to control the minds and actions of hearers. (Dijk, 1995)

In the book, *CDA and PDA Made Simple: Language, Ideology and Power in Politics and Media*, Mazid in 2014 has discovered and studied the relation between power and control, language and ideology and has also showed how such relation are represented. To achieve the goal of relationship between language/ideology and power/control, he has focused on two approaches named as: CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis and PDA (Political Discourse Analysis). CDA is an approach which deals with how dominance or authority, inequality, power abuse are endorsed, reproduced, resisted and repelled through text and talk in any social and political background (Mazid, 2014). CDA takes action in understanding, exposing and resisting any inequality or injustice that prevails in any social or political context. Political discourse analysis focuses on the political discourse to reproduce political power, power abuse or dominance. Like CDA, PDA also focuses on several forms of resistance or counter power against discursive dominance and control. For example politicians in their speeches and debates use certain strategies and the main purpose behind the use of such strategies is to increase number of voters and supporters. The ideologies of such politicians are hidden in their speeches and debates. Therefore, the main aim of political discourse analysis is to expose their hidden ideologies and hidden agendas to aware public about the reality of using such strategies in their political discourses. (Mazid, 2014)

2.3 Discursive Strategies

Political discourse analysis is used to analyze different discursive strategies that are used in political speeches and political contexts. The properties such as pronouns, lexical

choices, positive us negative others representation, use of modality, future orientation, and use of adjectives and other properties of text and talk are essential part of political discourse analysis. The structures of political discourse are effective and active in political contexts as they have preferred constructions and strategies that are useful in achieving and completing political actions in political situations. (Dijk, 1997)

In this term paper, discursive strategies such as pronominal choices, use of specific terminologies, modality in discourse, repetition in discourse, positive us negative others representation, adjectives and future orientation are analyzed using political discourse analysis on Bernie Sanders's 2020 presidential campaign kickoff speech.

In most of the debates and speeches, 'use of pronouns' as a discursive strategy is widely used. Pronouns are used instead of a noun. Pronouns are mostly used to avoid repeating names. The most widely used pronouns are 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she' and 'it'. The pronouns that are used in any specific discourse or in any political speech or a debate actually shows the ideology of the speaker or the ideology of the politician who uses such pronouns. Second discursive strategy is the 'use of adjectives'. Adjectives are the words that are used to describe nouns or pronouns. Mostly in political speeches adjectives are used to describe the qualities of the party to which the politician himself/herself belongs and loaded negative adjectives are also used to criticize the other political parties or politicians. Hedging and vagueness is discursive strategy which is used by politicians in their discourse to favor their own political party and to criticize the other political party. Modality is another discursive strategy which is mostly used in political speeches and debates. Through the use of modal verbs such as 'will', 'could', 'should' speaker or writer expresses the situation of possibility, probability, certainty, willingness or readiness. The addition of modal verbs in speeches or debates is helpful for the speaker to change the way events are expressed (Malghani et al., 2019). At many political forums, the politicians use specific terminologies. The use of specific terminologies by the speakers puts stress on issues related to economy or inequality, education, employment, racism and corruption prevailing in the country or the use of specific terms are used to motivate listeners to support that specific political party. Furthermore, in political speeches some words are repeated by speakers. Repeated words can be the pronouns, modal verbs or specific terminologies. Repetition of words in a political speech actually highlights the ideology of the politician in a specific political situation. Lastly, the discursive strategy of which every politician takes benefit is 'the positive self-image and negative others representation'. In most of the debates, talk shows, arguments and in political speeches, politicians uses the discursive strategy to prove themselves right by constructing positive self-image of their party. On the other side, politicians represent other parties or their opponents in a negative way by constructing a negative image of the other political party. (Tahsin, 2019)

3. Theoretical Framework

To give this research a theoretical framework, the researcher is using van Dijk's (1993) and van Dijk's Socio cognitive model (1998) as a theoretical framework. In *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. Discourse and Society*, van Dijk has said that there are several discourse structures which are used by speakers in order to show audiences their power. Discursive strategies such as use of pronouns by the speaker, lexicons, positive construction of their own self- image, specific terminologies and repetition of words are used to show the positive side of their own political party and to focus on the negative aspects of the other party. Inequality is based upon two existing strategies which are named as positive representation of the own group and negative representation of the out group. This distinction contrasts as US vs THEM. Speakers and writers always use technical language to present their positive image. But to present other's negative image they describe their deeds using the

element of over exaggeration. For this purpose, speakers take help of different discursive strategies to show themselves good and others as bad by highlighting their negative performances and activities. The use of these discursive strategies have many hidden meanings which can be used to increase number of voters and supporters. (Dijk, 1993) analysis is based on a detailed analysis of the various levels of the description

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The second theoretical framework is the use of socio cognitive model (1998) by van Dijk. Van Dijk in 1998 has suggested comprehensive categories named as modality, choice of pronouns, repetition of words, syntactic structures and use of adjectives etc. According to van Dijk, ideologies are resulted from nonfigurative mental systems and behind every discursive strategy there is a hidden ideology. It is, thus inferred that ideologies govern the personal understanding and thought of the particular group in an indirect manner. Secondly, the efforts which are used to realize the discourse among other actions and interactions is impressively influenced by the ideological processes. Models named by van Dijk such as social actions and interactions are actually responsible for creating mental representation of individuals. This is mostly represented in the form of US vs THEM. This strategy of Us vs Them is mostly observed among the speakers of a particular group who describe themselves and their group fellows in a very positive way and others in a very negative manner. Van Dijk has provided a framework if one wants to analyze positive us and negative others by following strategies such as by investigating the lexicons, use of pronouns, the strategy of Us vs Them and examining syntactic structures (Dijk, 1998).

4. Data Collection

The script of Bernie Sanders's 2020 presidential campaign speech is taken from internet: <https://vtdigger.org/2019/03/02/full-text-sen-bernie-sanders-2020-presidential-campaign-kickoff-speech/>. This speech was delivered by Bernie Sanders on 02 March, 2019 in Brooklyn. The purpose of taking the written transcript is to do Political Discourse Analysis of the discursive strategies used in the speech.

Textual Analysis

The selected speech of Bernie Sanders is a political speech where Sanders has used different discursive strategies. The strategies includes: use of modality, pronominal choices, positive us negative others representation, use of specific terminologies, repetition of words and use of adjectives.

The current research reveals that pronouns such as 'I', 'you' and 'we' were used in political discourse of Bernie Sanders to get support from the people by altering their ideology in favor of his own party. Theoretical framework presented by van Dijk (1998) states that in any political debate or in any political party different pronouns are used by the speakers and the purpose of using these pronouns is to create a dichotomy between two groups: in group and out group. In group refers to the group of the speaker who delivers the speech and out group refers to the opponents. The purpose of using pronouns is to highlight negative side of out group and to highlight positive aspects of in group.

Bernie Sanders started his speech by welcoming his listeners and viewers whole heartedly. At the beginning he used the pronoun 'I' and stated: "Today, I want to welcome you to a campaign..." (Sanders, 2019). In this line Bernie Sanders has used 'I' as pronoun. By using this pronoun he is warmly and excitedly welcoming his audiences. He has used this sentence with same pronoun twice. Throughout his speech Bernie Sanders has used 'I' and 'we' pronouns. He stated:

“We will no longer stand idly by and allow 3 people in this country to own more wealth than the bottom half of America while, at the same time, over 20 percent of our children live in poverty, veterans sleep out on the streets and seniors cannot afford their prescription drugs.” (Sanders, 2019)

Here Sanders has used ‘we’ as a pronoun. Use of we infers to his party. Use of pronoun ‘we’ is exclusive because here Sanders is not including the audience rather he has used ‘we’ for his own party. To collectively represent his party he has used we. He has used this pronoun to show his sympathy for the poor people who live in poverty and who do not have place to sleep and have no money to buy medicine. Furthermore, he said:

“We will no longer accept 46 percent of all new income going to the top 1 percent, while millions of Americans are forced to work 2 or 3 jobs just to survive and over half of our people live paycheck to paycheck, frightened to death about what happens to them financially if their car breaks down or their child becomes sick. Today, we fight for a political revolution.” (Sanders, 2019)

Again Bernie has used ‘we’ for his own party. Use of pronoun ‘we’ is exclusive. He has criticized the current government who is responsible for because of whom millions of Americans are struggling hard to improve their financial crises by doing more than one job in a day. Furthermore, he said:

“We say to the private health insurance companies, whether you like it or not, the United States will join every other major country on earth and guarantee healthcare to all people as a right. All Americans are entitled to go to the doctor when they’re sick and not go bankrupt after staying in the hospital.” (Sanders, 2019)

In these lines again Bernie has used ‘we’ which represents his party. He has used ‘we’ to present his party in a positive way by assuring people of having good healthcare by joining other countries.

“Today, we say to the pharmaceutical industry, that you will no longer charge the American people the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, the result being that one out of five Americans cannot afford the prescriptions their doctors prescribe.” (Sanders, 2019)

Continuing his speech, Bernie has again presented the positive image of his own party by using ‘we’ as a pronoun. Here, he has used this pronoun to criticize the pharmaceutical industry as in the current government of Donald Trump this pharmaceutical industry has increased their prices for prescription drugs. The result of these increased prices is that many Americans have not enough money to buy those prescribed drugs. Along with ‘we’ he has also used the pronoun ‘you’. He has used this pronoun for pharmaceutical company and has criticized them.

The political speech under study have the model verb ‘will’. The use of this model verb by Bernie Sanders has reflected the positive image of their party to do great things in future. For example:

“We will no longer accept the absurd situation where large corporations like Amazon, Netflix and General Motors pay nothing in federal income taxes after raking in billions in profits. We will no longer tolerate the situation in which the wealthy and large corporations stash billions in tax havens throughout the world.” (Sanders, 2019)

In these lines, Bernie has used ‘will’ which is high modality verb. Using this model verb along with pronoun ‘we’, he is creating good image of his party by saying that their party will never accept the wealthier corporations who do not pay taxes. Furthermore, to assure the people again he used ‘we’: “Yes, the wealthy and multi-national corporations in this country will start paying their fair share of taxes” (Sanders, 2019). Bernie again used ‘we’ to show the situation of probability in near future which emphasizes the people to build

a positive image of his party and which is done by creating new hopes in the listeners. More he said: “We’re going to win this election because we will put together the strongest grassroots coalition in the history of American politics” (Sanders, 2019). Again in these lines Bernie has created the situation of probability and readiness by using ‘will’ as a model verb. Here he has used ‘will’ to assure the public that they will put grassroots partnership which has never been done before in the history of America. In this lines use of pronoun ‘We’ and model verb ‘will’ has been used to develop the positive side of their in group. Continuing his speech he used pronoun ‘I’ several times to tell his family background and struggles he made to come at this level.

“I am not going to tell you that I grew up in a home of desperate poverty. That would not be true. But what I will tell you is that coming from a lower middle class family I will never forget how money – or really lack of money – was always a point of stress in our home. My mother’s dream was that someday our family would move out of that rent-controlled apartment to a home of our own. That dream was never fulfilled. She died young while we were still living in that rent-controlled apartment.” (Sanders, 2019)

“Now it’s true: I did not have a father who gave me millions of dollars to build luxury skyscrapers, casinos and country clubs. I did not come from a family that gave me a \$200,000 allowance every year beginning at the age of 3. As I recall, my allowance was 25 cents a week.” (Sanders, 2019)

In the above lines, Bernie has used pronoun ‘I’ for himself and pronoun ‘she’ for his mother. These pronouns are used not to highlight his party’s image but to show his own personal positive side to motivate listeners about his hard work and struggles that he made in his life without any corruption and unfair means. Furthermore, Sanders has used ‘we’ with pronoun ‘will’ and has again depicted the situation of possibility by presenting his party in more positive way as he said in his speech:

“When We are in the White House, we will enact a federal jobs guarantee, to ensure that everyone is guaranteed a stable job. There is more than enough work to be done in this country. Let’s do it. When We are in the White House we will end the decline of rural America, reopen those rural hospitals that have been closed, and make sure that our young people have decent jobs so they do not have to leave the towns they grew up in and love.” (Sanders, 2019)

More he says:

“When We are in the White House, we will move aggressively to end the epidemic of gun violence in this country and pass the common sense gun safety legislation that the overwhelming majority of Americans want. People who should not have guns, will not have guns. When We are in the White House, we are going to address not only the disparities of wealth and income that exist overall in our nation, but we will address the racial disparities of wealth and income. When We are in the White House, we are going to protect a woman’s right to control her own body. That is her decision, not the government’s.” (Sanders, 2019)

In the above lines, Bernie Sanders is totally bestowing a positive and progressive image of his party. The speech of Bernie Sanders is future oriented where he is full confident that when they will have the authority to be in the white house house where they can take control then they will make many changings like his upcoming government will guarantee jobs for everyone, will build more and houses for the people who cannot afford. He assures his people that in their government they will end violence in the country. Their government will benefit people by inaugurating the closed hospitals. Furthermore, he says that he will end racial disparities and institutional racism from this country and he also assured people by

saying that he and his government will give every right to women of our country and the decision to control her body will be hers not of government.

Throughout his speech, Bernie Sanders has used specific terminologies such as at the beginning of his speech he has used words: “racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and religious bigotry”. By using these terms, he is highlighting that these issues will not be part of his government. To portray the positive image of his government he used the words: “justice: economic justice, social justice, racial justice and environmental justice”. He has used these terms to highlight his government positively and to put stress on people to vote their government. In line with theoretical framework presented by van Dijk in (1993) which states that there are different discursive strategies and ideologies of the speakers which they use to prove their self and their party to be righteous and honest and others to be immoral and corrupt. In the same way, Bernie has used different adjectives in his speech while addressing to the people. The motives behind using adjectives was to portray a good image of their party and negative image of the opponents. For example: when he started his speech he used the adjective ‘dangerous’ for Donald Trump. He said that he is the most dangerous president of American history. Using this adjective, he is criticizing Trump and his government. He has used the adjective ‘best’ as he assured in his speech that his government will provide students with best education. He used the adjective ‘hard’ for himself when he told about his family background and the hurdles he and his family faced and they worked hard to overcome that. While describing about his family struggles he used these adjectives to gain sympathy of people and in this way he can increase his voters. Furthermore, adjectives: ‘black’ and ‘white’ were also used by Sanders to make people aware that his government like Donald Trump will not divide people on the basis of skin color and gender. To be in line here with the theoretical background, van Dijk in (1993) indicates that speakers transform the minds of the people to increase their supporters who can vote for them. For this purpose they use certain strategies. In the same way, Bernie Sanders has also some ideology behind the use of his discursive strategies.

Bernie Sanders in his speech has also used another strategy which is ‘repetition of words’. He has used the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ and the modal verb ‘will’ throughout his speech. Furthermore, he has repeated words such as ‘justice’, ‘government’, ‘poverty’, ‘greed’, ‘criminal’, ‘income taxes’ and nouns such as ‘father’, ‘America’ and ‘Donald Trump’. Repetition of words is done to emphasize the importance of any fact or an event. Sanders has repeated few words in his speech to develop positive feelings about his party and has used some words to spread negativity about other political party by repeating and emphasizing some words in the speech. Throughout his speech, Bernie constructed his positive image by highlighting his government’s good policies for the future and presented a bad image of Donald Trump and powerful institutions who control economy and political life of this country. He criticized Donald Trump by saying: “Donald Trump, the most dangerous president in modern American history...” Furthermore, he said:

“Donald Trump wants to divide us up by the color of our skin, our country of origin, our gender, our religion and our sexual orientation. We are going to do exactly the opposite. We are going to bring our people together – black, white, Latino, Native American, Asian American, gay and straight, young and old, men and women, native born and immigrant.” (Sanders, 2019)

In the above lines, he had highly criticized Trump. He says that Trump has the intention to divide the people on basis of skin color, gender, religion and sex. In his speech while addressing to the audiences he made ironical remarks for Trump whose motive is to divide this nation on the basis of skin color, sex, and gender discrimination. Continuing his remarks he immediately highlighted his government’s motives which are comparatively

different from Trump and are not based on any of the discriminations which Trump wanted for this nation. By saying so he wanted his listeners to think in favor of his government and stop voting and supporting Trump any more.

5. Conclusion

This research concludes that in his 2020 presidential kickoff speech, Bernie Sanders employed various discursive strategies, including the use of pronouns, modal verbs, word repetition, specific terminology, and the representation of "positive us" versus "negative others." These strategies aimed to strengthen his voter base and garner support. The data was analyzed through van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (1998) and van Dijk's (1993) framework, which explore discursive strategies, political ideologies, and the implicit meanings in a speaker's language. The findings align with van Dijk's theories, particularly the creation of a positive image of the in-group and a negative portrayal of the out-group. The results revealed that Sanders' strategic use of lexicons, pronouns, adjectives, word repetition, and specific terms was designed to promote his party's core principles positively, while also highlighting the negative actions of his opponents. Additionally, his discourse emphasized justice, equality, and the eradication of racial discrimination. To persuade and influence his audience, Sanders skillfully utilized these discursive practices. This study also offers insights for future researchers, suggesting that they can use this work as a reference point for analyzing the political discourse of prominent leaders, considering the ideologies behind their language choices.

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