Strategies of Denial in Amr Moussa and Abul Futouh Presidential Debate

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Abstract

This paper investigates the various strategies of denial employed by presidential candidates Abdel Moneim Abul Futouh and Amr Moussa in the first televised presidential debate in the history of Egypt and the Arab world. Based on van Dijk's model of analyzing denials of racism (1992) and van Eemeren et al.'s classification of the fallacies of argumentation (1996), the study analyzes the linguistic constructions correlated with denial as a form of managing accusations that is capable of moving the audience into supporting the opinions and ideologies expressed by the speaker. The study concludes that both candidates have similarities and differences in using denial strategies. Both debaters rely heavily on 'act denial' as the main vehicle for denying accusations. Moussa, however, differs from Abul Futouh in his dependence on argumentum ad hominem in its abusive as well as tu quoque variants. Abul Futouh, instead, employs goal denial and intention denial to manage his opponent's accusations.

Keywords: accusation − denial − presidential debates − fallacies of argumentation -

Introduction

On Thursday May 10th, 2012, Egyptian presidential candidates and front-runners Abdel Moneim Abul Futouh and Amr Moussa participated in the first televised presidential debate ever in the history of Egypt and the Arab world. The unprecedented event touched on a wide range of political and domestic topics, including such pressing issues as the Islamic character of Egyptian society, economic reform, and civil liberties versus the treatment of dissent. The debate follows the structure and the rules of American presidential debates. It is divided into two parts and consists of 12 questions. Each candidate was given two minutes to answer each question, was allowed to ask the opponent one question, and to comment on the opponent's responses at the end of each round of the debate. However, the four-and-a-half-hour long contest frequently degenerated into an exchange of angry accusations between the two contenders.

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Aim of the Study

The present study examines the linguistic constructions correlated with denial as one form of managing accusations. This is carried out through an analysis of the presidential debate between Moussa and Abul Futouh. Based on van Dijk's model of analyzing denials of racism (1992) and van Eemeren et al.'s classification of the fallacies of argumentation (1996, pp. 57-67), the study aims at explaining how language can be employed in justification, and how debates, as a striking form of argumentative discourse, are manipulated to influence people, moving them to support the opinions and ideologies expressed by the speaker. The study, thus, investigates the dynamics of "the discourse of denial" and attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the various strategies of denial employed by Moussa and Abul Futouh in the debate?
2. Do both candidates use the same or different strategies?

Theoretical Framework

Political debates, as a particular form of persuasive discourse, carefully and strategically manipulate denial to promote one party and to debase or attack the opposition, hence they help in positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. It is commonly believed that political campaign discourse is mainly about attacking, acclaiming, and defending (Benoit et al., 2002). Scholars agree on the power of debates in shaping audience perception of public image. Debates are particularly effective in forming mental images judgments among the audience, since they enable the viewers to develop perceptions of the candidate's ideology or personality traits. The presence of denial in presidential debates is due to the fact that the speaker is under the pressure to immediately respond to attacks. The more often a candidate is attacked, the more likely the candidate would employ denial as a defensive strategy (Benoit & Brezeal, 2002).

Strategies of denial involve rhetorical devices, argumentative moves, as well as linguistic constructions that reflect the arguer's mental attitudes and ideologies about culture and society. As part of the overall strategy of impression management, denial also relates to social psychology and communication research. In social interaction, people try to act, and hence to speak, in such a way that their interlocutors construct an 'impression' of them that is as positive as possible, or at least speakers try to avoid a negative impression (Arkin, 1981, as cited in van Dijk

1992, p. 90). The theoretical framework of the present study is, therefore, interdisciplinary.

Generally, denials are part of a strategy of *defence,* presupposing explicit or implicit accusations. In that case, people may deny to have engaged in negative acts, to have broken the law or some social norm, or to have some negative, overall personality characteristic of which they are *actually* accused by an interlocutor. On the other hand, denials may also be pre-emptive, as is the case in positive self-presentation or face-keeping, that is, they may focus on *possible* inferences of the interlocutor (van Dijk 1992, p. 91).

The term 'strategy' is defined by Wodak as a detailed and directed plan of discursive practices, adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic aim. Such discursive strategies, i.e., systematic ways of using language, are located at different levels of linguistic organization and complexity. Strategies, realized as macro-conversational patterns or moves, are often used to structure public debates (2006, p. 61).

The present study builds on van Dijk's model of analyzing denial strategies (1992), with insights from van Eemeren, et al.'s (1996) theory of argumentation. In van Dijk's model (1992), denials come in many forms, each with its own ideological, emotional, social, political and cultural implications. One strategy is act-denial, in which the accused denies having done the act altogether, as in 'I did not do/say that at all'. Another strategy is control-denial, as in 'I did not do/say that on purpose', or 'It was an accident'. A third strategy is intention-denial, as in 'I did not mean that', or 'You got me wrong'. van Dijk contends that action is combined of intention and activity. One may admit having engaged in an action that may have been interpreted as negative, but at the same time may deny the negative cognitive counterpart: 'I did not intend it that way.' That is, in strategies of defence, the crucial condition of responsibility for negative action lies in intentions: good intentions are seen as implementations of good attitudes (1992, p. 91). Intention denials are, therefore, strategically very effective, since it would be nearly impossible for the accuser to 'prove' the negative intentions of the accused. Goal-denial, a fourth strategy, is usually combined with a denial of responsibility, as in 'I did not do/say that, in order to ...'.

Justification and excuses are two more discursive strategies that are closely related to denials. People may justify a negative action by

claiming that the act was not harmful, or that the act involved positive, not negative consequences (Dunn and Cody, 2000, p. 376), or by constructing it as a legitimate response to some other person who was indeed guilty and, therefore, deserved a negative reaction. In this case, the arguer does not deny the act, but denies that it was negative, and explicitly asserts that it was justified. Thus, the arguer may admit having committed a specific act but disputes its falseness. In case of excuses, a negative act is admitted, but at the same time *excused*. Thus, the arguer may admit that the critical act is wrong but that s/he has nothing or little to do with it. Excuses are attempts to reduce personal responsibility for a "failure event" by claiming that the offense is attributed to "external, uncontrollable, or unintentional causes", according to Schlenker and Weigold (1992, cited in Dunn & Cody, 2000, p. 375). Thus, at least part of the blame may be put on special circumstances, or rather on others. This is often done through the strategies of *provocation* and *blaming the victim.* In provocation, the accused says that the wrongful act occurred in response to another offensive act. Susie Epp (2010) points out that provocation was originally referred to as scapegoating by Scott and Lyman (1968), who described it as one of the ways by which individuals account for undesirable acts by making excuses. The classic quarreling children's defense of "s/he started it!" is an application of provocation (Epp, p. 14).

According to van Eemeren et al. (1996, p.74), arguers regularly resort to fallacies of argumentation to strategically maneuver their standpoints. In this sense, fallacies are viewed as the violation of one or more of the rules governing the discourse within and throughout the stages of argumentation, thereby constituting "unacceptable moves". However, the researcher holds the view that 'some' fallacies are, in practice, legitimate means of argumentation. They are "justifiable moves" that discussants resort to in order to win their way through an argument, deliver their message and convince an audience.

What follows is a discussion of the fallacies of argumentation that appear in the debate analyzed in the present paper. Based on van Eemeren et al. (1996, pp.57-67) with insights and additions adapted from Copi (1972) and Downes (1995), each fallacy is defined, explained, and illustrated with examples.

The appeal to popularity (argumentum ad populum) is a fallacy of argumentation in which a proposition is held to be true because it is widely accepted (Bandwagon "the majority believe. . .") or is accepted by some (usually the elite) sector of the population (Snob Appeal). It is frequently employed in advertising: *Over four million people have switched to our insurance company, shouldn't you?* Another argumentative move is the appeal to authority, which is used when the arguer relies upon testimony, not facts. For such an appeal to be justified, the authority must be an expert in the area of knowledge under consideration.

In the argumentum ad hominem, instead of criticizing a person's arguments, we have a criticism of where the arguments are coming from. The ad hominem fallacy has three different types: in the abusive ad hominem, the arguer distracts people's attention by insulting the opponent instead of contesting the argument itself. By making the opponent appear suspicious, ridiculous, or inconsistent, people's attention will be diverted from the argument to the opponent. For example, instead of refuting the opponents' accusations, the arguer describes them as "*a group of fascist opinions*". Circumstantial ad hominem addresses the circumstances of those who hold the proposition. For example, *The President is in favor of drilling for more oil - but since he has made lots of money from oil, his reasons for more drilling must be personal.* Tu quoque occurs when the debater denies criticism by turning the critique back against the accuser. For example, *How can you tell me not to experiment with drugs when you did the same thing as a teenager?* As a diversionary tactic, tu quoque is very effective, since the accuser is put on the defensive.

In rhetorical studies, argumentum ad hominem is also known as turning the tables or attacking the accuser. It is a kind of reversal or a strategy of (counter-)attack. In van Dijk's point of view, reversal is the strongest form of denial, as in the arguments*: 'We* are not guilty of negative action, *they are'* and *'We* are not the racists, *they* are the *real* racists.' In reversals and counter-attacks, denial is usually linked to the presupposition of 'truth', which is constructed as self-evident, based on common sense, and reflecting the power of the consensus, as well as the mobilization of popular support. The appeal to common sense also has powerful ideological implications: self-evident truth is seen as 'natural', and hence the position of the Other (opponent / accuser) as 'unnatural', immoral, or even as 'crazy'. Thus, the strategic play of denial and reversal simultaneously involves the creation of social roles in the world of confrontational discourse, such as allies and enemies, victims and

oppressors. In many respects, such roles are reverted: victims become oppressors, those who are in power become victims (van Dijk 1992, p. 105). Opponents are, thus, categorized precisely in terms of their own accusations.

Denials can also be formulated as 'straw man' fallacies (when a fictitious standpoint is attributed to the opponent, or the opponent's actual standpoint is being distorted). From a pragmatic perspective, the subtle distribution of pronouns in reversals plays a significant role in the linguistic construction of denial.

In addition to direct or explicit forms of denial, there are other subtle ways to express doubt, distance or non-acceptance of accusations by others. Denial can be implied by the class of acts that may be categorized as *mitigations,* such as downtoning, minimizing, hedges, using euphemisms when describing one's negative actions, and other circumlocutions that minimize the act itself or the responsibility of the accused. This is exemplified by the following arguments: 'I did not threaten him, but gave him friendly advice', 'I did not insult her, but told her my honest opinion', etc. Mitigation not only appears in the use of euphemisms, but also in the *redistribution of responsibility,* and hence in the denial of blame. This is syntactically realized through passivization, which disputes a responsible agency, or conceals agency (van Dijk, 1992, p. 105-107).

Another strategy of denials is the use of disclaimers (I am not a racist, but . . .), which consist of phrases or sentences used to disavow agency or claim objectivity as to the position assumed on a point preceding or following. They are essential moves in the management of the impression the audience may have about the arguer. Disclaimers focus on a more permanent attitude, rather than on the specific opinion being expressed about some action or event. They are characterized by an explicit contradiction among the arguer's propositions connected by the typical but-clause (van Dijk, 1992, p.91). Additionally, they are not supported by any evidence; they merely serve as face-keeping rhetorical moves introducing generally negative assertions. Disclaimers, thus, block inferences from a particular instance to a more general impression. The most common types of disclaimers are:

(a) Apparent Denials ("I have nothing against Arabs, Muslims, but . . .");

(b) Apparent Admission ("Of course there are also smart Blacks, Muslims, Jews, but...");

(c) Apparent Concession ("They are not all criminals, but . . .");

(d) Apparent Ignorance ("I don't know, but . . .");

(e) Apparent Empathy ("They have had lots of difficulties in their own country, but . . .");

(f) Apparent Excuse ("I am sorry, but . . .");

(g) Transfer ("I don't mind so much, but my neighbor, colleagues ..").

Review of Literature

Strategies of denial and accusation management have been analyzed in studies dealing with court trials (Scott and Lyman, 1968), and relationships between parents and children (Wodak and Schulz, 1986). In the field of political discourse, the study of accusation management has largely focused on American presidential campaigns (Benoit et. al 2002; Chilton, 2004), with a few studies conducted on presidential debates outside the American context (Blum-Kulka & Liebes, 2000). The literature lacks research conducted on the construction of denial in presidential debates in Arabic. Hence, the debate analyzed in the present paper is the first presidential debate in the history of Egypt and the Arab world. The present study is conducted with a few to filling this gap. A review of selected relevant studies is presented in the following paragraphs.

van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) investigate the strategies employed by Austrian immigration authorities to justify, and hence legitimize, the rejection of family reunion applications of immigration workers. A discourse-historical approach is combined with systemic-functional and argumentation methods to analyze official rejection letters. The researchers focus on the discursive strategies of legitimation and the linguistic realization of such strategies. They distinguish four types of macro-strategies: constructive strategies, strategies of perpetuation and justification, strategies of transformation, and destructive strategies (p.11). Moreover, they identify four major categories of legitimation: first, authorization, or reference to institutionalized or impersonal authority; second, rationalization, which could be either instrumental or theoretical (offering definitions or explanations); third, moral evaluation; and fourth, mythopoesis, through telling stories.

Durrheim et al. (2005) examine the discursive practices deployed by mainstream South African newspapers in response to accusations of

racism issued in 1999 by the South African Human Rights Commission report. The article shows how several strategies of denial are interconnected to avoid criticism by developing 'acceptable' arguments for reasonable prejudice that marginalize black experience. One of the strategies of denial is splitting, by claiming that racism splits into various forms, which enables the media to distance themselves from those which they consider undesirable, while implying that racial representation in the media is both inevitable and benign. Once racism is split, denial is constructed by dislocating 'genuine' racism and situating it outside the media using the passive voice, the media-as-mirror metaphor, and looking back into history. De-racializing is another strategy of denial by which the authors refer to "the symbolic process whereby potentially racist practices are divested of racial significance and attributed to non-racial causes" (178). Moreover, racism is denied by the strategies of relativizing and trivializing. This is encoded by juxtaposing it with other violations that are as bad as, or worse than, media racism.

Wodak (2006) investigates the discursive strategies of denial recurrent in the debates surrounding two exhibitions (1995 and 2001) on war crimes committed by the German Wehrmacht (the National Socialist regime) in World War II. According to Wodak, some interviewees refused to deal with the issue at all, some claimed ignorance, combined with a refusal to take a stance (maintaining that they did not know anything about what happened), while others claimed victimhood. Moreover, some interviewees lifted the discussion up to a more general level, initiated extensive analyses, using the strategy of scientific rationalization, or engaged in 'positive-self' presentation by telling stories that portrayed them as having performed good deeds. For the most part, people used several strategies to justify, and/or deny, either by relativizing the facts, or using clichés, such as ''every war is horrible'', or by attributing the responsibility to someone else other than the speaker ''Not 'we,' but 'them' ''.

Augoustinos and Every (2007) explore the discursive patterns of formal and informal talk about race, ethnicity, and immigration in Western liberal democracies. They argue that relations of power, dominance, exploitation and social inequities are rationalized and justified through the mobilization of the liberal principles of equality, justice, and fairness in everyday language practices. Through analyzing texts constructing the indigenous minority in Australia, as receiving more

than their fair share and, as a consequence, disadvantaging the non-indigenous majority, the authors underscore a common reversal move in contemporary denial of racism in which majority group members represent themselves as the victims of discrimination and "political correctness." They contend that denial, as "one of the pervasive features of contemporary race discourse" (p.125), is also combined with disclaimers, apologies, positive self- and negative other-presentations.

Chiang (2010) explores the discursive procedures in which accusations and refutations are made in public discourse on hate speech against immigrants in the United States. This is carried out through the analysis of two interviews on CNN regarding illegal immigration. The study highlights the verbal formulations of rhetorical devices and their interactive uses in accusing and denying racial hatred. The performance and the structure of a public discourse on race or ethnicity may be explained in reference to individuals' positive and negative face wants. American public figures are concerned with their positive face while they protect their negative face wants (i.e. freedom of action). However, to project a politically correct image, American public figures must risk being politically impolite.

Benjamin et. al. (2018) conduct a comprehensive analysis of the 2016 presidential campaign between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Making use of national surveys, experiments, and textual analysis, the researchers explore the trends and content of political communication in the campaign. They assess the role of both traditional and social media, televised campaign advertisements, and convention addresses. Both quantitative and qualitative research is carried out, with a special emphasis on the 'unprecedented' use of defense appeals in presidential campaigns.

The Debaters
Amr Moussa served as Egypt's minister of foreign affairs from 1991 to 2001. During this time, he proved himself to be an exceptionally charismatic and well-spoken advocate for the Palestinian case under international law. He was acknowledged for his public opposition to Israel. In 2001, Moussa was appointed secretary general of the Arab League, where he served for another decade. When the 25th of January protests broke out, Moussa positioned himself on the "wise men committee," which tried to mediate between the revolutionaries and the regime. Moussa depicted himself as a viable secular option to the

increasing Islamization of the state, albeit not labeling himself a secularist.

While Moussa stands at the conservative end of the liberal spectrum, in a mirror image his opponent, Abdel Moneim Abul Futouh, occupies the liberal end of Islamism. Abul Futouh is a physician who in the 1970s founded an Islamist student movement that ultimately merged with the Muslim Brotherhood. He spent more than six years in prison for his work with the Muslim Brotherhood, but, eventually, shifted ideologically away from the group's dominant conservative strand. He was later expelled from the group for announcing an independent campaign for president. He won the backing of the Salafists, as well prominent liberals who saw him as a bridging figure with strong revolutionary credentials.

Data and Methodology

The video of the presidential debate was downloaded from YouTube(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrbkI1fkZFM&feature=player. It was then transcribed for the sake of analysis. The text analyzed in the present paper is the authentic Arabic text of the debate. The English translation of the selected parts is provided by the researcher for illustration. The analysis focuses mainly on the rebuttals part of the debate in which each candidate is given the opportunity to ask the opponent a question. It is these rebuttals that are of relevance to the framework of the present study, since in these rebuttals the two candidates exchange accusations and denials.

Analysis of Data

Quantitative Analysis

The results of the quantitative analysis of data are presented in the following table (Table 1). This is followed by a qualitative analysis of some excerpts of the debate for illustration.

		Moussa		Abul Futouh	
No.	Strategy of Denial	Frequency of Occurrence	Percen-tage	Frequency of Occurrence	Percen-tage
1	Act Denial	7	22.6%	3	23%
2	Intention Denial	0	0%	2	15.4%
3	Goal Denial	1	3.3%	3	23%
4	Justification	5	16.2%	2	15.4%
5	Excuse	1	3.3%	0	0%
6	Reversal	2	6.4%	0	0%
7	Argumentum Ad Hominem (Abusive)	3	9.6%	0	0%
8	Argumentum Ad Hominem (Tu Quoque)	6	19.3%	1	7.7%
9	Argumentum Ad Hominem (Circumstan-tial)	2	6.4%	0	0%
10	Appeal to Authority	3	9.6%	0	0%
11	Argumentum Ad Populum	0	0%	1	7.7%
12	Argumentum Ad Numerum	0	0%	1	7.7%
13	Apparent Admission	1	3.3%	0	0%
Total		31		13	

Table (1)

Regarding the research questions, the table shows that there are similarities and differences between the two debaters. One of the similarities is that the most dominant strategy of denial in the debate is act denial with 7 occurrences (22.6%) in Moussa's rebuttals and 3 occurrences (23%) in Abul Futouh's. It should be noted that the two strategies of act denial and goal denial are equally employed in Abul Futouh's rebuttals with 3 occurrences for each (23%). Moussa, however, uses goal denial only once (3.3%). In Abul Futouh's defense, the strategies of act and goal denial are followed by intention denial and justification with 2 occurrences for each (15.4%). On the other hand, in Moussa's defense, act denial is followed by argumentum ad hominem (tu quoque) with 6 occurrences (19.6%), and justification with 5 occurrences (16.2%). It is noted that goal denial is rare (one occurrence), and intention

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denial is not employed at all in Moussa's defense. The use of disclaimers with its various forms is almost absent from the debate, with only one instance in Moussa's denial (3.3%). This reveals Abul Futouh's general tendency to manage accusations by explaining the reasons (goal denial) behind his actions and interpreting the hidden intentions behind his sayings (intention denial).

A major difference between the two candidates lies in the use of the strategy of argumentum ad hominem. While Abul Futouh uses the strategy in its tu quoque variant in only one occurrence (7.7%); we notice that Moussa relies heavily on the various forms of this strategy to deny accusations. There are 6 occurrences of the tu quoque variant (19.6%), 3 occurrences of the abusive variant (9.6%), and 2 occurrences of the circumstantial variant (6.4%). Thus, in all, the strategy of argumentum ad honinem constitutes 35.3% of Moussa's defense strategy, with 11 occurrences. If the strategy of reversal (2 occurrences) is added to them, this will constitute 41.7% of Moussa's overall construction of denial. Based on the statistics presented in the table, it becomes clear that Moussa's denial strategy depends primarily on counter-attack; while Abul Futouh's strategy is essentially justificatory.

Qualitative Analysis

In the first round, Moussa accuses Abul Futouh of being self-contradictory in that he led a march to Abbasseya before the clashes and then later claimed it was an inappropriate protest. Abul Futouh employs goal denial:

أنا زرت يوم الجمعة شاركت فى المظاهرات للتضامن مع المذبوحين والذين اعتدى عليه

(I did visit the Friday protest in solidarity with those who were killed or assaulted).

He also employs act denial in the following examples:

(1) المظاهرات كانت سلمية. لم يثبت أن قام أحد بعمل عنيف ضد اى منشأة

(The protests were peaceful. No one attacked any buildings)

(2) أنا لم اتراجع عن دعم او التضامن ضد هذا الموقف غير الامين من اطراف فى السلطة.
وبالتالى انا مش شايف فى موقفى تناقض

(I didn't cease my support against that act . . . my position has no contradiction).

Abul-Futouh places denial between two counterattacks against Moussa's accusation of "having incorrect or inaccurate information":

يبدو ان المعلومات غير دقيقة عند "، ,"المعلومات التي قالها عمرو موسى غير صحيحة
" إلاستاذ عمرو موسى او هو ماتحراش الدقة فى تلقى معلوماته.

This is an instance of the argumentative strategy of argumentum ad hominem, in which the debater aims at discrediting the accuser and undermining the accusation altogether by constructing it as based on a false proposition. Moreover, Abul Futouh relies on labeling as a linguistic device to distinguish between protesters and anarchists as an argumentative move to deny the charge that those protests were violent.

Abul Futouh accuses Moussa of being a member of the past regime that people revolted against and adds that the figures of the past regime were silent on the crimes of corruption and killing. Turning tables at Abul Futouh, Moussa resorts to the strategy of reversal, the strongest form of denial in van Dijk's (1992) opinion. He charges his accuser of "being confused", and of "voicing unclear information":

انت ايضا يا سيدى لديك التباس فى هذا الموضوع ومعلوماتك ربما تكون غير دقيقة"

Moussa categorically denies the act that he was a member of the past regime:

حينما سقط النظام سقط برجاله، وأنا لم أكن من بينهم، أنا خرجت من الحكومة منذ
10 سنوات

(The regime fell with its men and I wasn't part of it. I was a minister 10 years ago)

He argues that the charge is, therefore, an exaggeration. Moussa reinforces his denial with the strategy of argumentum ad hominem, or undermining the credibility of the opponent by showing that he does not hold on to the principle that he publicly defends. Moussa attacks Abul Futouh by saying that "***his opposition has served only his interests and those of the Muslim Brothers, not those of Egypt***":

أنت ايضا سكت على هذا النظام. انت دافعت عن مواقف الأخوان المسلمين وموقف الجماعة
نفسها وكانت المعارضة تتعلق بكم وليس عن مصر.

This is an example of abusive ad hominem since by making the opponent appear distrustful, or inconsistent, the arguer aims at diverting people's attention from the argument to the opponent.

Moussa's construction of denial is linguistically encoded in the subtle distribution of pronouns and the alternation between the active and passive voice. According to Fowler (1991, p. 78), "The active is chosen when the focus of the action is to be on the agent of the action, implying clear responsibility". The passive allows parts of the clause to be deleted, leaving responsibility unspecified. The active voice is encoded through the use of pronominalization, while the passive voice is more impersonal and detached. The active voice is predictably paired with positive actions, and the passive voice with statements from which the debater wishes to distance himself. In this way, Moussa is able to claim agency for positive actions, while denying agency and responsibility for potentially negative actions, as illustrated in the following arguments:

الوضع فى مصر أنا عارضته وكنت وزيرا للخارجية يخدم المصلحة المصرية ولذلك
(1) أخرجت

(I was a foreign minister who <u>opposed</u> the state policy and I was removed because of this)

(2) النظام سقط وعمرو موسى خارجه ونحن جميعاً أسقطناه

(We all have <u>brought down</u> the regime)

(3) قلت في القمة العربية قبل ثورة 25 يناير ب 6 أيام أن ثورة تونس ليست بعيدة عن
هنا، و تحدثت عن القهر في مصر ليس دفاعاً عن جماعة ولكن عن وطن

(In the Arab Summit I <u>said</u> the Tunisian revolution isn't far away and <u>I have spoken</u> against injustice and my background is nationalistic and not loyal to a group).

In these instances, denial is enfolded with the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

When Moussa questions Abul Futouh's stance on the issue of Muslims converting to Christianity and vice versa, Abul Futouh employs Intention denial to dismiss the accusation:

تعبير عمرو موسى غير صحيح أو غير دقيق

(I didn't say this exactly/ I didn't mean it)

He asserts that his past statements had been misinterpreted and explains that what he said was that Islam protects people's freedom of conscience and quotes a verse: "And who wishes could be a believer, and who wishes could be a nonbeliever." = you got me wrong or I didn't mean it.

He, then, uses justification when he argues that he is not a sheikh, but he is expressing his understanding.

Abul Futouh accuses Moussa of getting outside financing to finance his campaign in violation of electoral rules. Instead of responding to the accusation, Moussa employs reversal as a strategy of denial:

نقل إلينا أيضا أن التوكيلات التى حصل عليها د.أبو الفتوح كان وراءها حملة تمويل كبيرة

(We also heard that the citizen endorsements for Dr. Abul Futouh were done with money.

This is followed by the strategy of act denial:

البلد مليانه شائعات واتهامات متبادلة. كلام غير دقيق غير صحيح. هناك حملات تشويه تتم من بعض الأشخاص

(The country is full of rumors and smear campaigns)

He strikes back at Abul Futouh in an instance of counter-attack using argumentum ad hominem:

"إعلانات أبو الفتوح هى ضعف ما أقوم بتقديمه لذلك أسأله انت جبت الفلوس دى منين؟"

(I see Abul Futouh's ads are double mine; we have to ask him where did you get this money?)

Moussa states that Abul Futouh, as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, had pledged an oath to the religious guide of the Muslim Brotherhood and asks whether he will have (another) president above him if is elected. Abul Futouh replies:

يبدو أن الأستاذ عمرو موسى مش متابع الأخبار بدقة ولا يعرف أنى استقلت من جماعة الإخوان المسلمين عندما ترشحت للرئاسة

(It seems Mr. Amr Moussa doesn't follow the news carefully and doesn't know that I resigned from the Muslim Brotherhood after I decided to run for the presidency)

He uses 'act denial preceded by abusive argumentum ad hominem when he sarcastically claims that his opponent "***doesn't read the news***". It is denial through attacking the accuser by depicting him as ignorant and unaware of the basic facts, thus weakening his accusation.

Abul Futouh accuses Moussa of supporting Mubarak in 2010 and wonders if he was for or against that regime. Before responding to the accusation, Moussa goes on to attack Abul Futouh's credibility by questioning his intentions. He says that the people in his campaign support him because he uses 'doublespeak':

فهو مع الليبراليين ليبرالي ومع السلفيين سلفي ومع الوسطيين وسطى

(He is liberal among the liberals, salafist among the Salafis, and moderate among the moderates).

Thus, Moussa constantly resorts to counter-attack, mainly the abusive argumentum ad hominem, as a predominant form of denial. He, then, proceeds with his refutation by arguing that "***the charge is inaccurate***":

"أرجو أن يكون د.ابوالفتوح دقيقا لأن هناك عدم دقة واضحة"

This is followed by goal denial when he admits that he chose Mubarak and explains the reasons behind his choice:

"وبالنسبة لتأييدي لمبارك فلقد قلت ان الاطار الذي تحدثت فيه كان التوريث بالمقارنة ما بين جمال مبارك وحسني مبارك فاخترت حسنى مبارك لأننى لم أكن أريد 30 سنة أخرى من حكم الوريث، فاخترت الحل الأقل سوءا"

(As for my support for Mubarak, this was related to the question of inheriting power. I chose Mubarak because I didn't want another 30 years of such rule .. This was the lesser of two evils).

In the second round of the debate, accusations and denials became more rigorous and the language became less moderate. Abul Futouh questions Moussa's opposition to Mubarak and attacks his role as a foreign minister saying that Egypt's relations with Africa, the Arabs, and some Islamic countries have deteriorated. Moussa denies the accusation and emphasizes his historical willingness to challenge Mubarak while in power by appealing to Authority. He cites as an evidence what the General Guide of Muslim Brotherhood said about him in appreciation of his work. Denial through the rhetorical strategy of populism is obvious when he says that the disagreement between him and the head of state "تحدث عنه الناس والرؤساء" *(was mentioned by people and by presidents).* This is an instance of denial through the appeal to popularity (argumentum ad populum) in which a proposition is held to be true because it is widely accepted (Bandwagon "the majority believe. . .") or is accepted by some (usually the elite) sector of the population (Snob Appeal).

Moussa continues his construction of denial through highlighting his accomplishments in the realm of Egyptian diplomacy:

نعم أنا كنت وزيرا للخارجية لعشر سنوات وأنا فخور بهذه الفترة

(Yes. I was Egypt's foreign minister for 10 years and I am proud of this period)

This is considered an example of denial through justification; since he does not deny his connection to Mubarak's regime but he asserts that the

act involved had positive, not negative consequences. Hence, it is justified. He enumerates his achievements during his post as foreign minister, namely, Egypt has become a member in the COMESA. He uses act denial when he says "هذا كلام غير حقيقى. هناك افتراء" (*That is not true. Mere allegations*.) Thus, denial in this instance is not only a strategy of *defence*, but rather a part of the strategy of positive self-presentation. This is linguistically encoded in assigning the first person pronoun "I" the role of the agent in several positive acts as in the excerpt:

علاقة مصر بالدول العربية والأفريقية والإسلامية كانت متميزة وقت أن كنت أنا وزيراً للخارجية، وأول من اجتمع بوزير خارجية إيران كنت أنا"

(Egypt's relations with African, Arab, and Islamic countries were strong and special when I was foreign minister. I was the first one to meet the Iranian foreign minister)

Moussa accuses Abul Futouh of saying "yes" to the constitutional amendments when all the revolutionary forces said "no". Abul Fotouh resorts to the argumentative strategy of attacking the accuser in his construction of denial. He sarcastically comments that Moussa, being part of the past regime, *"represents the old mentality that is likely to disrespect the choice of the majority"*:

يبدو أن السيد عمرو موسى بحكم مكوناته مع النظام السابق دائماً كان ضد الشعب المصري كأغلبية.

In contrast, Abul Futouh positively presents himself as a proponent for democracy, suggesting indirectly that Moussa represents autocracy. Resorting to the argumentative move of appealing to popularity, Abul Futouh constructs his denial as part of succumbing to the will of the majority. Rather than arguing for the validity of the constitutional amendments, he maintains that he supported the amendments simply because "*the majority of people said yes*".

Deploying the rhetorical strategy of appealing to fear, Moussa asks his opponent to reveal his role in creating an Islamist militant movement (Jamaaá Islamia) that was responsible for killing "around 1000 people" of innocent citizens in the 1980s. In response to the charge, Abul Futouh constructs his denial based on three main strategies. First of all, using the strategy of justification, he admits the act and says he is proud of it in an attempt to depict it as something positive. He then employs goal denial to suggest that he is not responsible for the violence and killing. He claims that the Jamaaá is a 'peaceful' movement and that violence was committed by "some members who left the movement and were responsible for the crimes":

إذا كان مجموعة من الشباب الخارجين عن سياق الحركة الإسلامية قد ارتكبوا جرائم عنف فهي تخصهم وحدهم

The third strategy that he uses is the argumentum ad hominem, the tu quoque variant, through which he dismisses the accusation by turning the critique against the accuser:

نظام مبارك الذي كان عمرو موسى جزء منه هو الذي ارتكب العنف، وأراق الدماء وقتل أكثر من 10 آلاف مصري في السجون والمعتقلات

(The violence was committed by Mubarak's regime that Moussa was part of. It killed more than 10000 Egyptian in prisons)

The argumentative move of using numbers, argumentum ad numerum, is also used to support the denial.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to investigate the various linguistic and argumentative strategies employed by Moussa and Abul Futouh in the construction of denial in their presidential debate. The two candidates represented not simply two presidential opponents but primarily opposing views and ideologies. The debate is characterized by a series of attacks and defenses, including counterattacks using a variety of denial strategies. The analysis of the presidential debate reveals that each candidate used a variety of denial strategies to manage accusation and influence the voters' minds.

Categorization (polarization in van Dijk's 1992 terminology) is one of the strategies employed by the debaters. It constructs a particular kind of discourse discriminating between the participants as two opposing 'groups'. Lexical items are selected in a way that strictly defines categorical relationships within systems that express the arguer's point of view. Once groups have been distinguished and categorized with lexically variable terms, they can be easily attributed positive or negative characteristics.

Polarization is enhanced by deploying the strategy of positive self-presentation / negative other-presentation that attributes to the opposing groups properties of US and THEM: if 'They' are the "bad guys", 'We' are the "good guys". Both contenders employ the strategy of positive self-presentation / negative other presentation as a form of denial. Moussa tries to enshrine his image by presenting himself as the voice of

experience that can bring security to a country which has been rocked by turmoil since Mubarak's fall. Abul Futouh depicts himself as the candidate of the revolution — opening the debate with praise for the "martyrs" killed by security forces and troops in protests against Mubarak and against the military that took his place in power.

Employing the strategy of argumentum ad hominem, the two candidates seek throughout the debate to discredit each other over their past associations and to damage each other's image by highlighting the opponent's perceived weaknesses rather than advancing their own strengths. Moussa aims at portraying Abul Futouh as an Islamist beholden to the Muslim Brotherhood who has held contradictory views on numerous occasions, including his position on Shari'a Law, implicitly indicating his unreliability, while Abul Futouh aims at depicting Moussa as a member of the former regime, thus questioning his commitment to revolutionary principles. As a strategy of denial, the argumentum ad hominem, in its abusive variant, enables the arguer distract the audience's attention by insulting the accuser and, consequently, dismissing the argument instead of responding to it. By making the opponent appear suspicious, ridiculous, or inconsistent, people's attention will be diverted from the argument to the opponent (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1996, p.64). The strategy frequently appears in its *tu quoque* variant, in which the debater denies the accusation by turning the critique back against the accuser, thus undermining the opponent's credibility by showing that s/he does not adhere to the point of view that s/he publicly defends. In this way, the charges may be fully reversed, by identifying the opponent precisely with the categories of his own attacks.

Another predominant strategy is denial through justification. Moussa persistently highlights his accomplishments in the realm of Egyptian diplomacy and emphasizes his historical willingness to challenge Mubarak's regime while in power. This is considered an example of denial through justification; since he does not deny his connection to Mubarak's regime, but he asserts that the act involved had positive, not negative consequences. Hence, it is justified.

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