



Arab World English Journal (March, 2018)  
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/th.202>

Theses / Dissertation (ID 202) Pp.1-262

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**Thesis Title:** A Socio-cognitive Approach to Factive Presupposition and Epistemic Modality in Hillary Clinton's Political Discourse: Tunisia's Democratic Transition as a Case Study

**Subject/major:** Linguistics

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**Degree:** PhD.

**Year of award:** 2017

**Supervisor:** Prof. Mounir Triki

**Keywords:** factive presupposition, epistemic modality, evidentiality, ideology- society-discourse paradigm, mental models, political discourse, political cognition, human rights, democracy, Tunisia's Revolution.

#### Abstract:

Since political discourse portrays politicians' knowledge state and their ideological assumptions, a critical analysis of Clinton's speeches may unveil her perceptual and conceptual worlds. More specifically, critical discourse analysis may uncover her mental representations about the Tunisian Revolution and the US attitude towards such an important political event in North Africa and the Middle East. Studying factive presupposition and epistemic modality seems to be an effective pragmatic tool to reveal what is presented as factual and ideological knowledge in political discourse. The research instrument used to work out the frequency distribution of these lexical features is the latest version of 'AntConc' software. To uncover the epistemic state of Hillary Clinton, van Dijk's (1995b) socio-cognitive approach, mainly discourse-cognition-society paradigm, is applied to analyze her speeches between January 2011 and December 2012. At the discourse level, research findings reveal that factive presupposition, epistemic modality and evidential verbs unveil the speaker's strong personal commitment to the truth value of her propositions. At the cognitive level, results show that the speaker's personal and social values, attitudes, ideologies and knowledge unmask her mental mapping of Tunisia, democracy and human rights. It also uncovers the cognitive mechanisms that govern discourse production and understanding via ICMs, cognitive frames, mental models and context models. At the social level, research demonstrates that Clinton's perceptual and conceptual worlds are based on a dichotomy that involves 'WE', or democracies Vs. 'THEY' or the enemies of democracy, hence a dual vision of the world or polarization. This research bridges the lack of research combining epistemic presupposition, epistemic modality and evidentiality within a socio-cognitive framework

**Cite as:** Zheni, T. (2017). *A Socio-cognitive Approach to Factive Presupposition and Epistemic Modality in Hillary Clinton's Political Discourse: Tunisia's Democratic Transition as a Case Study*. English Department, Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities, Manouba University, Tunisia (Ph.D.'s Thesis). Retrieved from (Arab World English Journal Database. (ID Number: 202, March, 2018). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/th.2002>