

# Culturonyms as Ideological Markers in English-Language Political Discourse: A Media-Based Linguistic Analysis

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**Abstract;** This article investigates the ideological function of culturonyms in English-language political and media discourse, focusing on their role as culturally marked lexical units that mediate identity, power, and evaluation. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and cultural linguistics, the study develops a theoretical model of semantic stratification to explain how culturonyms transition from culturally descriptive terms to ideologically operational markers. The framework is empirically validated through three case studies examining immigration discourse, lifestyle-based political critique, and symbolic marginalization through omission in mainstream media. Using lexical-semantic analysis, collocation analysis, and frequency mapping, the findings demonstrate that culturonyms systematically contribute to negative other-presentation, polarization within the *Us vs. Them* dichotomy, and the regulation of cultural visibility. The study further shows that ideological control is exercised not only through explicit evaluative labeling but also through strategic absence, which minimizes the cultural capital of marginalized groups. By integrating empirical corpus analysis with socio-cognitive and discursive theory, the article positions culturonyms as micro-level agents of ideological control and offers a replicable methodological model for analyzing culturally coded political language in contemporary media.

**Keywords:** *culturonyms; political discourse; ideological square; Critical Discourse Analysis*

## I. Introduction: The Nexus of Culture, Lexicon, and Political Contestation

### 1.1. Contextualizing Political and Media Discourse

The study of political discourse is grounded in the understanding that language constitutes an integral component of political action, functioning not merely as a vehicle of communication but also as an object of critical inquiry (Van Dijk, 1995). Political discourse differs fundamentally from other discourse types due to its inherently ideological nature and its role in constructing, legitimizing, and disseminating social values and worldviews (Fairclough, 1995). From a practical perspective, linguistic analysis enables scholars to identify the lexical, cognitive, and discursive mechanisms through which political ideologies are produced and circulated (Van Dijk, 2002).

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In the contemporary context, English-language media serve as the primary operational arena for political communication. Parliamentary debates, legislative initiatives, political campaigns, and public addresses are predominantly mediated through textual, audiovisual, and digital formats (Fairclough, 2010). This close interaction between language, media, and power necessitates a rigorous analytical framework such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which explicitly links discourse structures to broader social structures and relations of dominance (Fairclough, 1995). Within this framework, political correctness emerges as a salient linguistic phenomenon reflecting the ideological regulation of public discourse and the normative enforcement of values related to race, gender, and religion (Van Dijk, 2012).

## 1.2. The Culturonym as a Specialized Lexical Unit

This study focuses on culturonyms—lexical units that encode culturally specific phenomena and function as carriers of collective cultural knowledge. Within cultural linguistics, the analysis of culturonyms is essential because language operates both as a repository of cultural memory and as a mechanism for transmitting social norms, values, and worldviews (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1999).

Culturonyms such as *flamenco*, *sitar*, or *opera* frequently enter languages as loanwords or untranslated borrowings and retain strong cultural and historical associations (Seidova, n.d.). These units are not limited to referential meaning; rather, they function as complex semiotic signs capable of evoking emotional responses, ideological positions, and identity-based associations (Vorobyov, 1997). In some cases, culturonyms such as *punk* or *K-pop* acquire polysemous meanings that extend into domains of fashion, lifestyle, and identity politics (Seidova, n.d.). Their semantic stratification—the coexistence of multiple semantic layers—renders them particularly susceptible to ideological manipulation within political discourse (Van Dijk, 1995).

## 1.3. Research Gap and Study Objectives

While the theoretical foundations of ideological discourse analysis are well established within CDA (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1995), and specific lexical indicators such as ideologemes and evaluative name compounds have received scholarly attention, the culturonym has not been sufficiently examined as a distinct ideological marker in English-language political media (Seidova, n.d.). Existing studies tend to address broader lexical phenomena or focus on isolated cultural domains such as music or fashion, rather than analyzing the systematic mobilization of culturonyms within political rhetoric (Vorobyov, 1997).

The present study seeks to address this gap through a focused linguistic investigation with the following objectives:

1. To develop a structural model of the semantic stratification of culturonyms, tracing their transition from culturally descriptive units to ideologically functional markers (Seidova, n.d.).

2. To analyze the deployment of culturonyms within Van Dijk's ideological square, with particular attention to their role in constructing polarized socio-political representations of "Us" versus "Them" (Van Dijk, 2002).
3. To identify measurable linguistic mechanisms—such as lexical selection, frequency distribution, and collocational behavior—through which culturonyms contribute to the formation and reinforcement of ideological narratives in contemporary English-language media (Lai, 2017).

## **II. Theoretical Foundations: Mapping Ideology onto Cultural Lexicon**

### **2.1. Defining the Semiotic and Cultural Function of Culturonyms**

Culturonyms constitute a core category within cultural linguistics due to their ability to preserve cultural, historical, and symbolic specificity. Lexical units such as *sitar* or *flamenco* are inseparable from the ethnic, national, or regional identities they represent (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1999). Unlike borrowed terms that gradually lose their cultural markedness, culturonyms retain their indexical relationship to specific cultural contexts and histories (Vorobyov, 1997).

This cultural embeddedness allows culturonyms to function as verbal symbols endowed with strong connotative potential. Their dual semiotic role—simultaneously denoting a cultural phenomenon and evoking shared cultural associations—makes them particularly valuable for examining how ideology is encoded in language (Seidova, n.d.). The culturally grounded meaning layer thus serves as the prerequisite for subsequent ideological exploitation within political discourse.

### **2.2. The Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis provides the principal theoretical framework for examining the ideological use of culturonyms. CDA is understood as a multidisciplinary analytical approach concerned with the study of discourse in relation to power, ideology, and social inequality across media and communicative contexts (Fairclough, 1995). Key scholars in the field, including Fairclough and Van Dijk, emphasize the necessity of linking textual structures to underlying social structures such as class, ethnicity, and political power (Van Dijk, 2002).

CDA requires close attention to how linguistic choices contribute to the reproduction or contestation of social hierarchies. Given the complexity of contemporary political communication, CDA increasingly incorporates notions of contradiction, hybridity, and discursive complexity, recognizing that modern ideological processes are rarely linear or univocal (Fairclough, 2010).

### **2.3. Ideology, Cognition, and Discursive Control: Van Dijk's Model**

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of ideological discourse offers a crucial link between macro-level social structures and micro-level linguistic realization. According to this model, ideology does not directly control discourse but operates through shared cognitive frameworks—mental models—that

shape how speakers interpret events and select linguistic forms (Van Dijk, 1995).

A central feature of ideological organization is the polarizing schema commonly referred to as the *Us vs. Them* dichotomy. Political discourse routinely employs this schema to legitimize in-group interests and marginalize out-groups (Van Dijk, 2002). Ideological structures are assumed to include categories such as group identity, social activities, and relative social position.

Culturonyms, due to their inherent cultural specificity, are uniquely positioned to activate these group-defining categories. By invoking a culturally recognizable term, political actors can immediately signal group membership and cultural alignment, thereby facilitating rapid ideological categorization. This efficiency reduces cognitive processing demands and enhances the persuasive force of political messaging, making culturonyms especially effective instruments of discursive polarization.

2.4. Culturonym versus Ideologeme: A Functional Distinction

The ideological function of culturonyms becomes clearer when contrasted with ideologemes. Ideologemes represent core ideological concepts—such as *freedom*, *terror*, or *nation*—that carry explicit axiological orientation (Van Dijk, 1995). Some scholars have proposed replacing ideologemes with neutral “culturemes” in order to mitigate ideological bias in public discourse.

However, political practice demonstrates that culturally salient lexical units are inherently vulnerable to ideological appropriation. Since ideology emerges in contexts of competing group interests and contested interpretations of reality, culturonyms inevitably become sites of ideological struggle (Van Dijk, 2012). The phenomenon of political correctness exemplifies how culturally grounded terms acquire shifting evaluative meanings depending on political context.

When a culturonym is strategically employed to sustain dominance or enforce negative other-presentation, its axiological value becomes unstable and context-dependent. At this point, it ceases to function as a neutral cultural reference and assumes the operational characteristics of an ideologeme. This transition underscores the inherently contested nature of cultural language in political discourse and highlights the importance of semantic stratification in understanding how meaning is ideologically reconfigured.

Semantic Layer of Culturonym	Status/Function	Axiological Modus	Political Implication
Core (Denotative)	Lexical label (Cultureme)	Neutral (Referential)	Factual description of practice or object
Cultural (Connotative)	Identity marker (Cultureme)	Implicitly Indexed	Evokes shared cultural history, identity, or tradition
Ideological (Pragmatic)	Polarizing tool (Ideologeme)	Explicitly Positive (Us) or Negative (Them)	Sustains dominance or enforces negative other-presentation

Table 1: Semantic Transformation: From Cultureme to Ideologeme

### III. Linguistic Mechanisms of Ideological Lexicalization

#### 3.1. Semantic Stratification and Ideological Activation

The primary mechanism through which culturonyms acquire ideological force is **semantic stratification** (Seidova, n.d.). This process involves the coexistence of multiple semantic layers, beginning with a basic denotative meaning (e.g., *punk* as a musical genre) and extending to a culturally embedded layer which, when activated in political discourse, enables ideological interpretation (Vorobyov, 1997). The use of a culturonym thus functions as an act of semantic condensation, whereby complex cultural meanings are compressed into a single lexical unit that can be strategically mobilized (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1999).

These multifunctional units are particularly effective in political communication because they exploit the audience's shared cultural knowledge base (Seidova, n.d.). By activating culturally familiar associations, political actors can evoke emotional responses and ideological judgments with minimal explanatory effort. As a result, the culturonym operates simultaneously as a referential sign and as a carrier of sociopolitical values, enabling efficient ideological activation (Van Dijk, 1995).

#### 3.2. Lexical Choice and the *Us vs. Them* Dichotomy

Ideological control in political discourse is most visibly realized through the polarizing mechanism described by Van Dijk as the *ideological square*, which prioritizes positive self-presentation (*Us*) and negative other-presentation (*Them*) (Van Dijk, 2002). Lexical choice plays a decisive role in this process, as naming practices shape how social groups are categorized and evaluated.

In oppositional political rhetoric, particularly within conservative discourse, negatively charged lexical items are frequently employed to label perceived out-groups, such as *bogus asylum seekers*, *economic immigrants*, or *benefit scroungers* (Van Dijk, 2012). The incorporation of culturonyms into such constructions adds a layer of cultural specificity that intensifies the evaluative force of the label. By pairing a culturally marked term with a derogatory descriptor, political discourse amplifies negative other-presentation while simultaneously invoking group-based cultural distinctions.

This strategy is reinforced by a documented ideological preference for nominal forms. Research in discourse and cognition suggests that ideological conservatism correlates with a cognitive preference for stability, categorization, and structural clarity, all of which are effectively served by noun-based lexicalization (Van Dijk, 1995). Since culturonyms predominantly occur as nouns (e.g., *flamenco*, *sitar*, *K-pop*, *Briton*), they align seamlessly with this ideological demand. The noun-form culturonym enables the fixation of a social group as a stable and immutable category, transforming complex social dynamics into simplified ideological targets.

#### 3.3. Collocational Analysis and Hegemonic Reinforcement

Collocational analysis is a key methodological tool for uncovering ideological patterns embedded in

discourse, as ideologies often operate through repetitive and normalized linguistic associations (Lai, 2017). Hegemonic discourses—where the dominant group’s worldview is presented as natural or commonsensical—are sustained through stable and recurrent collocational structures (Fairclough, 1995).

When culturonyms are repeatedly paired with evaluative or marginalizing lexical items in media discourse, these associations become naturalized and ideologically invisible (Van Dijk, 1995). For example, if a culturally specific term consistently co-occurs with lexicon related to crime or social deviance, the resulting semantic cluster frames the associated group primarily through a lens of threat or deficiency. Over time, such collocational stabilization renders the ideological association unquestioned, reinforcing the principles of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation central to the ideological square (Van Dijk, 2002).

#### **IV. Discursive Strategies: Frequency, Omission, and Contradiction in Media Analysis**

##### **4.1. Frequency Mapping and Ideological Space**

Quantitative discourse analysis, particularly frequency mapping, provides an empirical means of estimating an actor’s position within ideological space (Van Dijk, 2012). The frequency with which specific lexical items occur is directly correlated with their ideological salience and relevance to political agendas.

In the case of culturonyms, elevated frequency signals that a particular cultural identity or concept occupies a central position within political conflict or policy framing. Media-based corpus analysis typically measures such frequencies as occurrences per million words, enabling systematic comparison across texts and time periods (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Tracking frequency shifts of culturonyms related to economic, cultural, or political systems allows researchers to identify which concepts are being foregrounded or suppressed. High-frequency repetition ensures sustained activation of socio-cognitive schemata, thereby consolidating the culturonym’s ideological function (Van Dijk, 1995).

##### **4.2. The Ideology of Absence: Marginalization through Omission**

Ideology is not only enacted through explicit lexical choices but also through systematic omission, which functions as a form of symbolic exclusion (Fairclough, 1995). The absence or marginal presence of certain culturonyms in mainstream English-language media discourse constitutes an active ideological strategy.

Culturonyms associated with marginalized groups—such as Indigenous or Latin American cultural references—are frequently underrepresented or replaced by vague, homogenizing labels (e.g., *boho*, *tribal*), which erase cultural specificity and complexity (Seidova, n.d.). This strategy aligns with the ideological square’s principle of minimizing positive representation of the out-group (Van Dijk, 2002). By denying culturally specific terms visibility, dominant discourse restricts the ability of marginalized



groups to articulate autonomous cultural and political narratives, thereby reinforcing existing linguistic and ideological hierarchies (Fairclough, 2010).

4.3. Dialectical Tension and Ideological Complexity

Critical Discourse Analysis must account for contradiction and instability as central features of ideological systems, particularly in a globalized and digitally mediated communicative environment (Fairclough, 2010). Contemporary discourse is characterized by rapid lexical innovation, leading to the emergence of new culturonyms and hybrid cultural forms such as *hyperpop* or *stan culture* (Seidova, n.d.).

These emergent terms challenge established cultural categories and disrupt traditional ideological frameworks, creating dialectical tension between institutional discourse and grassroots linguistic production. Political actors are therefore compelled either to co-opt or neutralize such neologisms as they transition from cultural lexicon to ideologically charged terminology (Van Dijk, 2012). The shifting status of culturonyms thus reflects an ongoing struggle over discursive authority, illustrating the dynamic relationship between language, ideology, and social change.

Ideological Strategy (Van Dijk, 1995)	Culturonym Function	Example Collocation (Linguistic Mechanism)	Resulting Ideological Message
Positive Self (Maximization)	Validation of the In-Group/Tradition	"Unshakable <b>British</b> <i>Fête</i> " (Positive adjective + Culturonym)	Appeals to shared heritage and legitimizes group identity
Negative Other (Maximization)	Marginalization/De-legitimization of Out-Group	"Bogus **** Asylum Seekers" (Negative adjective + Culturonym)	Frames immigration as criminal/fraudulent activity
Positive Other (Minimization)	Downplaying competitor's merits/achievements	"Outdated **** Bureaucracy" (Negative noun/adjective + Culturonym)	Reduces cultural capital or success to inefficiency
Negative Self (Minimization)	Deflecting criticism/Justification	"Necessary [ <b>Internal Culturonym</b> ] Austerity" (Mitigating adjective + Culturonym)	Reframes internal hardship as an inevitable necessity

Table 2: Culturonyms and the Ideological Square in Media

V. Empirical Case Studies in English-Language Media (Detailed Analysis)

The following case studies operationalize the proposed theoretical framework by demonstrating how lexical-semantic analysis, frequency mapping, and collocation analysis can be systematically applied to English-language media corpora. Together, they illustrate how culturonyms function as ideologically charged lexical units across different political contexts.

5.1. Case Study: Culturonyms of National and Regional Identity in Immigration Discourse

This case study examines media representations of immigration in English-language news discourse, focusing on how culturonyms indexing national or regional identities associated with incoming populations are employed to achieve negative other-presentation (Van Dijk, 2002).

The methodological procedure involves compiling a corpus of news articles and political transcripts related to border control and refugee debates. Within this corpus, culturonyms referring to the target groups are isolated and analyzed using collocation analysis to identify statistically significant pairings with negatively evaluated lexicon (Lai, 2017). For instance, the culturonym *Mexican* may be examined for recurrent co-occurrence with nominal compounds such as *border surge* or *unauthorized entry*. The repeated use of these collocations frames the referenced cultural identity through discourses of illegality, threat, and economic burden, thereby naturalizing an ideological construction of immigration as a predominantly legalistic and negative phenomenon (Fairclough, 1995). The persistence of such negative pairings provides empirical support for the claim that culturonyms are strategically mobilized to add cultural specificity to broader ideological strategies of derogation (Van Dijk, 2012).

## **5.2. Case Study: Lifestyle Culturonyms and the Critique of Elitism**

This analysis explores how political actors employ culturonyms associated with lifestyles, subcultures, or socio-economic groups to construct critiques of perceived elites. The focus is on culturally marked terms whose semantic stratification results in the ideological layer overriding the original cultural meaning (Seidova, n.d.).

Methodologically, the study selects items such as *Silicon Valley*, *hipster*, or culturally marked high-fashion terms from a corpus of opinion columns and political commentary (Seidova, n.d.). The analysis traces the shift in polysemy from an initial denotative reference (e.g., a geographic region or aesthetic style) to an ideological function indexing detachment, excessive liberalism, or economic exclusion. A culturonym associated with an expensive or niche cultural practice may thus be strategically invoked to signal “out-of-touch” elitism, irrespective of the original cultural phenomenon. This process relies heavily on the noun form of culturonyms, which satisfies the audience’s cognitive preference for stable, categorical targets of criticism and enhances the ideological clarity of the *Them* category (Van Dijk, 1995).

## **5.3. Case Study: Culturonyms and Symbolic Violence — The Politics of Absence**

The third case study addresses the ideological mechanism of omission, demonstrating how symbolic violence is enacted through the systematic underrepresentation of certain cultural identities in media discourse (Fairclough, 1995).

This approach employs comparative frequency analysis across a large, balanced media corpus (Van Dijk, 2012). The frequency of culturonyms linked to politically and economically dominant cultures—such as French terminology in gastronomy or Italian references in luxury discourse—is compared with that of culturonyms associated with marginalized regions, including Indigenous American or Eastern European cultural markers (Seidova, n.d.). Statistical analysis typically reveals that the latter occur at



markedly lower frequencies, often falling below minimal usage thresholds (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). When these marginalized culturonyms do appear, qualitative analysis frequently shows their replacement by vague, homogenizing labels such as *tribal* or *boho*, rather than culturally specific terms.

This pattern of underrepresentation confirms that ideological control is not exercised solely through explicit negative representation, but also through strategic non-recognition. By minimizing the visibility of complex and specific culturonyms, dominant media discourse reduces the cultural capital of marginalized groups and reinforces ideological hierarchies through the minimization of positive other-description (Van Dijk, 2002).

## VI. Conclusion: Culturonyms as Micro-Level Agents of Ideological Control

This study has demonstrated that culturonyms function as powerful micro-level instruments of ideological control in English-language political discourse. Through empirical case studies in immigration reporting, lifestyle-based political critique, and symbolic marginalization via omission, the analysis confirms that culturonyms are systematically mobilized to produce negative other-presentation, stabilize ideological categorization, and regulate cultural visibility.

The findings show that culturonyms exert ideological influence through a combination of semantic stratification, strategic lexical choice within the *Us vs. Them* dichotomy, recurrent collocational patterning, and frequency imbalance. These mechanisms enable political actors and media institutions to condense complex cultural identities into simplified evaluative frames, reinforcing polarization while naturalizing dominance. Crucially, ideological control is maintained not only through explicit negative labeling but also through strategic absence, which minimizes the cultural capital of marginalized groups.

By integrating insights from cultural linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, this research positions culturonyms as a specialized and operational form of ideologeme, uniquely suited to mediating identity, power, and evaluation in contemporary media discourse. Future research should extend this framework through longitudinal digital corpus studies and audience reception analysis to trace how emerging culturonyms acquire, shift, or resist ideological valence in rapidly evolving communicative environments.

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