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Master's Thesis

FAKE NEWS (based on English)

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CONTENTS

ANNOTATION

This Master's thesis investigates the linguistic-stylistic and communicative-pragmatic features inherent in English-language fake news. In an era of widespread information disorder, understanding the specific linguistic mechanisms through which “fake news” (encompassing misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation) are constructed and achieve their persuasive impact is crucial.

The research establishes a theoretical framework drawing from linguistics, communication studies, cognitive psychology, and discourse analysis, focusing on concepts such as micro-linguistic manipulation, conceptual framing, speech act theory, and the exploitation of cognitive biases through language. It then outlines a qualitative methodology for the analysis of a curated corpus of approximately 50 verified English-language fake news items sourced from diverse platforms and covering various themes, including politics, health/science, and social conspiracies.

The empirical core of the thesis presents a thematic categorization of the corpus, followed by detailed analyses of the fake news. These analyses systematically deconstruct selected fake news items, identifying dominant linguistic features (e.g.: emotionally charged lexicon, mimicry of authoritative genres, assertive syntax, misleading implicatures) and communicative strategies (e.g.: leveraging false authority, exploiting fear, reinforcing partisan biases, creating deceptive frames). The study synthesizes these findings to reveal common patterns in how fake news is linguistically engineered to influence perception, evoke emotion, and mobilize audiences. It also explores the dynamics of fake news dissemination, public reaction, and refutation.

The thesis concludes that the linguistic construction of fake news is not arbitrary but involves the deliberate and systematic deployment of specific rhetorical and discursive strategies. Recognizing these linguistic markers is posited as essential for enhancing media literacy, developing more effective counter-measures against information disorder, and fostering a more critically engaged public within the English-

speaking information ecosystem. The findings underscore the necessity of incorporating a nuanced understanding of language use into efforts to combat the proliferation and impact of fake news.

Keywords: fake news, disinformation, misinformation, linguistic analysis, stylistic analysis, pragmatic analysis, communicative strategies, discourse analysis, media literacy, English language, information disorder.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Магістерська робота присвячена дослідженню лінгвостилістичних та комунікативно-прагматичних особливостей, властивих англомовним фейковим новинам. В епоху поширеного інформаційного безладу надзвичайно важливим є розуміння специфічних мовних механізмів, за допомогою яких конструюються "фейкові новини" (що охоплюють дезінформацію, мізінформацію та маніпулятивну інформацію) та досягають свого переконливого впливу.

У дослідженні закладено теоретичну базу, що спирається на досягнення лінгвістики, комунікаційних студій, когнітивної психології та дискурс-аналізу, зосереджуючись на таких поняттях, як мікролінгвістичні маніпуляції, концептуальне фреймування, теорія мовленнєвих актів та використання когнітивних упереджень засобами мови. Далі описується якісна методологія аналізу спеціально зібраного корпусу, що складається з приблизно 50 верифікованих англомовних фейкових новин, отриманих з різноманітних платформ, що охоплюють різні теми, зокрема політику, здоров'я/науку та соціальні змови.

Емпіричне ядро роботи представляє тематичну категоризацію корпусу, за якою слідує детальний аналіз конкретних випадків. Цей аналіз систематично деконструює обрані фейкові новини, ідентифікуючи домінантні лінгвістичні риси (наприклад, емоційно забарвлену лексику, імітацію авторитетних жанрів, асертивний синтаксис, оманливі імплікатури) та комунікативні стратегії (наприклад, використання фальшивого авторитету, експлуатація страху, посилення партійних упереджень, створення оманливих фреймів). Дослідження узагальнює ці висновки, щоб виявити загальні патерни лінгвістичного конструювання фейкових новин з метою впливу на сприйняття, викликання емоцій та мобілізації аудиторії. Також розглядається динаміка поширення фейкових новин, суспільна реакція та їх спростування.

У висновках стверджується, що лінгвістичне конструювання фейкових новин не є випадковим, а передбачає цілеспрямоване та систематичне

застосування специфічних риторичних та дискурсивних стратегій. Уміння розпізнавати ці мовні маркери розглядається як необхідна умова для підвищення медіаграмотності, розробки ефективніших заходів протидії інформаційному безладу та формування більш критично налаштованої громадськості в англомовному інформаційному просторі. Результати підкреслюють необхідність включення глибокого розуміння використання мови в боротьбі з поширенням та впливом фейкових новин.

Ключові слова: фейкові новини, дезінформація, мізінформація, лінгвістичний аналіз, стилістичний аналіз, прагматичний аналіз, комунікативні стратегії, дискурс-аналіз, медіаграмотність, англійська мова, інформаційний безлад.

INTRODUCTION

Access to information plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding and influencing perceptions across diverse global domains, from politics and health to commerce and culture. This influence becomes particularly complex and potentially problematic when language itself is used strategically to mislead or manipulate. While offering unprecedented connectivity, the contemporary digital information environment has also become saturated with problematic information, including misinformation and deliberate disinformation, often collectively termed "fake news." amplify the impact of such language, making it harder to verify information that appears credible but is subtly framed to distort truth. Understanding how fake news are generated, adapted, and explicitly disseminated is critically essential.

The relevance of this paper lies in the growing prevalence and sophistication of fake news and disinformation across global digital platforms utilized by English speakers. As these forms of information disorder become more intricate, understanding their linguistic construction and communicative strategies is paramount. This issue is especially urgent in the context of politics and healthcare, where the spread of false information in English can significantly influence public opinion, international relations involving English-speaking nations, and broader social stability within English-speaking communities. This paper addresses the critical role of linguistic and communicative features in the dissemination and impact of misinformation within the English-speaking world.

Several scholars have made significant contributions to the broader fields informing this study, including Linguistics (e.g.: studies on framing, metaphor, and persuasive language), Disinformation Studies (e.g.: Claire Wardle on information disorder typology), Communication Theory (e.g.: Robert Entman on framing), and Cognitive Linguistics (e.g.: George Lakoff on conceptual metaphor). While these fields have offered valuable tools for understanding how meaning is shaped and manipulated through language, there has been less systematic research specifically on the detailed

linguistic features and communicative strategies inherent in fake content within the English language. This study aims to bridge that gap, shedding light on the linguistic vulnerabilities exploited in the creation and spread of misinformation in English.

The object of the paper is the linguistic characteristics and communicative strategies of fake news and disinformation within English-speaking digital and media environments, including social media and news platforms.

The subject of the paper is the lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic means used to construct, transmit, and interpret false or misleading messages; particular focus is placed on concept substitution, semantic distortion, and terminological bias that facilitate the spread of fake content among English-speaking audiences.

The purpose of this work is to analyze how fake news is getting created as a direct result of specific linguistic choices and the targeted substitution of concepts within English-language communication. This thesis explores how linguistic errors and intentional manipulations facilitate the creation and spread of Fake news, paying particular attention to the linguistic, communicative, and socio-cultural factors at play for English speakers. By adopting a language-centered perspective, we will reveal how language choices can build misleading meanings, misframe issues for English audiences, and ultimately influence public understanding based on distorted information presented in English.

The **tasks** undertaken within this research to explore the subject include:

- Examine how divergent linguistic choices applied to the same underlying information can create significantly different, potentially fake, representations for English-speaking target audiences.
- Identify key theoretical conclusions and practical implications regarding the linguistic and communicative features of Fake news based on the analysis of empirical examples.
- Utilize linguistic analysis tools to examine specific language use in texts that function as Fake news in English.

- Identify and analyze key themes and narrative distortions that are characteristic of Fake news in the English language.
- Investigate the role of linguistic and communicative strategies in shaping public perception and contributing to information disorder within English-speaking contexts.

The material for the research contains 50 dinstinct Emglish-language texts, claims and narratives that have been publicly identified and debunked as "fake news." These items were collected and verified by me, for this Master's thesis. The items, sourced from diverse online platforms (fake news sites, social media), provided textual data including core claims, article excerpts, and refutation details.

The methodology was primarily qualitative, integrating Linguistic-stylistic analysis (examining lexical, syntactic, rhetorical, and narrative features), Critical Discourse Analysis (investigating framing, representation, ideology, and intertextuality), and Pragmatic analysis (identifying speech acts, implicature, and communicative functions). Qualitative content analysis was used to identify recurring patterns. Each item was contextualized and systematically analyzed through these lenses, considering socio-cultural factors and digital platform influences, to understand the linguistic construction of deception and manipulation.

The paper's novelty focuses on examining the linguistic and communicative mechanisms of misinformation within the English language. It combines insights from Linguistics, Communication Studies, and Psychology to offer a new classification of language-based Fake news. Special attention is paid to concept substitution as a form of manipulation and to the development of analytical tools for identifying such Fake news in English texts. The work is practically grounded and applicable across multiple domains of communication targeting English-speaking audiences.

The practical significance of research lies in the meticulously identifying and analyzing the specific linguistic-stylistic and communicative-pragmatic strategies prevalent in English-language fake news. This detailed understanding is particularly

crucial for recognizing manipulative tactics within critical domains such as **political discourse and healthcare information** that will be deeper investigated in chapters 2 and 3. The findings can directly enhance media literacy, equipping individuals to more astutely evaluate the credibility of online content, especially concerning political narratives and health claims. Consequently, this work can inform the creation of targeted educational materials and aid in developing more robust countermeasures against the damaging effects of information disorder in these vital areas within the English-speaking world.

The research paper consists of approximately 87 pages, including an Introduction, three main chapters, Conclusions, and a List of References. Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical and methodological foundations for the study of fake news. Chapter 2 presents an empirical analysis of the linguistic construction of political fake news, while Chapter 3 offers a similar empirical analysis focused on fake news within the healthcare domain. Both empirical chapters include detailed case studies and classifications.

1. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DECONSTRUCTING FAKE NEWS THROUGH LINGUISTIC AND COMMUNICATIVE LENSES

1.1. The phenomenon of fake news

The digital age has brought to people information access, creating impressive opportunities for global communication and knowledge sharing [6]. However, this same technological infrastructure has become a fertile ground for the spreading of various forms of problematic information, often collectively, though sometimes imprecisely, referred to as "fake news." [9] These "fake news" cause big problems [30]. They make it hard for people to have good discussions, they can hurt how democracy works, they can make society less connected, and they can be bad for individuals.

We've always had things like lies spread on purpose (disinformation) and information used to push a certain idea (propaganda) [62]. But now, with the internet, these "Fake news" can spread much faster, reach more people, and look more real [68]. This means we need to really understand how they work, especially in English. The way these "Fake news" use language is a big part of why people believe them and how they affect what people think and do online [38]. So, it's really important to study how these language "Fake news" are put together [5].

1.1.1. Fake news, disinformation, misinformation, and related concepts.

Navigating the complex terminology that are surrounding problematic information is essential for analytical clarity[66]. The popular term "fake news" itself became highly contested after being weaponized especially in political discourse, leading many scholars to prefer more precise taxonomies[66]. A widely adopted and practical framework distinguishes problematic information based on dimensions of falsity and intent to harm[69].

Misinformation: Misinformation refers to the spread of false information where there is no malicious intent[50]. The person sharing it might genuinely believe it to be true or may disseminate it carelessly without proper verification[65]. Linguistically, misinformation often arises from genuine errors in understanding or expression, misinterpretations of language, or simple oversights in communication[45].

Within English-language contexts, we can find the possibilities for creating fake news in:

- **Lexical ambiguity and misunderstanding:** errors occur when key terms are misinterpreted due to polysemy (words with multiple meanings) or a lack of specific domain knowledge[83]. For instance, a general term might be used inappropriately in a technical context, leading to a false understanding. Confusion between similar-sounding words or words with overlapping but distinct meanings in English can also contribute.
- **Grammatical and syntactic errors:** mistakes in sentence structure, tense, aspect, or the use of grammatical markers can alter the intended meaning, leading to a false representation of events, timelines, or causal relationships in English[19]. For example, an incorrect verb tense can misrepresent the timing of an action.
- **Numerical and quantificational imprecision:** errors in stating or interpreting numbers, statistics, or dates expressed in English can lead to significant factual inaccuracies[4]. This can involve simple numerical mistakes or misinterpretations of quantifiers (e.g.: "some" vs. "many").
- **Pragmatic failures and omissions:** misinformation can result from a failure to convey crucial contextual or qualifying information in English. This might involve omitting hedges (e.g.: "possibly," "likely"), which weakens a statement, or failing to provide necessary background information for proper interpretation.
- **Disinformation** involves the intentional creation and/or sharing of information known to be false or manipulated, with the explicit goal to deceive, mislead, cause harm, or achieve a specific objective within English-speaking

audiences. The defining characteristics are malice and intentionality in the linguistic choices made[78].

Linguistic strategies employed in English-language disinformation campaigns include:

- **Strategic lexical choice:** purposefully selecting English words with specific connotations or emotional weight to skew perception[13]. For example, labeling a group as "radicals" instead of "activists" carries a negative connotation.
- **Selective presentation and omission:** presenting only parts of information that support a particular narrative in English while deliberately omitting contradictory details or context that would provide a more complete picture[36].
- **Quote manipulation and misattribution:** distorting the meaning of a quote in English through subtle changes in wording, taking it out of its original context, or falsely attributing statements to individuals or sources.
- **Loaded language and framing:** systematically using emotionally charged or biased language in English to frame an issue or individual in a particular light[24], influencing the audience's perception and interpretation.
- **Fabrication and linguistic mimicry:** creating entirely false narratives, documents, or reports in English, often mimicking the linguistic style and conventions of authentic sources to lend them false credibility[82].
- **Malinformation:** involves the sharing of factually accurate information that is used out of context or with the deliberate intent to harm an individual, group, or organization within English-speaking communities. The harmful intent lies in how the truthful information is linguistically framed and presented[23].

Linguistic strategies in English-language malinformation include:

- **Sensationalism and emotional amplification:** presenting factual information in English using highly emotional or sensational language to provoke a strong negative reaction against the target[86].

- **Selective disclosure and emphasis:** highlighting specific truthful details while downplaying or omitting other relevant information to create a misleading or damaging impression in English.
- **Incendiary language and hate speech:** using accurate but inflammatory language in English to incite hatred, discrimination, or violence against a particular individual or group.
- **Privacy violation through language:** publicly sharing private information in English, often accompanied by derogatory or accusatory language, to cause harm or humiliation**.** [69]

Understanding this taxonomy of information disorder, with a focus on its linguistic manifestations in English, is crucial. This thesis uses "Fake news" as an overarching term for these problematic outputs within English-language contexts, emphasizing the linguistic features and communicative strategies that define them[75]. This phenomenon is situated within broader contexts of influence operations and information warfare[80], where state and non-state actors strategically use language (including deliberately crafted misinformation and disinformation in English) to shape public perceptions and achieve their objectives within English-speaking populations.

1.1.2. Evolution of scientific thought on information manipulation.

The study of information manipulation has long-standing roots[2], evolving in parallel with advances in communication technologies and shifting geopolitical landscapes[34]. In the early 20th century, much attention centered on analyzing propaganda, particularly during times of war. Many of the classic linguistic techniques identified during that period, such as emotional appeals through specific word choices, selective disclosure of information, and ideological framing via particular narratives, remain relevant today and continue to manifest in various forms of communication.

As communication research evolved, the focus shifted from overt propaganda to more nuanced understandings of media influence and its linguistic underpinnings[55].

Agenda-setting theory[17] explains how media influence public priorities by repeatedly highlighting certain issues through language. In English-language media, the prominence or marginalization of stories shapes what enters public awareness. Linguistic framing as "urgent" or "relevant" helps determine audience focus[39].

Framing theory shows how language choices shape perception. By emphasizing specific aspects through vocabulary, tone, and structure, media guide English-speaking audiences' interpretation of events[10]. Words like "opportunity" vs. "threat" can drastically shift understanding and emotional response — across political and commercial contexts alike.

Cultivation theory highlights the long-term effects of repeated language patterns in media[32]. Consistent framing of groups or topics in English can gradually shape audience views, reinforcing stereotypes through cumulative linguistic exposure rather than isolated messages.

Social cognitive theory highlights how individuals form beliefs and behaviors by observing media models. English-language media — news, entertainment, or advertising — shapes perceptions of cultures and norms. Its linguistic choices can promote intercultural understanding or reinforce stereotypes and disinformation.

The rise of digital media has added further complexity to the linguistic landscape of information manipulation[53]. With the proliferation of social networks, algorithmic filtering, and AI-generated content in English, manipulated information can now spread faster and more widely than ever[1]. Poorly worded or deliberately misleading content is often absorbed into algorithmically curated "filter bubbles," where users are repeatedly exposed to information that confirms their existing views, often through similar linguistic framing[9]. In such contexts, the original linguistic nuances or intent may be lost[49], while the manipulated version gains traction and legitimacy through repetition and perceived consensus within English-speaking online communities.

Despite the sophistication of these media and psychological models in analyzing communication[73], they often treat the transmission of information as a

more direct process and may overlook the nuances of how language itself shapes interpretation[27]. This is where a deeper focus on linguistic analysis provides critical depth in understanding how "Fake news" operate within English. Examining the specific linguistic features, rhetorical strategies, and pragmatic implications of problematic information is essential.

The manipulation perspective within linguistic studies explicitly frames communication as a form of strategic influence, shaped by ideology, cultural norms, and power structures embedded in language. It recognizes that all communication involves choices[7], and that external pressures and internalized values shape these choices, particularly in how language is used to persuade or mislead. In the context of disinformation in English, this understanding is particularly valuable, as it highlights how language can be instrumentalized to serve strategic communicative goals.

Communicators' linguistic practices are shaped by their training, social background, professional environment, personal beliefs, and many other factors[74]. These factors can lead to unconscious biases in how information is presented in English, especially in ambiguous or ideologically charged situations, influencing word choice, tone, and framing[90].

Finally, ethical considerations in communication serve as critical benchmarks for assessing the integrity of information disseminated in English[64]. Ethical communication practices demand transparency, accountability, and a commitment to accurately conveying information, even under pressure. Understanding the ethical dimensions of linguistic choices is essential for identifying and resisting manipulation within English-language contexts.

Altogether, integrating theories from communication, psychology, sociology, political science, and linguistics enables a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how misinformation and disinformation are generated, adapted, and circulated within English-speaking societies. Especially in our digitally mediated world, recognizing the power of language as a site of potential distortion is not a theoretical luxury — it is a practical necessity[46]. This thesis seeks to contribute to

this interdisciplinary effort by foregrounding the crucial role of linguistic analysis in understanding how truth can be preserved, bent, or entirely rewritten through the strategic use of language in "Fake news".

1.1.3. Reasons for the spread of and trust in fake news.

Individuals' and societies' susceptibility to fake information, particularly when encountered within English-language contexts, is not simply a matter of ignorance or a lack of media literacy. Instead, it arises from a complex and dynamic interplay of technological, psychological[41], and socio-cultural factors that shape how information is encountered, evaluated, and internalized linguistically and cognitively[21].

- **Technological infrastructure and platform dynamics**

At the core of today's information environment lies the linguistic architecture of digital platforms. Social media networks and content-sharing services are not passive channels; they are active environments structured by algorithms designed to maximize user attention and engagement through specific linguistic cues and framing[16]. This optimization logic often prioritizes content that is emotionally charged through evocative language[89], cognitively stimulating through novel or surprising linguistic structures, or socially affirming through language that resonates with in-group norms — traits that fake information often exhibits in abundance within English discourse. As a result, misleading or false content is disproportionately amplified through algorithmic propagation[61].

Recommendation systems employed by major platforms are particularly influential in shaping users' linguistic environments[31]. These algorithms are trained to learn user preferences, including their engagement with specific linguistic styles and topics, and reinforce them, often by suggesting progressively more extreme or emotionally provocative material framed in similar linguistic terms. This "rabbit hole" effect can trap users in echo chambers or filter bubbles, where their existing beliefs are continuously confirmed and opposing views, often expressed through different linguistic frameworks, are excluded. In such closed informational environments,

disinformation, especially when presented in familiar English or framed in culturally resonant terms, can flourish unchecked, leveraging specific linguistic features for persuasive effect.

- **Ease of dissemination and virality**

Modern communication technologies make the transmission of information virtually frictionless within English-speaking networks. Content, regardless of its veracity, can be shared instantly and at scale, often without any requirement for linguistic verification or accountability. This low-barrier sharing encourages impulsive reactions and emotional engagement[87], especially when content confirms deeply held beliefs or triggers outrage through specific linguistic choices[96]. Even subtle linguistic manipulations in otherwise factual-seeming content can spark significant responses if they are framed to align with the expectations or fears of a particular English-speaking audience.

Virality is not solely a product of truth or utility; it is also a function of linguistic visibility (how prominently the language is displayed), novelty (how unusual or attention-grabbing the language is), and emotional impact (how strongly the language resonates with users' feelings)[54]. Once a piece of information gains initial traction through compelling language, network effects often take over: shares generate more visibility, which leads to more shares, in a self-perpetuating cycle of linguistic and social reinforcement. By the time content is linguistically debunked[18], the damage to public understanding may already be done.

- **Precision targeting and cultural tailoring**

Another key vulnerability in the English-language information ecosystem lies in the precision with which disinformation campaigns can be engineered. Digital platforms harvest and analyze vast quantities of user data, including their linguistic preferences and online communication patterns, enabling malicious actors to micro-target specific populations with customized messages. This includes carefully crafted English-language content that has been strategically adapted to resonate with particular

cultural values, political tensions expressed through specific terminology, or social anxieties articulated through prevalent linguistic frames. In multilingual or multicultural societies where English serves as a common language, these tailored messages can exploit local narratives, historical grievances expressed through specific vocabulary, or linguistic nuances to increase persuasive power.

For instance, the same core piece of fake information can be linguistically framed differently for different English-speaking audiences: using language that evokes national pride in one group while employing language that stokes fears of external threats in another. This linguistic flexibility makes disinformation a highly adaptable and effective tool in influence operations targeting diverse English-speaking communities.

- **Automation and the illusion of consensus**

The scale and apparent legitimacy of fake content in English can be further reinforced through automatio[59]n. Bot networks, fake accounts employing consistent linguistic styles, and coordinated digital actors can artificially inflate the popularity of a message, creating the illusion that it is widely accepted or endorsed within English-speaking online spaces. When users see a post with thousands of shares or likes, regardless of its actual content or origin, they are more likely to view it as credible or representative of broader public sentiment within their English-speaking network. This perceived linguistic consensus can override critical evaluation

- **The psychological component: why it works**

While this section focuses on the technological ecosystem and its linguistic dimensions, it is essential to recognize the underlying psychological mechanisms that amplify the effectiveness of "Fake news" presented in English. People are more likely to accept information that confirms their existing worldview[29], is presented in a seemingly familiar linguistic style, or is framed in emotionally resonant terms using specific vocabulary and rhetorical devices[99]. The linguistic framing of a message for

a specific audience enhances these effects, particularly when done with rhetorical or ideological intent.

Moreover, users often assume that information presented in well-formed English has been "filtered" for accuracy or reliability, which creates a false sense of trust in the linguistic presentation itself. This misplaced trust, combined with the rapid flow of information in English-language digital spaces, makes it difficult for individuals to pause, reflect, and critically assess the linguistic construction of what they are consuming.

- **Why our minds are vulnerable to fake news**

Human cognition is not optimized for the objective evaluation of every piece of information encountered in English[60]. Instead, our brains rely on heuristics — mental shortcuts developed to cope with complexity and information overload. While these heuristics are generally adaptive, they also create predictable vulnerabilities that can be exploited by fake information, particularly when such content is presented in a linguistic form that aligns with pre-existing beliefs or cultural narratives prevalent in English-speaking communities[40].

- **Confirmation bias** is one of the most pervasive cognitive tendencies. People tend to seek out, interpret, and recall information expressed in English in ways that confirm their existing beliefs and attitudes. As a result, they are more likely to accept "Fake news" that align with their worldview[94], while dismissing signs of linguistic inconsistency or factual inaccuracy. For example, a poorly worded statement falsely attributed to a political figure may be readily believed by individuals predisposed to distrust that figure, despite clear signs of linguistic distortion.
    - **Motivated reasoning** takes this further: individuals subconsciously work harder to reject information presented in English that contradicts their preferences, while accepting agreeable content with minimal linguistic scrutiny. In this process, the quality or accuracy of the language used in a "fake" often becomes irrelevant, as long as the message satisfies an emotional or ideological need.

- **The availability heuristic** makes people judge the frequency or plausibility of an event based on how easily examples come to mind, often influenced by the vividness and emotional impact of the language used to describe them. "Fake news" that are emotionally charged or vividly presented in English — such as a story involving violence, betrayal, or scandal described with dramatic language — are more memorable and, consequently, more likely to be perceived as common or real, even if isolated or entirely fabricated.
- **The illusory truth effect** illustrates how repetition alone, particularly of specific linguistic formulations, can create the illusion of truth[51]. A false claim, especially if echoed across multiple platforms using similar language, can gain traction through sheer familiarity. Once embedded in public discourse through repeated linguistic exposure, even accurate corrections or clarifications struggle to dislodge the original falsehood.
- **Anchoring bias** causes initial exposure to information, particularly if presented with strong linguistic framing[35], to shape future judgments, regardless of its accuracy, disproportionately. A misleading claim introduced early in a news cycle, using specific persuasive language[93], can set the tone for how subsequent information is interpreted, even if that claim is later retracted or revised.
- **Negativity bias** further compounds this problem. Humans are hardwired to pay more attention to and place greater weight on negative information, particularly content related to threats or losses, often expressed through alarming or fear-inducing language. "Fake news" that emphasize danger, corruption, or hostility are more likely to grab attention and provoke strong emotional reactions, making them highly shareable and impactful within English-speaking communities.
- **The Dunning-Kruger effect** reveals a troubling paradox: individuals with lower expertise in a given domain are often more confident in their judgments. In the context of evaluating the linguistic credibility of information, this means that people with limited critical language analysis skills may nevertheless feel confident

evaluating the reliability of complex or manipulated English texts, potentially reinforcing belief in "Fake news."

- **The bias blind spot** completes the picture: while most people can recognize cognitive biases in others' interpretations of language, they struggle to identify or acknowledge these biases in their own processing of English-language information[76]. This self-perception gap hinders critical reflection and makes individuals less likely to question their susceptibility to "Fake news," even when presented with evidence of manipulation.

- **Emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of susceptibility**

Beyond cognitive biases, several emotional and social factors also shape how individuals respond to misinformation presented in English.

- **Emotional resonance** plays a central role. "Fake news" often succeed not by appealing to logic or evidence, but by triggering powerful emotions — fear, anger, moral outrage, pride, or group loyalty — often through carefully chosen language and narrative structures that resonate with the target audience's emotional landscape.

- **Social identity and in-group cohesion** further influence susceptibility. People tend to trust information that comes from within their perceived social group and is expressed in language familiar to that group. They are also more likely to share content that reinforces group identity or denigrates out-groups through specific linguistic markers of identity and difference.

- **Source credibility heuristics** also shape perception. Instead of analyzing the linguistic content itself, individuals often rely on superficial cues such as professional design, perceived authority conveyed through language, or endorsement by familiar figures within English-speaking communities. "Fake news" can exploit these shortcuts by appearing in credible formats — on official-looking websites with formal language, in polished news templates, or accompanied by authoritative-sounding source attributions — thereby lowering skepticism and encouraging dissemination.

- **The broader environment of vulnerability** means that certain socio-political and economic conditions significantly exacerbate the public's vulnerability to fake information, particularly in translated formats.
- **Declining trust in institutions** such as government, mainstream media, science, and academia, creates a vacuum that alternative narratives, including conspiracy theories or ideologically motivated Fake news, can readily fill. In multilingual settings, these narratives are often imported from foreign contexts, translated to suit local sensibilities, and presented as more "authentic" or "unfiltered" than domestic discourse.
- **Polarization and partisan dynamics** contribute further. In deeply divided societies, individuals are especially motivated to accept negative claims about opposing groups, often without verifying the information or questioning the integrity of the translation. In such contexts, the veracity of a message becomes secondary to its utility in reinforcing partisan identity or advancing political agendas.
- **The attention economy and information overload** also play a critical role. In an environment saturated with competing messages, attention becomes a scarce resource. Media producers, driven by financial pressures to maximize clicks, views, and shares, may prioritize speed and emotional impact over accuracy and contextual fidelity. As a result, poorly translated or sensationalized content often reaches the public faster than more reliable, carefully vetted translations.
- **Gaps in media literacy and unequal access to digital skills** further deepen disparities in vulnerability[85]. While some individuals possess the critical tools to assess information sources and question translations, others may lack the linguistic, cultural, or technological knowledge necessary to do so. In many cases, basic media literacy programs do not address the complexities of translation, leaving audiences ill-equipped to detect subtle distortions or manipulations that occur in cross-linguistic contexts.
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1.2. Identification, impact, and dangers of Fake news in a globalized context

1.2.1. Methods for recognizing fake news and manipulative content.

While standard verification techniques (examining the source, author, date, evidence, lateral reading, and image checks) are crucial when encountering information in English, evaluating content that might originate from another language and have been rendered into English requires additional layers of linguistic vigilance:

- **Linguistic scrutiny:** pay close attention to the quality and characteristics of the English language used. Does the text exhibit awkward phrasing, grammatical errors, unnatural or unusual word choices, or inconsistencies in style or register that might suggest a poor or non-native translation (whether human or machine)? While fluent-sounding English does not guarantee accuracy, noticeable linguistic issues can serve as a significant red flag, indicating a potentially unreliable source or manipulation of the original message.
- **Investigate potential source language influence:** consider if certain phrasing or grammatical structures seem unusual for typical English and might reflect the grammatical patterns or idiomatic expressions of another language. This doesn't automatically mean it's a "fake," but it warrants further investigation into the potential origin and translation process (if any).
- **Analyze key terminology:** pay particular attention to the specific English vocabulary used, especially for politically, socially, or culturally sensitive terms. Are these terms used in a way that seems loaded, overly simplistic, or potentially designed to evoke a specific emotional or ideological reaction in an English-speaking audience? Researching the typical English equivalents and connotations of terms related to the topic can reveal if the chosen language seems deliberately skewed.
- **Assess the linguistic register and tone:** does the overall style and tone of the English text seem appropriate for the purported source and context? For example, does a supposedly academic report use overly emotional or informal language in

English? Inconsistencies in register can suggest manipulation or an unreliable translation process.

- **Look for internal linguistic inconsistencies:** are there contradictions or illogical connections within the English text itself? Do arguments presented rely on vague or undefined terms? Such internal linguistic weaknesses can be indicative of poorly generated or deliberately misleading content.
- **Consider the pragmatic implications:** how is the information presented in English likely to be understood and acted upon by the target audience? Does the language used subtly guide the reader towards a particular interpretation or conclusion? Analyzing the intended pragmatic effect can reveal manipulative intent.
- **Evaluate the translator/publisher's linguistic credibility:** who is responsible for the English version? Is it a reputable international news agency known for its journalistic and linguistic standards? Is it a recognized academic press with rigorous editing processes? Or is it an anonymous social media account or a known source of propaganda that often employs biased or inflammatory language in English? The linguistic credibility and reputation of the entity presenting the information in English are crucial factors to consider.
- **Apply critical evaluation of persuasive language:** be particularly wary if the English translation employs overly simplistic arguments, relies heavily on emotional appeals rather than evidence-based language, or uses fallacious reasoning. These rhetorical strategies are common in persuasive content, including "Fake news."
- Incorporating these linguistically-grounded layers of scrutiny enhances critical evaluation of information in English.

1.2.2. Social, political, and psychological consequences.

"Fake news" encountered within English-language contexts can have particularly insidious and far-reaching consequences because they can resonate with a wide and diverse audience[79], potentially influencing perceptions and behaviors across various social, political, and psychological domains. The linguistic framing and

communicative strategies employed in these "fake news" play a crucial role in shaping these impacts.

- **Political impacts:**
  - **Distorted international perceptions:** linguistically manipulated narratives in English can significantly shape how countries, leaders, and their policies are perceived on a global scale[67]. The specific vocabulary, framing, and rhetorical devices used can impact diplomatic relations, the formation of international alliances, and public support for international actions involving English-speaking nations. For example, the consistent use of derogatory language to describe a foreign leader in English-language media can erode public trust and hinder diplomatic efforts.
  - **Interference in foreign affairs:** the strategic dissemination of disinformation in English can be used to destabilize foreign governments, interfere in their electoral processes by swaying public opinion through targeted linguistic campaigns, or undermine international treaties and organizations by spreading doubt and mistrust through carefully constructed English narratives. For example, fabricated reports presented in seemingly authoritative English, discrediting international climate agreements, can influence policy decisions and public support in English-speaking countries.
  - **Justification for conflict:** the systematic dissemination of narratives in English that demonize an adversary through dehumanizing language or fabricate threats using alarmist rhetoric can be a powerful tool in building public support for military action or aggressive foreign policy within English-speaking populations. The linguistic construction of the "enemy" plays a critical role in this process.
- **Social impacts:**
  - **Cross-cultural misunderstanding & prejudice:** poorly constructed or intentionally biased language used in English-language representations of foreign cultures, ethnic groups, or religions can reinforce negative stereotypes and hinder meaningful intercultural dialogue. The selective highlighting of negative aspects using specific vocabulary or framing can fuel xenophobia and prejudice within English-

speaking societies. For example, news reports about crime in other countries that consistently emphasize the ethnicity of perpetrators using loaded language can contribute to harmful stereotypes among English-speaking audiences.

- **Global public health threats:** misinformation concerning diseases, treatments, or vaccines[11], when disseminated in clear and persuasive English, can rapidly undermine public health responses on a global scale[71]. The linguistic authority with which false claims are presented can erode public trust in legitimate health information and lead to detrimental health behaviors within English-speaking communities, as was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic[15].
- **Erosion of global norms:** coordinated campaigns employing disinformation in English can strategically attack universal human rights principles or undermine trust in international law by using specific legal or ethical terminology in misleading ways[25]. The linguistic framing of these attacks can subtly shift public opinion and weaken support for established global norms within English-speaking nations.

- **Economic impacts:**
  - **International market distortion:** the spread of fake reviews, manipulated product information using deceptive language, or false news about companies operating across borders, all presented in fluent English, can unfairly damage businesses and distort international markets. The linguistic credibility of these "Fake news" can significantly impact consumer confidence and investment decisions within English-speaking markets.
  - **Undermining international trade/investment:** the dissemination of rumors or disinformation in English concerning a country's economic stability or regulatory environment can deter foreign investment and disrupt international trade relationships involving English-speaking partners. The linguistic framing of economic news can significantly influence investor sentiment.
  - **Psychological impacts:** while sharing similarities with the psychological effects of monolingual "Fake news" (such as increased anxiety and cynicism), "Fake

news" encountered in English, particularly those originating from seemingly foreign sources, can add a layer of confusion and distrust specifically regarding international information sources and intercultural communication itself among English speakers. The linguistic unfamiliarity or perceived cultural distance can amplify feelings of uncertainty and suspicion.

1.2.3. Fake news as a tool of propaganda and information warfare.

Within the context of propaganda (systematic attempts at persuasion) and information warfare (the strategic use of information as a weapon)[84], the English language serves as a critical vector for projecting influence and manipulating perceptions across borders, targeting English-speaking populations globally.

Propagandists utilize the English language not merely to convey a message, but to strategically adapt it to resonate with the cultural values, political sensitivities, and existing biases of specific target audiences within English-speaking communities. This often involves more than literal translation or simple linguistic transfer; it necessitates strategic reframing using carefully chosen English vocabulary and terminological nuances to maximize persuasive impact.

Malicious actors can exploit the fact that English-speaking audiences often lack direct access to source language information or the cultural context necessary to critically evaluate claims, especially those originating from non-English sources. They can present distorted versions of events or narratives in seemingly credible English with relatively little fear of immediate and widespread contradiction within English-speaking spheres.

Many states operate international media outlets (e.g.: RT, CGTN, BBC World News – though with vastly different aims and standards) that broadcast and publish content in English and other languages. Analyzing the linguistic strategies and framing techniques employed by these outlets is crucial to understanding how national narratives are projected and how potential manipulations might be embedded within their English-language content.

While soft power relies on cultural attraction and the persuasive appeal of a nation's values and culture, sharp power, as defined by Walker and Ludwig (2017), often involves manipulative uses of information[36], including censorship and disinformation projected outwards. The English language is a key tool in this projection, allowing states to directly target global audiences with carefully crafted narratives.

Different actors, both state and non-state, may employ different linguistic strategies within their information operations targeting English speakers. Some might focus on crude fabrications presented in sensationalized English, while others utilize more subtle meaning shifts and framing techniques embedded in seemingly plausible and well-articulated English narratives. Understanding these varying linguistic approaches is essential for detection and analysis.

1.3. Linguistic manipulation and conceptual framing in the Genesis of "Fake news"

Having established the broader context of "fake news" within English-language communication, we now focus sharply on the theoretical underpinnings of how linguistic choices and the strategic framing of concepts function as primary mechanisms for generating misleading and false information within English-speaking communities.

1.3.1. The foundational role of language in constructing and distorting meaning in English "Fake news".

Language is not merely a neutral conduit for conveying pre-existing truths; it actively shapes our understanding of reality[22]. The selection of specific words, grammatical structures, and rhetorical devices in English directly influences how information is perceived and interpreted. Within the realm of "fake news," this constructive power of language is often exploited to create and disseminate distorted versions of reality.

The way we process language involves more than just decoding individual words. Our minds actively work to build coherent mental models of the information we encounter. This process is influenced by our existing knowledge, beliefs, and the linguistic cues present in the text. "Fake news" often leverage specific linguistic patterns to guide this constructive process in a misleading direction.

The choice of vocabulary in English "Fake news" is paramount. Words carry not only denotations but also rich connotations, emotional weight, and socio-cultural associations. By strategically selecting words with particular emotional resonances or cultural baggage, creators of "Fake news" can subtly influence the audience's attitudes and interpretations.

Furthermore, the grammatical structure of sentences in English can be manipulated to emphasize certain aspects of a narrative, obscure agency, or create a false sense of causality. For instance, the use of passive voice can downplay responsibility, while specific sentence constructions can create a sense of urgency or authority, regardless of the veracity of the underlying information.

1.3.2. Micro-linguistic manipulation: word choice, grammar, and style in English "Fake news".

Misinformation within "fake news" isn’t just constructed through grand narratives; it is often meticulously woven through an array of small but essential linguistic details. When language is deployed with deliberate inattention to truthfulness or with a conscious intent to mislead, the message conveyed can be fundamentally altered, sometimes in subtle and sometimes in profound ways. These manipulations are evident at several micro-linguistic levels[7].

- **Lexical (Word) level issues**

Words are far more than simple carriers of dictionary definitions; they are laden with connotations, emotional resonances, and cultural implications, all of which can be exploited in the creation of fake news. For instance, a term like "freedom fighter" versus "terrorist" for the same individual carries vastly different emotional and political weight, immediately framing the subject in a biased light. Similarly, the use of highly

emotive words such as "crisis," "scandal," or "cover-up" can generate immediate alarm or suspicion, even before any factual claims are assessed. The strategic selection of words with strong negative or positive associations is a hallmark of manipulative texts.

Formality and register are also key. A fake news item might adopt an overly formal or pseudo-scientific register, using complex jargon to create an illusion of authority and credibility, thereby intimidating the reader into acceptance. Conversely, it might employ overly colloquial or simplistic language to feign solidarity with a perceived "common person" audience, fostering an uncritical sense of trust. The deliberate choice of specificity is another tool: vague terms like "many people are saying" or "sources claim" can create an impression of widespread support or inside knowledge without providing verifiable evidence, while overly precise but ultimately irrelevant details can lend a veneer of authenticity to an otherwise fabricated account.

Idioms and culturally specific references can be used to establish an "in-group" appeal, making the message resonate more strongly with a target demographic, or they can be subtly twisted to misrepresent situations. Slogans, catchphrases, and emotionally charged epithets common in fake news often rely on these lexical manipulations to bypass rational thought and evoke an immediate emotional response..

- **Grammatical level problems**

Different grammatical structures within English can be artfully employed to shape perception and obscure truth in fake news. For example, the choice of verb tense and aspect can create a false sense of urgency or immediacy; using the present continuous ("this is happening now") for an unverified or past event can heighten anxiety and bypass critical reflection. Conversely, past tenses might be used to lend an air of settled fact to disputed claims.

Modality – the linguistic expression of possibility, necessity, obligation, or certainty – is frequently manipulated. Fake news often employs strong modal verbs like "will" or "must" to present speculative outcomes as inevitable truths (e.g.: "this policy will destroy the economy") or weak modals like "might" or "could" to introduce unsubstantiated fears as plausible threats (e.g.: "experts suggest this could lead to...").

The strategic absence or presence of modal qualifiers can dramatically alter the perceived certainty of a claim.

Information structuring through syntax is also critical. The use of the passive voice is a common tactic to obscure agency, making it unclear who is responsible for an action (e.g.: "mistakes were made" instead of "politician X made mistakes"). Complex sentence structures can be used to overwhelm the reader or to embed controversial claims within seemingly innocuous clauses, while short, declarative sentences can create a false sense of directness and undeniable fact. The order of clauses can also be manipulated to emphasize certain pieces of information while downplaying others, guiding the reader's interpretation.

- **Stylistic issues**

Style and tone are fundamental to the persuasive power of fake news and are rarely accidental. If a fake news piece aims to incite anger, its style will likely be aggressive, accusatory, and filled with loaded language. If it aims to sow doubt, its tone might be conspiratorial, insinuating, and peppered with rhetorical questions designed to erode trust in established sources[100]. Irony and sarcasm can be employed, not for humor, but to denigrate opponents or dismiss counter-arguments without engaging them substantively.

Figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, and hyperbole, is often used not to clarify but to distort and inflame. For example, describing immigrants as a "flood" or a political opponent's policies as a "cancer" uses metaphorical framing to evoke strong negative emotions and simplify complex issues into simplistic, often dangerous, narratives. Persuasive language, including direct appeals to emotion (fear, patriotism, resentment) or false appeals to authority ("scientists agree," when they do not), are staple stylistic choices. A manipulative creator of fake news might even mimic the style of legitimate news outlets to enhance its deceptive credibility.

- **Pragmatic issues (Meaning in Use)**

Language in fake news operates significantly at the pragmatic level, focusing on what is meant or done by an utterance, beyond its literal meaning. Speech act theory helps to identify the intended illocutionary force behind fake news statements: are they genuinely asserting facts, or are they performing acts of accusing, inciting, deceiving, or creating division? For example, a headline phrased as a question ("is politician X corrupt?") may pragmatically function as an assertion of corruption in the reader's mind, even without direct evidence.
Implicature – meaning that is suggested or implied rather than directly stated – is a powerful tool for manipulation. Fake news often relies on readers drawing predetermined, misleading conclusions from carefully phrased insinuations. For instance, juxtaposing two unrelated facts can lead readers to infer a causal link that does not exist.

Presupposition is also exploited by embedding false or unproven information as if it were already known or accepted background truth (e.g.: "the continued failure of this policy shows..." presupposes the policy has failed, which may be the very point of contention). Cultural expectations of communication can also be manipulated. For instance, a fake news item might adopt a tone of feigned outrage about a fabricated social transgression, knowing it will trigger specific cultural sensitivities and bypass critical analysis. The overall communicative intent is often to bypass rational processing and trigger an immediate, desired response based on pre-existing biases or fears.

1.3.3. Substitution of concepts as a cognitive and communicative manipulative strategy.

One of the most dangerous forms of manipulation in translation is concept substitution. This isn’t just about picking the wrong word or showing bias — it’s about intentionally changing how people understand a whole idea or issue by swapping the way it’s framed.

According to cognitive linguists like George Lakoff, the words we use trigger specific mental frames — patterns or ways of thinking. These frames help us

understand and judge what we hear or read. These frames shape how we understand and judge information. Thus, when creators of fake news strategically select or coin particular terms and narratives, they can activate desired frames in the audience's mind. This leads the audience to interpret the situation through a new, often misleading, lens that aligns with the manipulator's agenda.

In this context, the production of fake news becomes an exercise in strategic cognitive re-framing. The originator isn’t just conveying information (or misinformation); they are actively constructing a version of reality. If they possess a specific ideological or political agenda, they will choose language that activates frames supportive of that viewpoint, often at the expense of accuracy or balanced understanding.

Here are some of the ways this manipulation happens:

- Altering metaphors: Our understanding of many abstract concepts is fundamentally metaphorical. Fake news often introduces or reinforces specific metaphors to guide perception. For example, framing immigration as an "invasion" (argument is war metaphor) evokes fear and hostility, whereas framing it as a "flow" might be more neutral, and as a "contribution" more positive. Changing the dominant metaphor changes how the issue is understood and what solutions seem appropriate.
- Same denotation, different connotation with the emotional baggage means that the words chosen in fake news might have a similar literal meaning (denotation) to a more neutral term, but it carries vastly different emotional or cultural associations (connotation). For instance, referring to a government program as "social welfare" might sound benign or positive to some, while labeling it a "socialist handout" is designed to evoke negative reactions in other audiences, thereby shaping opinion without altering the underlying factual description of the program itself.
- Employing euphemisms or dysphemisms: Fake news frequently uses euphemisms to downplay negative actions or consequences (e.g.: calling civilian casualties "collateral damage") or dysphemisms to demonize individuals, groups, or ideas (e.g.: referring to political opponents as "traitors" or "radicals," or labeling

environmental regulations as "job-killing policies"). Both strategies directly manipulate the audience's emotional and ethical assessment.

- Inventing new terms or co-opting loaded ones: Creators of fake news may coin new terms or phrases (neologisms) or popularize obscure jargon that carries specific ideological weight, effectively shaping the discourse around an issue. For example, terms like "fake news" itself, or "alternative facts," or more niche terms within specific conspiracy theories, can define the boundaries of a debate and legitimize a particular worldview.
- Normalizing the new frame through repetition: Constant exposure to a specific, biased linguistic framing in multiple fake news items can lead audiences to accept that framing as natural or standard. A misleading term or narrative, if repeated often enough across various platforms, can become ingrained in public discourse, making the manipulated understanding seem like common sense.

To really understand how concept substitution functions in fake news, analysis must extend beyond isolated words. It requires examining the broader discursive patterns — how consistent linguistic choices guide audiences to think about events and issues in highly specific, often deeply biased or entirely false, ways, thereby constructing a distorted version of reality.

CONCLUSION FOR CHAPTER 1

This chapter has delineated the essential theoretical frameworks and methodological perspectives required to analyze the linguistic construction of "fake news" and manipulative content within the English language. Moving beyond a simplistic view of misinformation as merely false statements, current research in linguistics, communication theory, and cognitive science reveals that the power of fake news lies significantly in its sophisticated use of language to shape perception, evoke emotion, and guide interpretation.

The exploration of micro-linguistic features — spanning lexical choice, grammatical structuring, and stylistic presentation — demonstrates how deliberate manipulations at these levels can imbue fake narratives with a veneer of credibility, urgency, or emotional resonance. Word choices laden with specific connotations, the strategic use of modality and voice, and the deployment of rhetorical devices are not accidental embellishments but core components of how fake news achieves its persuasive and deceptive aims.

Furthermore, the communicative-pragmatic dimension of fake news highlights how language is used to perform deceptive speech acts, generate misleading implicatures, and embed false presuppositions, thereby guiding audiences towards predetermined conclusions. The overarching intent often transcends simple information transfer, aiming instead to influence attitudes, behaviors, and societal trust.

A particularly insidious strategy identified is concept substitution, or cognitive re-framing. By carefully selecting language that activates specific mental frames, creators of fake news can fundamentally alter how an issue, event, or group is perceived, often instilling bias or reinforcing disinformation narratives by manipulating the audience's underlying cognitive understanding.

Collectively, these linguistic-stylistic and communicative-pragmatic perspectives provide a robust methodological toolkit for this thesis. Understanding how fake news operates necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that draws insights from discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, rhetoric, and cognitive linguistics. It is through such a multi-faceted lens that we can systematically deconstruct the linguistic architecture of Fake news, revealing how choices in language — from the selection of a single word to the structuring of a narrative — can profoundly distort reality, manipulate public opinion, and impact social and political landscapes. This chapter thus establishes the conceptual foundation for the empirical analysis of English-language fake news that will follow, underscoring language not merely as a medium of information, but as a potent instrument of manipulation in the contemporary information ecosystem.

2. THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL FAKE NEWS

This chapter transitions from the theoretical foundations of fake news and its linguistic manipulation[38] to a focused empirical examination of these phenomena within the highly consequential domain of political discourse[13]. The pervasiveness of "fakes" in political contexts — ranging from electoral campaigns and policy debates to the shaping of public opinion about political figures and ideologies — necessitates a detailed analysis of how language is instrumentalized to achieve deceptive and persuasive ends[57]. This chapter will investigate the specific linguistic-stylistic choices and communicative-pragmatic strategies deployed in the creation and dissemination of verifiably false or misleading political narratives targeted at English-speaking audiences, drawing on case studies from the compiled corpus.

2.1 Corpus overview and thematic categorization

The analysis is based on a 50-item corpus of English-language fake news, verified as false by independent fact-checkers (e.g.: Snopes, PolitiFact, WHO)[52]. The items were selected for their wide dissemination and public availability, including both the original claim and its refutation. Sources range from fake news sites and viral social media posts to partisan blogs and decontextualized real news. Formats include articles, headlines, fabricated quotes, and viral memes. Common features include linguistic manipulation and emotional framing.

Each item was categorized by its main theme:

- **Health and science (32% - 16 out of 50 items)** – COVID-19, vaccines, fake cures, climate denial, pseudoscience, and conspiracy theories (e.g.: 5G, chemtrails).
- **Politics and elections (26% - 13 out of 50 items)** – False claims about politicians, election fraud, manipulated images, and policy misinformation.

- **Historical myths (10% - 5 out of 50 items)** – Fabricated events or distorted narratives (e.g.: "Irish slaves," Hitler myths).
- **Conspiracies (8% - 4 out of 50 items)** – Broad theories like QAnon, Pizzagate, or staged events (e.g.: Sandy Hook).
- **Moral panics/social hoaxes (8% - 4 out of 50 items)** – Fear-inducing claims (e.g.: Momo Challenge, fake trafficking tips).
- **Visual misinformation (8% - 4 out of 50 items)** – Misleading images or videos (e.g.: fake war footage, photoshopped scenes).
- **Celebrity/public figure fakes (8% - 4 out of 50 items)** – Non-political false claims (e.g.: parody misinterpreted as fact, celebrity rumors).

Health/science and political misinformation dominate (58%), revealing the emotional and ideological leverage of these topics, at which I'll be focusing in Chapters 2 and 3. The spread of fake news spans various themes but consistently exploits language for manipulation and amplification.

2.2. Political discourse and the ecosystem of Fake news

This chapter focuses on examination of political fake news, exploring their distinctive characteristics and operational dynamics within the contemporary English-language media discourse. Political fake news, a potent subset of disinformation, strategically targets and exploits emotionally charged subjects, ideological cleavages, and public perceptions of prominent political figures and institutions. The intent driving such fabrications often extends beyond mere deception; it seeks to influence public opinion, exacerbate societal polarization, undermine trust in democratic processes, or achieve specific partisan objectives. These messages are rarely haphazard; they are typically meticulously crafted linguistic artifacts, engineered to manipulate perception by skillfully mimicking the forms and conventions of legitimate political communication while subtly or overtly subverting truth. This chapter will

delve into the ecosystem that fosters political fakes and will deconstruct the specific linguistic-stylistic choices and communicative-pragmatic strategies that underpin their persuasive power, drawing on illustrative examples from the compiled corpus.

2.2.1 The ecosystem of political Fake news

To effectively analyze the linguistic architecture of political fakes, it is imperative to first contextualize their existence within the broader framework of political discourse. This involves understanding the inherent characteristics of political communication[14], the strategic functions that fakes serve within this domain, their typical origins and modes of propagation, and the diverse forms they assume.

2.2.2. Political discourse as a fertile ground for persuasion and manipulation

Political discourse, in its essence, is a sphere of strategic communication primarily concerned with the acquisition, maintenance, and exercise of power, as well as the articulation and contestation of ideologies and policies. It encompasses a vast array of communicative acts, from formal speeches by political leaders and detailed policy documents to dynamic media commentary, campaign advertising, and the myriad forms of public engagement with political issues. A defining characteristic of political language is its inherent persuasiveness; it aims to mobilize support, shape public understanding, legitimize certain actors or agendas, and often, to discredit opponents. This persuasive imperative means that political language is frequently charged with emotion, employs sophisticated rhetorical devices, and strategically frames issues to resonate with specific audiences or align with partisan viewpoints.

These inherent qualities, while central to democratic debate, also render political discourse particularly susceptible to manipulative linguistic practices[39]. The adversarial nature of much political debate can incentivize the oversimplification of complex issues, where nuanced policy discussions are reduced to easily digestible, though often misleading, slogans or claims. The reliance on emotional narratives — appealing to fear, hope, anger, or patriotism — can bypass rational scrutiny, making audiences more receptive to linguistically engineered fakes that tap into pre-existing

sentiments. As an example, narratives designed to stoke fear about electoral integrity, such as claims of "Antifa members being bussed into cities to riot," gain traction by exploiting anxieties and partisan suspicions, often employing alarmist language. The rapid-fire nature of modern political news cycles, amplified by 24/7 media coverage and the echo chambers of social media, can further overwhelm critical evaluation, allowing well-crafted fakes to proliferate before effective rebuttals can gain equivalent reach.

2.2.3. The strategic functions and intentions

Political fake news items are not arbitrary falsehoods; they are typically deployed with clear strategic intentions aimed at influencing political landscapes. A primary function is often electoral manipulation, where fakes are designed to either bolster a preferred candidate or damage the reputation and credibility of an opponent[59]. This can be achieved through fabricated endorsements, such as the claim that "Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for President," which sought to lend religious authority to a political campaign by co-opting the Pope's ethos through carefully constructed, plausible-sounding but entirely false statements and quasi-journalistic framing. Similarly, invented scandals or misattributed quotes, like the long-circulating fabricated 1998 quote where Donald Trump purportedly disparaged Republican voters, serve to paint a negative picture of a political figure, often tailored to confirm the biases of a target audience[56].

Beyond direct electoral impact, political fakes function to sow social and political discord. By disseminating narratives that exacerbate existing societal divisions or create new ones, these fakes can erode social cohesion and undermine trust in democratic institutions. For example, the "Birtherism" conspiracy, which falsely questioned Barack Obama's U.S. birth and thus his legitimacy as president, served not only as an attack on an individual but also as a means to fuel racial and political animosity. Another key function is to shape public perception of policies and political actions[94]. Misleading claims about legislation, such as the assertion that Barack Obama signed a law banning the Pledge of Allegiance or that Nancy Pelosi diverted

billions in Social Security funds to cover impeachment costs, are designed to provoke outrage and mobilize opposition against specific political actors or policy directions by grossly misrepresenting factual circumstances. Ultimately, the intent often extends to weakening trust in credible information sources, including mainstream media and official government communications[3], thereby creating a space where disinformation can more easily flourish.

2.2.4. Authorship, platforms, and the dissemination of political fakes

The creation and propagation of political fake news involve a diverse array of actors and leverage various technological platforms. Authorship can range from highly organized state-sponsored entities conducting sophisticated influence operations aimed at foreign populations, to domestic politically motivated groups, hyper-partisan media outlets[9], individual bloggers or influencers seeking to advance a specific ideology, and even individuals creating hoaxes or satire that subsequently become decontextualized and spread as genuine news. The anonymity afforded by many online platforms often makes precise attribution difficult, yet the strategic linguistic choices and targeting apparent in many fakes point to deliberate, rather than accidental, creation. For instance, the creators of sites like "WTOE 5 News" or "Ending the Fed" deliberately crafted content designed to appear legitimate while promoting false narratives for political or financial gain.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter/X have become primary conduits for the dissemination of political fakes[1], owing to their vast user bases, algorithmic amplification of engaging (often sensational) content, and the ease with which information can be shared[68]. The linguistic style of fakes is frequently tailored to these environments, favoring concise, emotionally impactful headlines and shareable snippets over in-depth, nuanced reporting. Fake news websites, designed to mimic the appearance of legitimate news organizations through similar layouts, domain names, and journalistic jargon, also play a crucial role in lending a veneer of credibility to false information[82]. The speed of dissemination often outpaces

verification efforts[61], allowing false narratives to take hold in public consciousness before they can be effectively debunked.

2.2.5. Manifestations and typologies of political fake news

Political fake news manifests in a variety of forms, each employing distinct but often overlapping linguistic and presentational strategies to achieve deception[66]. One common type is the fabricated or misattributed quotation, where words are invented and ascribed to a public figure to damage their reputation or falsely align them with a particular viewpoint. The fabricated Trump quote from 1998 or misrepresentations of Kamala Harris's statements on meat consumption fall into this category, relying on the perceived authority of a direct quote to mislead.

Manipulated or decontextualized visuals form another significant category, where images or videos are altered or presented with false textual framing to create a misleading political narrative[34]. Examples include photoshopped images like President Obama supposedly awarding a medal to Harvey Weinstein, or game footage from "Arma 3" being presented as real combat footage during geopolitical events with political implications. Here, the accompanying text (captions, headlines) is crucial in linguistically directing the interpretation of the visual.

Entirely fictitious narratives presented as factual news reports are also prevalent. These often appear on purpose-built fake news websites and mimic the structure and style of legitimate journalism, complete with headlines, bylines (often pseudonymous), and fabricated source attributions. The claims about Pope Francis's endorsement of Donald Trump, originating from sites like "WTOE 5 News," exemplify this type, which leverages the conventions of news reporting to lend credibility to falsehoods.

Satirical content taken seriously represents another avenue for political misinformation. Articles originally intended as parody or social commentary[2], such as the claim that Barack Obama banned the Pledge of Allegiance (originating from Paul Horner's satirical "abcnews.com.co"), can be stripped of their satirical cues and circulated as genuine news, particularly when they align with pre-existing partisan

biases. The linguistic mimicry of official or journalistic style in the initial parts of such articles is key to their deceptive potential when decontextualized.

Finally, **broad political conspiracy theories**, such as QAnon or narratives about George Soros funding and controlling Antifa and Black Lives Matter protests[100], represent a more complex form of fake news. These often involve a constellation of interconnected false claims, develop their own specialized lexicon, and rely on suggestive language and the reinterpretation of events through a conspiratorial lens to build a comprehensive but entirely unfounded worldview. These diverse manifestations highlight the adaptability of fake news in exploiting different formats and communicative strategies to achieve political influence.

2.3. Linguistic and communicative strategies in political fake news

The persuasive and deceptive power of political fake news is deeply rooted in its linguistic construction. A close analysis of the corpus reveals consistent patterns in how lexical choices, grammatical structures[74], stylistic elements[19], and broader communicative strategies are employed to manipulate audience perception, evoke emotional responses, and bypass critical scrutiny.

2.3.1. Lexical manipulation: the power of loaded words and strategic naming

The vocabulary of political fake news is rarely neutral; it is often carefully selected to carry significant emotional weight and ideological connotations[99]. A primary tactic is the use of loaded terms and dysphemisms to describe political opponents, policies, or groups. Words such as *traitor, corrupt, radical, socialist, fascist, fake, illegal,* or *elite* are frequently employed to evoke immediate negative reactions and frame subjects in a predetermined, biased light, often without substantive evidence. For instance, labeling political adversaries as "traitors" or their policies as "job-killing" bypasses reasoned debate by appealing directly to emotion and pre-existing prejudice. Conversely, euphemisms or positively connoted terms might be used to describe

favored figures or policies (e.g.: "*freedom fighters*" instead of "*insurgents,*" or "*tax relief*" for policies primarily benefiting the wealthy).

The strategic use of proper nouns is also critical. Invoking the names of highly recognizable and often polarizing political figures (e.g.: "Trump," "Obama," "Pelosi," "Soros") or institutions immediately activates a cascade of associated beliefs and emotions in the audience, priming them to accept or reject the ensuing claim based on their partisan leanings. Furthermore, political fakes often employ vague or ambiguous terminology such as "sources say," "many people are saying," or "it is widely believed" to create an illusion of widespread support or insider knowledge without providing verifiable attribution. This tactic was evident in the claims about Antifa activities, which often relied on unspecified "reports" or "warnings." The coining of neologisms or the popularization of specific jargon (e.g.: terms within QAnon theories) can also serve to create an in-group lexicon that reinforces a particular worldview and frames issues in a specific, often misleading, way.

2.3.2. Grammatical and syntactic maneuvers for persuasion and disturbance

Grammatical and syntactic choices in political fake news are often deliberately engineered to shape perception, assert authority, or obscure agency[45]. A common feature is the use of short, declarative sentences and assertive syntax, particularly in headlines and opening statements, to convey a sense of urgency, directness, and irrefutable fact, even when the claims are unsubstantiated[7]. Headlines like "BREAKING: Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for President" or "BREAKING: Fox News Exposes Traitor Megyn Kelly" exemplify this direct, impactful style, designed to grab attention and create an immediate impression.

The strategic use of modality is another key grammatical feature. Strong modal verbs expressing certainty (e.g.: "will," "must," "is definitively") are often used to present speculative claims or partisan opinions as inevitable truths or established facts[27]. Conversely, carefully placed weak modals or hedging language can be used to introduce doubt about opponents or to subtly plant unsubstantiated fears. The

manipulation of voice is also significant; while active voice can be used for direct accusation, the passive voice is frequently employed to obscure agency or responsibility, as in phrases like "it has been reported that..." or "concerns have been raised," allowing controversial claims to be made without identifying a clear source.

Rhetorical questions are a pervasive syntactic device, used not to elicit information but to guide the audience towards a particular conclusion or to sow doubt (e.g.: "Is [politician X] fit for office?" pragmatically functions as an assertion of unfitness for those predisposed to agree)[39]. The structure of sentences, including the ordering of clauses, can also be manipulated to emphasize certain pieces of information while downplaying others, subtly guiding the reader's interpretation and focus.

2.3.3. Stylistic and rhetorical devices for creating a persuasive style

The overall style and tone of political fake news are fundamental to its persuasive power and are rarely accidental[90]. Many fakes adopt a sensationalist or tabloid style, characterized by dramatic headlines, often in all-caps, the liberal use of exclamation marks, and a focus on shocking or emotionally provocative content[3]. This style is designed to maximize engagement and shareability in fast-paced digital environments. The tone can vary widely: some fakes adopt an aggressive, accusatory tone filled with loaded language to incite anger or outrage against a political target[86]. Others employ a more conspiratorial or insinuating tone, using suggestive language, ellipses, and innuendo to erode trust in established sources and hint at hidden agendas, as seen in many QAnon-related fakes or those targeting figures like George Soros.

A key stylistic strategy is the mimicry of legitimate genres. Fake news articles published on purpose-built websites often meticulously imitate the stylistic conventions of professional news reporting, including a formal register, the citation of (often fabricated or decontextualized) figures or "experts," the use of journalistic jargon, and a seemingly objective third-person narrative voice. This linguistic masquerade is crucial for deceiving audiences who rely on such stylistic cues to assess credibility. For instance, the fake news regarding Pope Francis's endorsement, originating from "WTOE 5 News," utilized such stylistic mimicry.

Figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, and hyperbole, is often employed not for clarification but to distort reality and inflame passions. Describing political opponents with dehumanizing metaphors or framing policies with alarmist analogies can powerfully shape emotional responses and simplify complex issues into dangerous, simplistic narratives. Direct appeals to emotion (fear, patriotism, resentment, hope) are staple rhetorical choices, often overshadowing or replacing evidence-based argumentation. Similarly, false appeals to authority ("scientists agree," when they do not, or citing anonymous "insiders") are used to bolster claims without genuine substantiation.

2.3.4. Communicative-pragmatic strategies that shape belief and action

Beyond lexical, grammatical, and stylistic choices, political fake news operates significantly at the communicative-pragmatic level[57], focusing on what is meant, implied, or achieved by an utterance in context, rather than solely on its literal meaning[20]. A crucial aspect is the performance of deceptive speech acts. Headlines and core claims often function as fabricated assertions presented with illocutionary force (e.g.: a headline stating "[Politician] CAUGHT IN SCANDAL!" aims to perform the act of exposing and condemning, regardless of truth). Even headlines phrased as questions ("Is [Policy X] a Threat to Our Freedom?") can pragmatically function as assertions in the reader's mind[95], especially if they align with pre-existing biases[40].

Implicature – meaning that is suggested or implied rather than directly stated – is a powerful tool for manipulation. Political fakes often rely on readers drawing predetermined, misleading conclusions from carefully phrased insinuations or the juxtaposition of unrelated pieces of information. For example, placing a politician's photo next to a controversial figure, accompanied by an ambiguous caption, can imply an association or endorsement that is not explicitly stated but is readily inferred by a target audience.

Presupposition is also frequently exploited by embedding false or unproven information as if it were already known, accepted background truth, or shared common ground (e.g.: "Given the continued failure of [Opponent's Policy]..." presupposes the

policy has indeed failed, which may be the very point of contention). This tactic subtly shifts the burden of proof and makes the embedded claim harder to challenge directly.

Furthermore, political fakes often manipulate cultural expectations of communication and social norms[25]. They might adopt a tone of feigned outrage about a fabricated transgression to trigger specific cultural sensitivities, or they might leverage in-group language and shared partisan assumptions to foster a sense of solidarity and uncritical acceptance among like-minded individuals, while simultaneously denigrating out-groups[87]. The overall communicative intent frequently transcends simple information transfer; it aims to bypass rational processing[29], trigger immediate emotional and ideological responses, and ultimately, to influence attitudes, beliefs, and potentially, political actions based on a distorted or entirely false premise.

2.4. Linguistic and communicative analysis of political fake news

2.4.1. Fake news leveraging false authority and endorsements.

This category encompasses fake news items that fabricate endorsements or statements from highly respected and authoritative figures, such as religious leaders, celebrities, or public intellectuals, to confer unearned credibility upon a political candidate, ideology, product, or specific claim. The core strategy is to co-opt the pre-existing trust and positive affect associated with the authoritative figure.

Illustrative Case: "BREAKING: Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for President"[119]

This specific fake news item, originating from sites like "WTOE 5 News" during the 2016 U.S. election, serves as a prime example of this category. It claimed the Pope had made an unprecedented political endorsement, often including fabricated quotes.

Linguistic-stylistic analysis:

Headline grammar and lexis:

Such Fake news typically employ headlines with omitted articles or auxiliary verbs (e.g.: "Pope endorses Trump" instead of "The Pope has endorsed Trump") to create a sense of immediacy and mimic news ticker style, common in digital media.

Use of loaded adjectives and verbs is standard. Words like “SHOCKS,” “BREAKING,” “EXPOSES,” “REVEALS,” or the definitive “ENDORSES” inject drama, imply exclusivity, and establish an authoritative tone.

Exploitation of proper nouns and institutional references: the prominent use of highly recognizable proper names (e.g.: "Pope Francis," "Denzel Washington") and references to their associated institutions (e.g.: "Vatican," "Hollywood") is crucial for immediately grounding the fake claim in a semblance of reality and leveraging established public awareness.

Simulation of journalistic register:

These Fake news often adopt a quasi-objective, third-person narrative voice. They may include journalistic markers such as datelines, attributions to anonymous "insiders" or "sources close to..." (e.g.: "Vatican insider confirms"), or faux attributions to wire services or invented news entities (e.g.: "VIA National Insider Politics") to simulate the conventions of legitimate news reporting.

Fabricated quotations: direct quotes attributed to the authority figure are common, often carefully crafted with language designed to sound plausible for that individual while strongly supporting the fake premise. The vocabulary within these quotes is usually tailored to resonate with the target audience's values (e.g.: religious or patriotic terminology).

Lexical conflation of domains: a key strategy involves deliberately conflating distinct domains of influence, for instance, fusing religious authority with specific political endorsements, or celebrity status with expert scientific opinion. This creates a disorienting but potent message, as the authority from one domain is inappropriately transferred to another.

Communicative-pragmatic analysis:

False ethos construction (borrowed credibility): the primary pragmatic goal is to manipulate audience perception by borrowing or misappropriating the ethos (credibility, trustworthiness, moral standing) of a respected figure. The fake endorsement functions to make the endorsed subject (person, idea, product) appear more legitimate or desirable.

Deceptive speech acts: the headline and core claims often function as fabricated performative speech acts (e.g.: "The Pope endorses..."). Even if patently false upon investigation, these statements carry initial rhetorical force and aim to shape belief, especially in rapid-consumption environments immediately.

Targeting echo chambers and in-group reinforcement: these articles are frequently designed for rapid circulation within specific ideological or social media echo chambers. They are crafted to resonate strongly with the pre-existing values and biases of a target group, thereby reinforcing in-group beliefs and encouraging uncritical sharing. For instance, a fake political endorsement will be tailored to appeal to supporters of that candidate.

Eliciting emotional resonance over factual scrutiny: fhe language used aims to provoke strong emotional reactions:surprise, validation, outrage, or hope, depending on the audience and the nature of the fake endorsement. This emotional engagement often bypasses or delays rational fact-checking.

Exploitation of platform mechanics and information overload: Fake news leveraging false authority are often designed for virality on platforms like Facebook or Twitter/X, where sensational headlines and compelling attributions can spread rapidly even if the full article is not read. The headline itself becomes the primary misleading message.

Why this type of fake news exists and spreads:

Ideological reinforcement and confirmation bias: such Fake news powerfully confirm the existing beliefs and desires of specific audiences (e.g.: "I knew this respected person would agree with our side!").

Attention economy dynamics: the shocking or unexpected nature of a prominent figure making a controversial endorsement drives clicks, shares, and ad revenue, and is amplified by platform algorithms that favor high-engagement content.

Simplicity and low cost of production: creating a fake article with a sensational headline and fabricated quotes requires minimal effort. It can be hosted on obscure websites designed to mimic legitimate news sources or simply spread as text/image macros on social media.

Desire for validation: people may share such Fake news not necessarily because they fully believe them, but because they *wish* them to be true or find them useful for validating their own positions.

Typical public reaction and refutation dynamics:

Initial reaction: often characterized by high engagement (shares, likes, comments) within targeted partisan or interest groups, rapid spread, and initial acceptance by those whose biases align with the fake claim. Skepticism may arise more slowly outside these groups.

Refutation process: typically debunked by established fact-checking organizations (e.g.: Snopes, PolitiFact, AP Fact Check), which investigate by checking with official representatives of the authority figure or their institution, and by identifying the disreputable nature of the originating fake news website or source.

Cognitive and social lag in correction: official refutations often struggle to achieve the same viral reach as the original fake news. Due to the "continued influence effect" or "illusory truth effect," the initial false claim may persist in public memory or belief even after being corrected, particularly within communities invested in its veracity.

2.4.2. Fake news based on hoaxes taken seriously.

This category involves content that was originally created with satirical intent, as a parody, or as a deliberate hoax, but which is subsequently misinterpreted and circulated by audiences as genuine news. The deceptive power of such Fake news often

lies in their ability to closely mimic the style of legitimate news or official pronouncements, leading those who miss the satirical cues or encounter the content out of context to accept it at face value.

Illustrative Case: "Barack Obama signed a law banning the Pledge of Allegiance in schools"[120]. This claim, debunked by Snopes and FactCheck.org, originated from a 2016 article on "abcnews.com.co," a satirical website by Paul Horner. The text clearly outlines the fake claim and its satirical elements, such as attributing quotes to "Fappy the Anti-Masturbation Dolphin."

Linguistic-stylistic analysis:

Mimicry of official/journalistic style:

Headlines and opening paragraphs often adopt a **formal, serious tone and a conventional news structure** (e.g.: "Obama signs executive order banning the pledge..."). They use official-sounding lexicon ("Executive Order," "revokes federal government's official recognition," "illegal," "federally funded agency") and precise (though fabricated) details like an Executive Order number ("13738").

This initial linguistic verisimilitude is crucial for deceiving readers, especially those who only read headlines or skim the beginning of articles.

Juxtaposition of serious and absurd elements:

The core of the satire often lies in the **gradual or abrupt introduction of absurd, humorous, or patently ridiculous details** within the otherwise serious-sounding frame (e.g.: fabricated quotes from entities like "Fappy the Anti-Masturbation Dolphin" or listing the Westboro Baptist Church as a complaint line).

This juxtaposition is intended to signal the satirical nature to discerning readers, but it is frequently lost when the content is shared without the full context or when readers are not attuned to looking for such cues.

Exploitation of partisan tropes and stereotypes: satirical Fake news often play on pre-existing partisan stereotypes or common criticisms leveled against political figures. The "Obama banning the Pledge" fake, for example, taps into a pre-existing

(and false) narrative among some conservatives that Obama was unpatriotic or hostile to traditional American symbols.

Communicative-pragmatic analysis:

Deceptive verisimilitude for initial engagement: the primary strategy for deception (when taken seriously) is the skillful imitation of legitimate news formats and language to achieve initial believability.

Exploitation of confirmation bias: such Fake news are particularly effective when they align with the audience's pre-existing biases or political grievances. Readers who already view the targeted figure negatively are more likely to accept the satirical claim as plausible, overlooking or rationalizing the absurd elements.

Context stripping in dissemination: the spread of these Fake news often involves headlines or key sentences being shared on social media without the full satirical article, thereby removing the very cues that would reveal its non-serious intent.

Poe's law invocation: these Fake news often exemplify Poe's Law – without a clear indicator of the author's intent, it is difficult or impossible to tell the difference between an expression of sincere extremism and a parody of extremism.

Why this type of fake exists and spreads:

Original satirical or hoax intent: they are created by individuals or sites aiming to entertain, provoke, critique societal norms, or demonstrate public gullibility (Poe's Law in action).

Confirmation bias and partisan sharing: individuals who want the claim to be true (because it confirms their negative view of a politician, for instance) are likely to share it uncritically, even if they vaguely sense something is off.

Lack of critical reading skills: some audiences lack the skills to identify satirical cues, especially in unfamiliar online environments or when content is presented out of context.

Algorithmic amplification of sensational headlines: the shocking or emotionally charged headlines of such Fake news (e.g.: "Obama bans pledge") often

lead to high engagement, which can be amplified by social media algorithms, irrespective of the content's satirical nature.

Typical public reaction and refutation dynamics:

Initial reaction: can include genuine outrage, anger, or concern among those who believe the claim. Widespread sharing within communities predisposed to believe the fake. Others might recognize the satire and share it for humorous purposes, inadvertently contributing to its spread among those who don't get the joke.

Refutation process: fact-checkers (like Snopes, FactCheck.org) debunk these by:

- Identifying the original source as a known satirical or fake news website (e.g.: highlighting "abcnews.com.co" as Paul Horner's creation).
- Pointing out the absurd or demonstrably false elements within the full original article (like the Fappy the Dolphin quote).
- Verifying the factual claims against official records (e.g.: checking the actual content of Executive Order 13738).
- Explaining the satirical intent if known, or the history of the hoax.

"Too good to check" phenomenon: for those whose biases are strongly confirmed by the fake, the claim can feel "too good (or too fitting) to check," leading to resistance to correction. The humorous origin can sometimes make believers feel foolish, further entrenching denial.

2.4.3. Fake news using fabricated or misattributed quotes/actions

This category includes fake news that invents quotations and attributes them to public figures, or falsely describes actions purportedly taken by them. These Fake news aim to damage a person's reputation, create a false impression of their beliefs or character, or lend authority to a particular viewpoint by putting words into the mouth of a well-known individual.

Illustrative case: "Donald Trump's fabricated 1998 quote about republicans.[148] This long-circulating fake quote, debunked by Snopes, attributes a

statement to Donald Trump supposedly from a 1998 People Magazine interview: "If I were to run, I'd run as a Republican. They're the dumbest group of voters in the country. They believe anything on Fox News. I could lie and they'd still eat it up. I bet my numbers would be terrific."

Linguistic-stylistic analysis:

Direct quotation marks for false attribution:

The core linguistic feature is the use of **quotation marks ("...") around entirely fabricated text**, presented as the verbatim speech of a public figure. This immediately lends an air of authenticity and direct evidence.

Mimicry of speaking style (plausibility attempt):

The language within the fabricated quote often attempts to **mimic the known speaking style, tone, or typical vocabulary of the person** to whom it is attributed. For the Trump quote, the language ("dumbest group of voters," "believe anything on Fox News," "I could lie and they'd still eat it up") is designed to sound like something the target audience believes Trump might say, or that reflects his perceived cynicism or speaking patterns.

Specific but false contextual details:

Often accompanied by **false contextual details** to enhance credibility, such as citing a specific publication (e.g.: "People Magazine") and year ("1998"). These details provide a (false) trail for verification that can initially seem plausible.

Simplicity and memorability of the quote: the fabricated quotes are usually **concise, shocking, and easily memorable**, designed for maximum impact and shareability, especially as image macros or short social media posts.

Communicative-pragmatic analysis:

Character assassination or elevation: the primary goal is often to **damage the reputation and credibility of the attributed speaker** (if the quote is negative, as in the Trump example) or, conversely, to falsely elevate their status or align them with a particular cause (if a positive or supportive quote is fabricated for a favored figure).

Confirmation of pre-existing biases: these Fake news are highly effective when they "confirm" what a particular audience already believes or suspects about the public figure. The Trump quote powerfully resonates with those who view him and his supporters negatively.

Exploitation of source amnesia: even if initially seen with a source, the shocking quote itself may be remembered and repeated, while the (false) attribution to a specific magazine or interview is forgotten or becomes less important over time.

Creation of "gotcha" moments: fabricated quotes often serve as perceived "gotcha" moments, providing seemingly irrefutable proof of a person's hypocrisy, stupidity, or malevolence, which is then used in partisan arguments.

Why this type of fake exists and spreads:

Partisan attack or support: they are potent tools in political warfare, used to attack opponents or create false narratives of support.

Desire for definitive "proof": a direct quote can feel like unshakeable evidence of someone's true character or beliefs, bypassing more nuanced analysis.

Ease of fabrication and dissemination: it's simple to type out a fake quote and attribute it to someone, then spread it rapidly online, especially as image macros.

Emotional impact: shocking or controversial quotes evoke strong emotional responses, encouraging shares without critical verification.

Satirical origins misinterpreted: sometimes, such quotes may originate as satire or hyperbole, but are then stripped of context and circulated as genuine.

Typical public reaction and refutation dynamics:

Initial reaction: often widely believed and shared by those whose views align with the sentiment of the fabricated quote. Can generate significant outrage or amusement, depending on the target and the audience.

Refutation process: fact-checkers (like Snopes) debunk these by:

- Attempting to find the quote in the cited source (e.g.: searching People Magazine archives for the Trump quote).

- Contacting representatives of the individual or the publication.
- Demonstrating the lack of any contemporaneous reporting or evidence of the quote having been uttered.
- Tracing the quote's online origins, often revealing it appeared much later or on disreputable sites.

Difficulty of complete eradication: fabricated quotes can be very resilient and continue to circulate for years even after being repeatedly debunked, because they are easily memorable and effectively encapsulate a particular (often negative) perception of the individual.

2.4.4. Fake news misrepresenting political actions or policies.

This category of fake news involves the deliberate distortion, misrepresentation, or outright fabrication of information concerning governmental actions, legislative proposals, or the policies of political figures and institutions. These Fake news often aim to incite partisan outrage, sow distrust in government, or mobilize support for or against a particular political agenda by creating a false understanding of official actions.

Illustrative Case: "The Biden administration is planning to ban gas stoves"[112] This claim, widely circulated in conservative media and social media and debunked by PolitiFact, significantly misrepresented comments by a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) commissioner and ongoing regulatory discussions about emissions and safety standards as an imminent, widespread "ban" on gas stoves by the Biden administration.

Linguistic-Stylistic Analysis:

Definitive and alarmist framing of speculation or process:

Tentative regulatory discussions, expressions of concern by individual officials, or early-stage research are **linguistically reframed as finalized, imminent, and draconian government actions.** The use of definitive verbs ("is planning to ban," "will

ban") replaces more accurate conditional or speculative language ("is considering," "is exploring standards," "one official suggested").

The headline reflects the framing that was already circulating: that a "ban proposal" existed and was being pushed by the "Biden administration."

Lexical choice evoking overreach and loss of freedom:

Terms like "ban," "mandate," "government overreach," "war on [something]" (e.g.: "war on gas stoves"), "they're coming for your [item]" are frequently employed to trigger anxieties about government intrusion and loss of personal choice.

The item in question (e.g.: "gas stoves") is often portrayed as a symbol of freedom, tradition, or common sense that is under attack by out-of-touch elites or a specific political party.

Omission of nuance and context:

Complex regulatory processes, safety concerns, or environmental considerations are stripped away, reducing the issue to a simplistic narrative of an arbitrary "ban." Details about the scope, timeline, or actual nature of proposed regulations (e.g.: safety standards for new appliances vs. confiscation of existing ones) are typically omitted.

Attribution of broad policy to specific political figures: actions or statements by individual agency officials or within specific regulatory bodies are often directly and broadly attributed to the top political leadership (e.g.: "Biden administration is banning...") to politicize the issue and assign partisan blame.

Communicative-Pragmatic Analysis:

Fear-mongering and mobilization of opposition: the primary strategy is to generate fear and anger among the public about a supposed threat to their lifestyle, property, or freedom, thereby mobilizing opposition to the implicated political party or administration.

Creation of a "wedge issue": these Fake news often seize upon everyday items or practices (like gas stoves) and turn them into politicized symbols, creating a wedge issue to divide the populace and energize a political base.

Misleading simplification: complex policy debates or regulatory procedures are reduced to a simple, emotionally resonant, but false, narrative of a direct "ban." This bypasses engagement with the actual, more nuanced issues at play (e.g.: indoor air quality, energy efficiency).

Exploitation of distrust in government: These narratives tap into pre-existing skepticism or distrust of government regulation and bureaucracy, framing any regulatory exploration as an immediate and extreme imposition.

Why this type of fake exists and spreads:

Partisan advantage: misrepresenting an opponent's policies or intentions is a common tactic to gain partisan advantage, energize supporters, and sway undecided voters.

Resistance to change/regulation: often spread by groups or individuals ideologically opposed to specific types of regulation (e.g.: environmental, safety) or to the political party currently in power.

Amplification by partisan media and influencers: partisan media outlets and social media influencers play a key role in taking a kernel of truth (e.g.: an official expressing a concern) and exaggerating it into a full-blown (false) "ban" narrative.

Clickbait and engagement: sensational claims about government overreach generate high levels of engagement (clicks, shares, comments) on social media and partisan news sites.

Lack of understanding of regulatory processes: many members of the public are unfamiliar with the slow, multi-stage nature of governmental regulatory processes, making them more susceptible to believing that a single comment or preliminary discussion equates to an immediate, sweeping policy change.

Typical public reaction and refutation dynamics:

Initial reaction: can provoke significant public outcry, grassroots opposition, and political mobilization based on the false premise. Often leads to widespread anger directed at the implicated administration or political party.

Refutation process: fact-checkers (like PolitiFact), mainstream media, and government agencies involved attempt to debunk these by:

- Clarifying the actual status of the policy or regulation (e.g.: explaining it's an early discussion, a proposal by one commissioner, or about future standards, not a current ban).
- Providing the full context and nuance that was omitted in the fake news narrative.
- Quoting official sources to state there is no such ban in place or imminent.
- Explaining the difference between individual opinions of officials and actual government policy.

Effectiveness of refutation limited by partisan entrenchment: for audiences already predisposed to distrust the implicated administration or believe in widespread government overreach, refutations may be dismissed as spin, cover-ups, or evidence that "they backed down due to public pressure." The emotional and political resonance of the "ban" narrative can make it very resilient, even in the face of factual correction. The narrative also often serves the purpose of preemptively discrediting any future, legitimate regulatory discussions on the topic.

CONCLUSION FOR CHAPTER 2

This chapter has undertaken a focused empirical examination of political fake news, deconstructing its manifestations and linguistic architecture within contemporary English-language media discourse. The analysis reveals that political fakes are not mere falsehoods but are strategically crafted linguistic constructs designed to exploit the inherent characteristics of political communication — its persuasive aims[24], reliance on emotional narratives, and susceptibility to partisan framing — to manipulate public opinion and influence political outcomes[57].

The investigation into the ecosystem of political fake news in section 2.1 highlighted how its strategic functions, such as electoral manipulation, the discrediting of opponents, the shaping of policy perceptions, and the sowing of societal discord, are achieved through diverse authorship and dissemination across various platforms, notably social media and purpose-built fake news websites[16]. Common typologies observed included fabricated endorsements, misattributed quotations, misrepresented political actions or policies, manipulated visuals with textual support, satirical content taken seriously, and broad political conspiracy theories. These fakes often emerge during pivotal political moments and are designed to resonate with specific ideological leanings.

The detailed analysis of linguistic and communicative strategies in section 2.2 and the case studies in section 2.3 underscored consistent patterns. Lexically, political fakes frequently employ emotionally charged vocabulary, loaded terms, and strategic naming to evoke immediate partisan reactions and frame subjects prejudicially. Grammatically, they often utilize assertive syntax and declarative sentences to project unearned authority, while also employing passive constructions or vague attributions to obscure agency or source[45]. The strategic manipulation of modality and rhetorical questions further serves to guide audience interpretation. Stylistically, many political fakes adopt sensationalist or tabloid-esque features, including dramatic headlines and emotive punctuation, or conversely, mimic the formal register of legitimate news reporting to enhance deceptive credibility.

Communicatively and pragmatically, these texts excel at performing deceptive speech acts, generating misleading implicatures, and exploiting presuppositions to embed false premises. They are adept at leveraging false authority, as seen in fabricated endorsements, and at exploiting confirmation bias by presenting narratives that align with pre-existing political grievances or beliefs, such as in the misrepresentation of political actions or the propagation of conspiracy theories. The decontextualization of satire and the persuasive framing of manipulated visuals further illustrate the multifaceted nature of linguistic manipulation in this domain.

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that the effectiveness of political fake news is inextricably linked to its sophisticated linguistic construction. The deliberate selection of words, the artful structuring of sentences, and the deployment of specific rhetorical and pragmatic techniques are fundamental to how these fakes bypass critical scrutiny, achieve viral dissemination, and exert influence within the English-speaking political sphere. Recognizing these distinct linguistic markers is crucial for enhancing media literacy, fostering more resilient democratic discourse, and developing effective countermeasures against the pervasive challenge of politically motivated information disorder. The insights gained here provide a critical foundation for understanding how similar principles of linguistic manipulation may operate, albeit with different thematic focuses, in other high-stakes domains such as healthcare.

3. THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF FAKE NEWS IN THE HEALTHCARE

To understand how fake health-related content spreads, we need to look closely at how real medical communication works and how people interact with it[71]. Health discourse is special because it deals with complex and often emotional topics like illness, safety, and risk[48]. People rely on it during times of stress or confusion, and they often don't have the background knowledge to fully check what they hear or read. This makes the area especially vulnerable to misinformation[12].

Real healthcare communication usually comes from trusted sources: doctors, scientists, public health institutions[42], and uses careful, precise language. It is based on research and changes over time as new information becomes available. Because of this, official messages may sometimes sound uncertain or cautious. For example, medical experts often say things like "early studies suggest" or "more research is needed," which shows they are being responsible and not rushing to conclusions.

Fake health news takes advantage of this complexity[4]. It often uses simple, emotional, and confident language that feels more direct and persuasive. Instead of showing how evidence changes, it presents information as final and shocking. Claims like "this natural cure has been hidden from you" or "doctors don't want you to know this" are not just attention-grabbing — they also create distrust in experts and push people toward alternative sources, no matter how unreliable[43].

One common trick in fake medical messages is making strong claims without proof. While real science takes time and usually explains both benefits and risks[8], fake news focuses only on dramatic effects, like saying a vaccine causes a serious illness[44] or that a food can instantly cure cancer. These claims often look scientific on the surface, using medical-sounding words or referencing made-up studies[81]. They may even copy the format of real news articles or scientific reports to appear trustworthy.

What makes this worse is that people usually see this kind of content in places that don't check facts — like social media, blogs, or messaging apps[15]. These platforms reward messages that get a strong reaction, and fake health content often does just that. It is shared not because it is true, but because it is emotional, surprising, or fits what people already believe. Once a message spreads in this way[16], it can be very hard to correct, even with clear evidence.

Another important point is that fake health news isn't always made up from nothing. Sometimes it starts with real information but changes key details or takes things out of context[11]. For example, a real side effect that is very rare might be presented as common. Or a comment made by a public health expert in a specific situation might be reused to support a completely different claim. This makes the fake seem more believable and harder to argue against.

In summary, fake healthcare content works by imitating the appearance of trustworthy communication while removing its careful approach. It speaks with confidence, uses emotional language, and spreads quickly in spaces where people don't have the tools or time to check the facts. At the same time, many people genuinely want to make good choices for their health, which makes them more open to strong messages that seem to offer simple answers. Understanding these patterns helps us see why this kind of misinformation works and why it's so important to develop clear, accurate, and accessible health communication in return.

3.1. Healthcare discourse in terms of the landscape of trust, vulnerability, and misinformation

To understand how fake medical news spreads, we first need to look at how real health communication works. Medical and healthcare messages are usually very careful, based on scientific research, and written or spoken by experts such as doctors, scientists, or health organizations. These messages often contain important but

complex information about diseases, treatments, or prevention, and they are meant to help people make safe and informed decisions.

However, not everyone has the background knowledge to understand medical terms or statistics. In times of crisis, such as during a pandemic, people feel anxious or uncertain and want quick, clear answers. This emotional need creates a vulnerable situation where false information can easily take hold[6]. Fake news takes advantage of this gap — between what people need and what official health communication can realistically provide.

Real health discourse tends to be cautious. For example, scientists often say things like “more research is needed” or “results are not yet confirmed.” This kind of language is honest, but it can sound unsure or confusing to the public. On the other hand, fake health messages often appear more confident and emotional. They promise fast results, easy cures, or hidden truths, which can feel more comforting or convincing than the cautious tone of experts.

Fake medical content also uses simple and direct language, often repeating emotional or dramatic phrases. It might say something like “Doctors don’t want you to know this cure” or “This one ingredient will save your life.” These statements are designed to catch attention and build distrust toward medical professionals or public institutions. They often present false choices, such as suggesting that vaccines are dangerous while “natural” solutions are always safe — even when there is no scientific proof.

In many cases, fake health news copies the structure or appearance of real articles. It may use headlines that look like those from real newspapers, include images of doctors or hospitals, or even mention scientific studies — though these studies may not exist or are taken completely out of context. This helps the false message seem more believable.

Social media plays a big role in spreading fake health information. Unlike official health websites or medical journals, platforms like Facebook, Twitter/X, or YouTube do not always check the accuracy of content before it reaches millions of

users. The most shared messages are often those that are shocking, emotional, or easy to understand — not necessarily those that are true. Because of this, a simple but fake claim may reach more people than a detailed and accurate medical explanation.

Another danger is that fake messages are often repeated many times across different sources. This repetition makes them feel more familiar, and people may start believing something just because they've seen it often. This is sometimes called the "illusion of truth" — the more we hear something, the more likely we are to think it is correct, even if it's not.

Healthcare discourse is a special type of communication that depends on trust, careful language, and expert knowledge. But this careful approach can be misused by those who spread false or misleading health information. Fake content works by copying the surface of real health messages while changing the message itself to suit a different purpose, often to sell a product, promote an idea, or create fear or distrust. Understanding how this works is the first step in learning how to resist it and build better, clearer, and more trustworthy health communication for the future.

3.1.1. Clarity, accuracy, and trust in healthcare communication

Effective communication in healthcare is foundational to patient well-being and public health. It is predicated on the principles of clarity, accuracy, empathy, and, paramountly, trust between patients, healthcare providers, and public health institutions. The language used by legitimate medical sources aims to convey often complex information about diagnoses, treatments, preventative measures, and health risks in a manner that is both understandable to diverse audiences and faithful to established medical knowledge and evidence. This discourse typically involves cautious phrasing, transparent discussion of benefits and risks, acknowledgment of uncertainties where they exist, and a reliance on evidence-based reasoning. The ethical imperative is to inform and empower individuals to make sound health decisions and to foster public confidence in the healthcare system.

These very characteristics, however, create specific vulnerabilities. The inherent complexity of many medical conditions and treatments can be challenging for

lay audiences to fully comprehend, creating an opening for oversimplified or distorted explanations offered by purveyors of fake news. The specialized terminology necessary for medical precision can be co-opted or misused in fake narratives to lend a veneer of scientific authority to entirely unfounded claims, as seen in many fakes promoting "miracle cures" or detailing fabricated side effects of legitimate treatments. The profound reliance on trust in healthcare communication makes this domain a prime target for actors seeking to undermine established medical authorities, promote alternative or unproven remedies, or exploit public anxieties for commercial or ideological ends.

3.1.2. Motivations, sources, and dissemination channels

Fake news targeting healthcare originates from a diverse array of sources and is driven by various motivations. A significant portion is generated by individuals or groups with strong ideological objections to conventional medicine, most notably anti-vaccine movements that actively create and disseminate content designed to erode confidence in immunization programs. Such fakes often draw on long-disproven claims, such as the purported link between vaccines and autism, or newer fabrications like COVID-19 vaccines causing AIDS or magnetism[77]. Commercial interests also play a substantial role, with some entities promoting unproven or even dangerous "cures," supplements, or alternative therapies through misleading marketing that employs pseudo-scientific language and unsubstantiated testimonials. Claims about garlic or bleach curing COVID-19, or the promotion of Ivermectin as a COVID-19 treatment despite lack of robust evidence, exemplify this motivation, often exploiting public fear and desperation.

Conspiracy theorists contribute by weaving elaborate narratives that frequently implicate governments, pharmaceutical companies ("Big Pharma"), or international health organizations like the WHO or CDC in alleged plots to deceive the public, profit from illness, or cause harm. The sources of these fakes range from dedicated fringe websites and blogs that present themselves as alternative health authorities, to individual influencers on social media platforms, and sometimes, tragically,

misinformed individuals within the general public who unwittingly share false information. Social media platforms have become critical vectors for the propagation of healthcare fakes due to their algorithmic amplification of emotionally resonant content and the ease with which dramatic health claims can be shared. The linguistic style of these fakes is often tailored for virality[72], using alarming headlines, compelling (though often false) personal stories, and visually engaging (though potentially misleading) graphics. The speed of dissemination in these online environments frequently outpaces the ability of legitimate health authorities to effectively debunk false claims and mitigate their harmful impact.

3.1.3. The thematic landscape of fake news in healthcare

An analysis of the corpus reveals that fake news within the healthcare domain clusters around several prominent and recurring themes, often reflecting areas of significant public concern, medical complexity, or pre-existing anxieties about health and treatment[48].

A dominant category, particularly evident in the contemporary context, is **misinformation concerning infectious diseases, their prevention, and their treatment**. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for a deluge of such fakes. Examples from the corpus include claims that "COVID-19 vaccines cause AIDS," the promotion of household substances like bleach or common foods like garlic as effective cures for COVID-19, and false information about the risks of public health measures, such as assertions that face masks cause dangerous CO2 buildup or oxygen deprivation. These fakes typically prey on widespread fear and uncertainty, offering simplistic, often miraculous-sounding solutions or warnings that directly contradict established medical guidance and public health recommendations[42].

Vaccine-related misinformation constitutes another major and persistent thematic area. This encompasses a wide spectrum of false claims about vaccine safety, efficacy, and alleged hidden components or purposes[44]. Corpus examples include assertions that COVID-19 vaccines make recipients magnetic, cause autism (a long-discredited but resilient fake)[43], or contain microchips for tracking. The discrediting

of proven vaccines is often coupled with the promotion of unproven or inappropriate alternatives, as seen with the widespread claims about Ivermectin being a safe and effective cure for COVID-19, or the deliberate misinterpretation and sensationalizing of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial data to suggest that the vaccine is extremely dangerous and its adverse effects were deliberately hidden[65].

Furthermore, misinformation about general health practices and purported dangers of conventional medicine also features. This can include the promotion of unverified "detoxification" methods, unsubstantiated claims about the causes of chronic diseases, or narratives designed to undermine trust in pharmaceutical products or medical procedures by exaggerating risks or fabricating conspiracies involving "Big Pharma." While not all corpus items fall neatly into these exact categories, the overarching pattern is one of exploiting public vulnerability concerning health, illness, and medical interventions.

3.2. Case studies of the Fake news in healthcare

The construction of persuasive and deceptive fake news within the healthcare domain relies heavily on specific linguistic and communicative strategies designed to lend false credibility to unfounded claims, evoke strong emotional responses, and bypass critical evaluation. This section provides detailed analyses of representative case studies from the corpus, illustrating how lexical choices, grammatical structures, stylistic features, and pragmatic maneuvers are employed to achieve these manipulative ends.[98]

3.2.1. Exploiting health anxieties, fear and false hope for creating fake news

Public anxiety surrounding diseases, particularly novel or widespread ones like COVID-19, creates fertile ground for fake news that expertly manipulates language to evoke fear and offer illusory solutions. A prominent example from the corpus involves claims that "COVID-19 vaccines cause AIDS," a particularly potent piece of

misinformation due to the historical stigma and fear associated with AIDS. Linguistically, such fakes often engage in the misappropriation of medical terminology. Terms like "immune deficiency," "viral replication," or "spike protein" might be used out of their correct scientific context or linked through fabricated causal chains to create a veneer of scientific plausibility for an entirely false assertion. The headline itself, "COVID-19 Vaccines Cause AIDS," is a stark, unqualified assertion designed for maximum shock value.

Another common linguistic tactic evident in claims like "drinking bleach can cure COVID-19" or "eating garlic can prevent or cure COVID-19" is the use of simplistic, definitive language presenting an easy solution to a complex problem. While legitimate medical advice is often nuanced and cautious, these fakes offer straightforward, albeit dangerous or ineffective, actions. The language may also involve appeals to "natural" remedies versus "chemical" or "artificial" conventional treatments, a common rhetorical strategy in alternative health misinformation that taps into a preference for perceived purity or tradition. The case of garlic, for instance, might involve the linguistic exaggeration of its known antimicrobial properties into a claim of specific efficacy against a novel virus, omitting crucial scientific distinctions and evidence standards. The assertion that "masks cause dangerous CO2 buildup / oxygen deprivation" similarly employs **alarmist language** ("dangerous," "deprivation") and often misrepresents physiological processes to stoke fear about a widely recommended public health measure. These fakes pragmatically aim to override official health guidance by presenting more emotionally compelling, albeit false, narratives.

3.2.2. Deconstructing vaccine misinformation using language as the instrument for creating doubts

Vaccine misinformation represents a significant and persistent category of healthcare fakes, characterized by sophisticated linguistic strategies designed to sow doubt about vaccine safety and efficacy, and frequently to promote elaborate conspiracy theories. Claims from the corpus, such as COVID-19 vaccines causing recipients to become magnetic, linking vaccines to autism, or asserting that vaccines

contain microchips for tracking purposes (often associated with figures like Bill Gates), illustrate these tactics. A core linguistic feature is the co-opting and misuse of scientific or technical-sounding jargon. For instance, discussions of "nanoparticles" or "metallic components" in vaccines might be linguistically framed to "explain" the fabricated phenomenon of magnetism, lending a pseudo-scientific gloss to an absurd claim[52].

The communicative strategy often involves a direct erosion of trust in legitimate health authorities like the WHO, CDC, or FDA, and in pharmaceutical companies. This is achieved linguistically through insinuations, loaded questions, and the amplification of anecdotal or unverified "adverse events." For example, the claim that Bill Gates "admits the vaccine will no doubt kill 700,000 people" is a gross linguistic distortion of a hypothetical statement about side-effect ratios, twisted into a nefarious admission of intent. Similarly, the promotion of Ivermectin as a COVID-19 cure often involved the selective linguistic highlighting of preliminary or flawed studies, framing their dubious findings as definitive proof while downplaying or ignoring contradictory evidence from more rigorous research. The misrepresentation of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial data also demonstrates this, where complex scientific documents are cherry-picked for isolated data points or adverse event lists, which are then linguistically framed out of context to suggest widespread, deliberately concealed dangers. The language often employs emotive appeals to parental concern, personal autonomy, or fear of unknown long-term consequences, all designed to bypass rational assessment of vaccine benefits and risks.

3.2.3. The creation of the "Alternative truth"

Many healthcare fakes construct their persuasive appeal by positioning themselves as sources of "alternative" or "suppressed" knowledge, often employing a distinctive blend of pseudo-scientific language and appeals to non-traditional forms of authority. This is evident in the broader discourse surrounding unproven remedies or theories that contradict established medical science. While your corpus focuses heavily on COVID-19 and vaccines, the linguistic principles extend to other areas of health misinformation. These fakes often utilize a lexicon that includes terms like *toxins,*

natural, holistic, detox, energy fields, quantum healing, or *immune boost*, which, while sometimes having legitimate uses, are frequently invoked in vague or scientifically ungrounded ways to promote products or practices.

Grammatically, these texts may rely on assertive statements presented as established fact, even when lacking empirical support (e.g.: "This natural compound eliminates all toxins from your body"). The use of testimonials or anecdotal evidence is a common stylistic feature, where personal stories are linguistically framed as compelling proof, often overshadowing or directly contradicting scientific evidence. There is often an explicit or implicit appeal to anti-establishment sentiment, framing conventional medicine or regulatory bodies as part of a "cover-up" or beholden to "Big Pharma." For instance, a fake cure might be promoted with language like, "What doctors won't tell you..." or "The hidden truth they don't want you to know..." This creates a narrative where the purveyor of the fake is positioned as a courageous truth-teller, and the audience is invited into a select group possessing special, suppressed knowledge. The overall communicative goal is to persuade the audience to reject evidence-based medical advice in favor of unsubstantiated or potentially harmful alternatives, achieved by building a linguistic façade of credibility and tapping into distrust or a desire for simpler, "more natural" solutions.

3.2.4. Visual-textual cooperation in healthcare misinformation

While the textual component is central, healthcare fakes increasingly leverage visual elements — such as manipulated charts, out-of-context images of medical conditions, or videos of supposed experts or testimonials — to enhance their persuasive impact. The linguistic elements accompanying these visuals are crucial in framing their interpretation. For example, a graph showing a correlation (not causation) might be presented with a caption that linguistically asserts a direct causal link between a vaccine and an adverse event. An image of a skin rash might be falsely labeled with text claiming it's a common and severe side effect of a new medication.

The language in these visual-textual fakes often employs direct, declarative statements that leave little room for ambiguity, overriding any critical visual

assessment the viewer might undertake. Overlay text on videos can highlight specific (often misleading) phrases or statistics, reinforcing the false narrative. The synergy between a compelling or alarming visual and assertive, emotionally charged text creates a potent combination that can be highly memorable and shareable, particularly on social media. The linguistic framing ensures that the visual, even if ambiguous or benign on its own, is interpreted in a way that supports the false health claim, thereby amplifying its deceptive potential. This multimodal approach[72] is particularly effective in conveying complex (mis)information quickly and in a seemingly evidential manner.

3.2.5. Fake news exploiting health fears and misinformation.

This pervasive category of fake news disseminates false or misleading claims about diseases, medical treatments, vaccines, and public health policies. Such Fake news often prey on individuals' anxieties about health, distrust of medical institutions or pharmaceutical companies, or their desire for simple, "natural" solutions to complex health problems.

Illustrative Case: "COVID-19 Vaccines Cause AIDS"[117]: This claim circulated widely, often promoted by fringe websites like "The Exposé" and amplified by anti-vaccine influencers. The text refer to these sources and a refutation from virologist Robert Gallo via Correio Braziliense, where he states the obviousness of vaccines not causing AIDS.

Linguistic-stylistic analysis:

Misuse of scientific terminology (pseudo-science):

Fake news in this category often co-opt legitimate scientific or medical terms (e.g.: "immune system," "viral load," "spike protein," "acquired immunodeficiency syndrome") but use them incorrectly, out of context, or to draw false equivalences, creating a **veneer of scientific credibility** for an unscientific claim.

Fabrication of causal links through jargon: For example, falsely linking vaccine mechanisms (like temporary immune responses) to the complex pathogenesis of a distinct disease like AIDS.

Sensational and alarmist language:

Headlines and claims frequently use words designed to evoke fear and urgency (e.g.: "VACCINE DISASTER!," "HIDDEN DANGER EXPOSED!," "Millions at Risk!").

The claim "vaccines cause AIDS" is itself an extremely potent fear-inducing statement, leveraging the historical stigma and fear associated with HIV/AIDS.

Selective data presentation and misinterpretation:

Often involves cherry-picking data from unrelated studies, misinterpreting statistics (as seen in another fake news about 94% of COVID deaths being among vaccinated), or presenting anecdotal "evidence" as a generalizable fact. Linguistic framing makes these misinterpretations seem authoritative.

Appeals to "alternative" authorities or suppressed truths:

Frequently cites discredited doctors, "whistleblowers," or fringe "experts" whose claims are presented as suppressed by the medical establishment or "Big Pharma." The language suggests an uncovering of a conspiracy of silence.

Communicative-pragmatic analysis:

Exploitation of fear and uncertainty: capitalizes on public anxiety surrounding new diseases (like COVID-19) or medical interventions (like new vaccines), and general health concerns.

Erosion of trust in legitimate health authorities: a primary goal is to undermine public confidence in mainstream medical institutions (CDC, WHO, FDA), doctors, and scientific research by portraying them as corrupt, incompetent, or part of a conspiracy.

Promotion of "forbidden knowledge": positions the fake claim as a dangerous truth that "they" don't want you to know, appealing to those who see themselves as critical thinkers challenging an official narrative.

Argument from ignorance or false equivalence: suggests that because all long-term effects of a new vaccine are not yet known, any feared outcome (like AIDS)

is plausible, or falsely equates temporary vaccine side effects with symptoms of severe diseases.

Oversimplification of complex biology: reduces complex immunological and virological processes to simplistic, often erroneous, cause-and-effect statements that are easy to grasp and share.

Why this type of fake exists and spreads:

Genuine health anxieties: people are naturally concerned about their health and that of their loved ones, making them receptive to information (even false) that promises protection or explains perceived dangers.

Mistrust of pharmaceutical industry/government: pre-existing skepticism about the motives of pharmaceutical companies ("Big Pharma") or government health policies provides fertile ground for such Fake news.

Desire for control and simple answers: in the face of complex and frightening health crises, false claims offering simple explanations or purported cures can provide a false sense of control or understanding.

Influence of anti-vaccine movements: established anti-vaccine networks actively create and disseminate such misinformation, leveraging existing infrastructure and follower bases.

Algorithmic amplification: sensational health claims often perform well on social media, leading to algorithmic amplification and rapid spread before effective debunking.

Typical public reaction and refutation dynamics:

Initial reaction: can cause significant alarm, leading to vaccine hesitancy, rejection of public health measures, and sometimes adoption of harmful "alternative" treatments. These Fake news often go viral within specific communities already distrustful of mainstream medicine.

Refutation process: gealth authorities (WHO, CDC, FDA), reputable medical journals, independent fact-checkers (like Full Fact, Reuters), and prominent scientists (like Robert Gallo in the example text) work to debunk these claims by:

- Providing clear scientific explanations of how vaccines work and why they cannot cause unrelated diseases like AIDS.
- Correcting misinterpretations of data or scientific concepts.
- Highlighting the lack of any credible scientific evidence supporting the fake claim.
- Emphasizing the safety and efficacy data from actual clinical trials.

Difficulty of correction: health misinformation can be particularly "sticky" due to the emotional component of fear. Once a health-related fear is implanted, it can be very difficult to dislodge with factual information alone, especially if the individual distrusts the sources providing the correction.

Illustrative Case: "Masks Cause Dangerous CO2 Buildup / Oxygen Deprivation"[109]

This claim circulated widely, particularly during periods when mask mandates were implemented as a public health measure against COVID-19. It was debunked by numerous health organizations, including the American Lung Association, and fact-checkers like AFP and BBC News.

Linguistic-stylistic analysis:

Misuse of scientific terminology (pseudo-science): The claims often co-opt legitimate medical terms like "hypoxia" (low oxygen) and "hypercapnia" (excess CO2) but misapply them to the routine wearing of common cloth or surgical masks. This creates a false alarm by associating mask-wearing with severe medical conditions.

Fabrication of causal links through jargon: The fake news fabricates a direct causal link between the physical barrier of a mask and clinically significant oxygen deprivation or CO2 retention, ignoring the porosity of mask materials to gas molecules and the body's respiratory mechanisms.

Sensational and alarmist language: The language used is designed to evoke fear and physical discomfort. Phrases like "suffocating," "depriving your body of vital

oxygen," "breathing in your own poison," or "dangerous buildup" are common, linguistically framing masks as an immediate health threat.

Selective data presentation and misinterpretation (often anecdotal): Proponents might selectively cite feelings of discomfort or breathlessness (which can occur, especially with improper fit or exertion) and linguistically escalate these subjective experiences into proof of dangerous physiological changes. Misleading interpretations of how CO2 behaves in enclosed spaces might also be used.

Appeals to "alternative" authorities or suppressed truths: Often, claims are attributed to fringe "doctors" or "scientists" who supposedly "dare to speak out" against the mainstream narrative, or they appeal to "common sense" ("it just feels like I can't breathe properly!") as overriding scientific evidence.

Communicative-pragmatic analysis:

Exploitation of fear and uncertainty: The claims capitalize on discomfort some people experience wearing masks, and general anxieties about health and breathing, particularly for those with pre-existing respiratory conditions (even if masks are still recommended for many).

Erosion of trust in legitimate health authorities: By portraying a widely recommended public health measure as harmful, the fake news aims to undermine the credibility and competence of organizations like the WHO or CDC, and by extension, government mandates.

Promotion of "forbidden knowledge" or personal experience over science: It positions personal sensation or anecdotal "evidence" as more valid than scientific studies on mask safety, appealing to those who prioritize individual feeling over population-level data.

Argument from ignorance or false equivalence: It might suggest that because masks *feel* restrictive to some, they *must* be causing harm, a false equivalence between subjective sensation and objective physiological danger.

Oversimplification of complex biology: It simplifies respiratory physiology, ignoring the body's capacity to adapt to minor changes in airflow and the difference between perceived breathlessness and actual clinical hypoxia or hypercapnia.

Why this type of fake news exists and spreads:

Genuine discomfort & personal experience: Some individuals do find masks uncomfortable, and this subjective experience can make them receptive to claims that validate these feelings as medically significant.

Political/ideological opposition to mandates: Resistance to mask-wearing was often intertwined with broader political or ideological objections to government interventions, making health-based justifications for non-compliance appealing.

Desire for control and simple answers: If masks are "dangerous," it provides a simple reason to reject a perceived imposition.

Influence of anti-science/anti-authority groups: Groups skeptical of mainstream science or government authority actively promoted these claims.

Algorithmic amplification: Content questioning or opposing mainstream narratives, especially if emotionally charged, can gain significant traction on social media.

Typical public reaction and refutation dynamics:

Initial reaction: Can lead to widespread anxiety about mask-wearing, non-compliance with public health mandates, and confrontations over mask use. It often resonates strongly within communities already skeptical of official health advice.

Refutation process: Health organizations (American Lung Association, WHO, etc.) and fact-checkers worked to debunk claims by:

Explaining the basic science of respiration and gas exchange through permeable materials.

Citing studies showing no significant negative impact on oxygen or CO2 levels from common mask types in healthy individuals.

Highlighting that surgeons and other healthcare professionals wear masks for extended periods without harm.

Providing guidance on proper mask fit and use to minimize discomfort.

Difficulty of correction: For individuals strongly swayed by personal discomfort, ideological opposition, or distrust of authorities, factual refutations were often dismissed. The emotional component of feeling "unable to breathe" can be a powerful personal "truth" that is hard to counter with scientific data alone. The politicization of mask-wearing further entrenched resistance to corrective information.

3.2.6. Fakes exploiting pseudo-scientific language and false authority

This pervasive category of fake news disseminates false or misleading claims about the nature, causes, prevention, or treatment of diseases, as well as the efficacy or safety of public health interventions. Such fakes typically prey on individuals' anxieties about illness, distrust of medical institutions, or their desire for simple, miraculous, or readily available solutions to complex health problems, often leading to dangerous health choices or the rejection of sound medical advice.

Illustrative case: "Drinking bleach can cure COVID-19"[138]

This extremely dangerous piece of misinformation gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that ingesting household bleach or other disinfectants could prevent or cure the virus. The FDA and numerous health authorities issued strong warnings against this practice.

Linguistic-stylistic analysis:

Misuse of scientific terminology (pseudo-science) & false equivalence: The core linguistic deception lies in the misapplication of the term "disinfectant" or "cleanser." While bleach is effective for surface disinfection, the fake news dangerously and falsely equates this external action with internal therapeutic efficacy. It's a linguistic transfer of properties from one domain (inanimate surfaces) to another (human body) without scientific validity.

Fabrication of causal links through jargon (or lack thereof): Unlike more sophisticated fakes, this one often relies on a simplistic, almost magical, causal link: "bleach kills germs" therefore "bleach kills COVID in you." The "jargon" here is the common understanding of bleach, misused.

Sensational and alarmist language (contextual): The sensationalism is driven by the extreme nature of the "cure" and the desperate context of the pandemic. Headlines or social media posts promoting this often used urgent or revelatory language, implying a simple, powerful, overlooked solution.

Selective data presentation and misinterpretation (by omission): Proponents typically omit any mention of bleach's extreme toxicity when ingested, focusing solely on its germicidal properties. This is a critical linguistic omission.

Appeals to "alternative" authorities or suppressed truths (implicit): Promoting such a dangerous "remedy" often implicitly positions it as a "secret" or "simple truth" that the medical establishment, with its complex and expensive treatments, might be ignoring or suppressing.

Communicative-pragmatic analysis:

Exploitation of fear and uncertainty: This fake news directly preys on the profound fear of COVID-19 and the uncertainty surrounding effective treatments, especially in the early stages of the pandemic.

Erosion of trust in legitimate health authorities: By proposing such a radical and accessible "solution," it implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) undermines the guidance of health professionals who warn against it, framing them as perhaps withholding simple cures.

Promotion of "forbidden knowledge" (or dangerous "common sense"): It presents a seemingly logical (though fatally flawed) idea – "it kills germs outside, so it must kill them inside" – as a form of "common sense" truth being ignored by complex science.

Argument from ignorance or false equivalence: The argument hinges on a false equivalence between surface disinfection and internal medicine.

Oversimplification of complex biology: It drastically oversimplifies the human body's intricate systems and the way pathogens interact with them, reducing a complex viral infection to something that can be "cleaned out" like a stained surface.

Why this type of fake news exists and spreads:

Genuine health anxieties & Desperation: Extreme fear during a pandemic can lead people to consider extreme and unproven "cures."

Mistrust of pharmaceutical industry/government: Some may believe that simple, cheap solutions like bleach are deliberately overlooked in favor of profitable drugs.

Desire for control and simple answers: Ingesting bleach offers a tangible, albeit horrifyingly misguided, sense of taking action and control against an invisible threat.

Influence of fringe groups/individuals: Certain individuals or groups may promote such dangerous ideas for notoriety, to sow chaos, or out of a deeply misguided belief system.

Algorithmic amplification & Virality of the Bizarre: The shocking and bizarre nature of the claim can itself contribute to its spread on social media, even if shared in disbelief or condemnation initially.

Typical public reaction and refutation dynamics:

Initial reaction: Widespread shock and condemnation from most, but alarmingly, adoption by a small minority leading to poisonings and deaths. It can generate intense online debate and morbid curiosity.

Refutation process: Public health bodies (FDA, poison control centers) and medical professionals issued immediate and urgent warnings detailing the severe dangers of ingesting bleach. Fact-checkers highlighted these warnings and the lack of any scientific basis for the claim.

- Emphasizing the extreme toxicity and immediate harm.
- Explaining that disinfectants are for external use only.
- Providing clear instructions on what to do in case of accidental ingestion.

Difficulty of correction: While most people would recognize the danger, for a small, desperate, or deeply distrustful segment, the allure of a simple, powerful "solution" might override warnings, especially if they perceive official sources as

untrustworthy. The refutation here is less about nuanced scientific debate and more about stark warnings of immediate physical harm.

CONCLUSION FOR CHAPTER 3

The empirical analysis presented in this chapter, focusing on the linguistic construction of fake news within the critical domain of healthcare, demonstrates the sophisticated and often insidious role of specific linguistic choices and communicative strategies in propagating dangerous misinformation. Through detailed case studies of claims such as "COVID-19 Vaccines Cause AIDS," "Masks Cause Dangerous CO2 Buildup / Oxygen Deprivation," and "Drinking Bleach Can Cure COVID-19," it is evident that these instances of fake news are not merely factually incorrect statements. Instead, they are carefully engineered linguistic artifacts designed to exploit public anxieties, undermine trust in legitimate health authorities[101], and achieve specific persuasive and manipulative effects within the English-speaking information ecosystem.

A consistent finding across these varied healthcare fakes is the strategic misuse of scientific or medical terminology to create a deceptive veneer of credibility[81], often coupled with the fabrication of unsubstantiated causal links through this pseudo-scientific jargon. The language employed is frequently sensational and alarmist, designed to evoke immediate fear, urgency, or outrage[89], thereby bypassing rational scrutiny. This is further compounded by the selective presentation or gross misinterpretation of data, often anecdotal, which is linguistically framed to appear authoritative. Appeals to supposed "alternative" authorities or "suppressed truths" are common[43], a rhetorical strategy aimed at positioning the fake news as revelatory and the purveyors as courageous truth-tellers against a conspiratorial medical establishment[16].

Communicatively and pragmatically, these healthcare fakes systematically exploit fear and uncertainty surrounding diseases, treatments, and public health

interventions[12]. A primary goal is the erosion of trust in established medical institutions (CDC, WHO, FDA) and healthcare professionals, often portraying them as incompetent, corrupt, or complicit in harm[33]. The promotion of "forbidden knowledge" or simplistic "common sense" solutions over complex, evidence-based medicine is a recurring tactic[11]. These narratives frequently rely on arguments from ignorance or false equivalences and achieve their persuasive power through the oversimplification of complex biological and physiological processes into easily digestible, though erroneous and often dangerous, cause-and-effect statements[44].

The analysis underscores that the spread of such healthcare fake news is fueled by genuine public health anxieties, pre-existing mistrust in institutions, a desire for simple answers in complex situations, the influence of dedicated anti-science or anti-vaccine movements[8], and the algorithmic amplification inherent in digital media[1]. While refutation efforts by health authorities and fact-checkers are crucial[18], the "stickiness" of health misinformation[51], deeply rooted in emotional responses and entrenched beliefs, presents significant challenges to correction.

In conclusion, this chapter affirms that a nuanced understanding of the linguistic-stylistic and communicative-pragmatic construction of healthcare-related fake news is pivotal[98]. The identified patterns of language use from lexical manipulation and syntactic framing to the deployment of specific rhetorical and pragmatic strategies are not accidental but are fundamental to how these dangerous fakes are created, legitimized, and disseminated[72]. Recognizing and deconstructing these linguistic mechanisms is essential for enhancing public health literacy, fostering critical engagement with health information, and developing more resilient defenses against the pervasive threat of information disorder in the vital domain of healthcare.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the strategic use of language is not a peripheral aspect but a foundational element in the creation, dissemination, and impact of English-language "Fake news." Far from being mere falsehoods, these instances of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation are often sophisticated linguistic constructs, capable of shaping, distorting, and even fabricating realities within the contemporary global information landscape. The combined theoretical, conceptual, and empirical analysis across the chapters reveals how specific linguistic-stylistic choices and communicative-pragmatic strategies operate as key mechanisms in the persuasive architecture of these Fake news.

Theoretically, this thesis has established that fake news leverages the inherent power of language to frame narratives, evoke emotions, and influence cognitive processing. Concepts such as micro-linguistic manipulation (through word choice, syntax, and style), concept substitution (as a framing technique), and the exploitation of pragmatic principles (like speech acts and implicature) have been shown to be central to how Fake news achieve their deceptive ends. These theoretical underpinnings highlight that fake news is not just about *what* is said, but critically about *how* it is said in English to target specific audiences and achieve desired effects.

Empirically, the investigation of a diverse corpus of approximately 50 verified English-language fake news items confirmed the prevalence and systematic application of these linguistic strategies across various themes, including politics, health, science, and social conspiracies. The quantitative thematic distribution and detailed qualitative case studies exposed common patterns: the use of emotionally charged language, the mimicry of authoritative genres, the assertion of claims with unwarranted certainty, and the deliberate framing to appeal to pre-existing biases. These findings illustrate how fake news is often structurally designed to bypass critical scrutiny and achieve rapid, viral dissemination, particularly within digital media ecosystems.

The findings also point to the ongoing challenges in detection and mitigation. While traditional fact-checking is vital, an understanding of the linguistic construction of Fake news offers an additional layer for critical assessment. The subtle ways language can be used to mislead necessitate enhanced media literacy programs that specifically address these linguistic tactics.

In sum, this research calls for a greater emphasis on the linguistic dimensions of information disorder within the English-speaking world. Understanding the specific ways language is weaponized is crucial for developing more effective countermeasures. Addressing the proliferation of Fake news requires interdisciplinary strategies that integrate linguistic insight with technological solutions, educational initiatives, and responsible platform governance. Only by recognizing and confronting the sophisticated linguistic engineering often at play can we hope to foster a more informed, resilient, and critically engaged public discourse.

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Addition 1. Fake news using fabricated or misattributed quotes/actions

"Donald Trump's fabricated 1998 quote about republicans.

A fabricated news story claiming Hollywood actor Denzel Washington had praised US President-elect Donald Trump is being shared widely on Facebook.

The post from Facebook page American News has been shared more than 22,000 times since Monday.

It claims Mr Washington praised Mr Trump, saying: "We need more and more jobs.

"He has hired more employees, more people, than anyone I know in the world."

The story also claims Mr Washington called President Barack Obama "anti-Christian".

Mr Washington's publicist **Alan Nierob, external** told BBC News: "The story is 100% complete fabrication."

But some Facebook users have been fooled.

One, Anita Ward, said on Facebook: "Kudos to Denzel.

"We need to be a united country not divided, after all it is called United States of America.

"In the name of Jesus, stand up for America and come together, love one another and work together."

Another posted: "He has been my favourite actor for a very long time. Knew there was something special about him. God is his saviour. Thank you, Denzel!"

The prevalence of fake news on Facebook **has become a hot issue in the wake of the US election**.

And Facebook boss Mark Zuckerberg responded to these concerns **in a post, external** on Saturday night.

"Only a very small amount is fake news and hoaxes," he said.

"The hoaxes that do exist are not limited to one partisan view, or even to politics."

But it appears not all Mr Zuckerberg's own employees were satisfied with his response, as **Buzzfeed news has reported, external** that some have set up an unofficial task force to deal with the problem.

Addition 2. Fake news exploiting health fears and misinformation.

Can COVID-19 vaccines cause AIDS?

No, there is no evidence that any WHO-approved COVID-19 vaccines are linked to an increased risk of HIV/AIDS or a fake condition being called vaccine-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (VAIDS).

What our experts say

There is no evidence from COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials or controlled follow-up data that links WHO-approved COVID-19 vaccines with increased risk of HIV/AIDS or a fake condition being called vaccine-acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (VAIDS).

There are no data that show an increase in HIV cases among vaccinated individuals; additionally, among individuals living with HIV, clinical trials of WHO-approved COVID-19 vaccines have not shown any increase in the development of AIDS among individuals with HIV.

AIDS, or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, is caused by a virus called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). HIV is the virus that can cause infection, whereas AIDS is a condition caused by HIV; not all people who get infected with HIV will go on to have AIDS. AIDS, also known as stage 3 of HIV, develops when an HIV infection gets severe enough that it starts damaging the immune system. Most people who get HIV get it through sexual relations or sharing needles. There is also no possibility of HIV/AIDS transmission from the COVID-19 needle because a new needle is used every time.

Some other known ways of acquiring immunodeficiency (also called secondary immunodeficiency disorder) that are not HIV/AIDS include chronic conditions like cancer, malnutrition, environmental toxins, certain drugs, and genetic disorders. There is also no evidence that vaccines are linked to a higher risk of secondary immunodeficiency disorder.

Context and background

False claims have been circulating that COVID-19 vaccines (and boosters) cause AIDS or "VAIDS." Not only is this information false but there is no known medical condition called VAIDS.

There are a number of places that this claim may have stemmed from. One place this claim may have stemmed from is from legitimate concerns that some scientists have about COVID-19 vaccines made with a recombinant adenovirus type-5 (Ad5) vector potentially increasing susceptibility to an HIV infection.

These concerns stem from two studies that researched the efficacy of an Ad5 vectored vaccine in preventing HIV infection. The researchers of both studies found an increased risk of HIV among vaccinated men. These results have led some experts to caution against the deployment of vaccines that use similar vectors. These experts

are especially concerned about the use of such vaccines in areas where there is already high HIV prevalence out of concern that the vaccines could lead to more HIV cases.

These concerns are legitimate, but there are a few reasons that they don't apply to the WHO-approved vaccines being rolled out:

1. Most importantly, none of the WHO-approved vaccines use an Ad5 vector. Three of the vaccines are using adenoviruses, but not Ad5. Those three are the AstraZeneca vaccine, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, and the Covishield vaccine (Oxford/ AstraZeneca formulation). Other types of adenovirus vaccines have not been shown to increase risk of HIV or any other immunodeficiency risk in any setting.

2. There is no current data showing any increased HIV risk with the two (non-WHO-approved) COVID-19 vaccines that use Ad5.

3. The vaccines that led to increase in HIV risk in the studies did not have what is called an "HIV envelope" – which is the outside coat of HIV made of fats. HIV uses protein "spikes" embedded in its envelope to enter host cells. HIV vaccine studies that did have an HIV envelope did not lead to an increase in HIV risk. As a result, not only is it possible that this increased HIV risk may only occur with HIV-specific vaccines, but it's also possible that this HIV risk may only occur with HIV-specific vaccines that use the HIV envelope. This means that COVID-19 vaccines using Ad5 would be extremely unlikely to lead to any increase in HIV risk in general.

Sputnik V and CanSino's Convidicea COVID-19 vaccines both use Ad5. Neither of these are WHO-approved vaccines but they have been rolled out in multiple countries. There is no current data showing any increased HIV risk with these two vaccines; however, South Africa, a country with high HIV rates, did not approve either of these vaccines due to concerns.

These very specific concerns – that do not apply to any WHO-approved vaccines or the majority of COVID-19 vaccines, and might not end up being real concerns for the two vaccines that use Ad5 – are likely one of the reasons that false claims have started circulating that COVID-19 vaccines can cause HIV, AIDS, or VAIDS (a fake condition).

The other main reason for this claim to be circulating appears to be general vaccine hesitancy and cherry picking data.