

POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DONALD TRUMP'S POLITICAL SPEECHES

Jawad El Bakri*

Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakesh,
Morocco.

*Pos-el: elbakrijawad42@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the use of language in political discourse through a critical analysis of former U.S. President Donald Trump's speeches. It aims to uncover how Trump strategically employs linguistic features to construct ideologies, manipulate public opinion, and legitimize his political agenda. Using a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study analyzes a selection of Trump's campaign and presidential speeches related to foreign policy issues such as immigration, ISIS, Iran, Russia, and North Korea. The analysis focuses on key discourse features, including metaphor, repetition, modality, presupposition, and intertextuality. The findings reveal that Trump consistently uses emotionally charged language, binary oppositions ("us" vs. "them"), and nationalistic appeals to create a persuasive narrative. He frequently contradicts himself across speeches, but these contradictions are often masked by rhetorical strategies that reinforce audience support. Additionally, Trump scapegoats previous administrations and foreign entities to emphasize his policy proposals as corrective solutions. The study concludes that Trump's discourse is not merely expressive but instrumental in shaping political reality, maintaining power, and reinforcing ideological divides. This research contributes to the understanding of how language functions as a tool of political influence in contemporary populist rhetoric.

Keywords: political discourse analysis; ideology: power; critical discourse analysis

ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan bahasa dalam wacana politik melalui analisis kritis terhadap pidato mantan Presiden AS Donald Trump. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengungkap bagaimana Trump secara strategis menggunakan fitur linguistik untuk membangun ideologi, memanipulasi opini publik, dan melegitimasi agenda politiknya. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif yang didasarkan pada Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA), studi ini menganalisis pilihan pidato kampanye dan kepresidenan Trump yang terkait dengan isu kebijakan luar negeri seperti imigrasi, ISIS, Iran, Rusia, dan Korea Utara. Analisis ini berfokus pada fitur wacana utama termasuk metafora, pengulangan, modalitas, praanggapan, dan intertekstualitas. Temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa Trump secara konsisten menggunakan bahasa yang bermuatan emosional, oposisi biner (misalnya, "kita" vs. "mereka"), dan seruan nasionalistis untuk menciptakan narasi yang persuasif. Dia sering kali bertentangan dengan dirinya sendiri dalam pidatonya, tetapi kontradiksi ini sering kali ditutupi oleh strategi retorika yang memperkuat dukungan audiens. Selain itu, Trump menjadikan

pemerintahan sebelumnya dan entitas asing sebagai kambing hitam untuk menekankan proposal kebijakannya sebagai solusi korektif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa wacana Trump tidak hanya ekspresif tetapi juga berperan dalam membentuk realitas politik, mempertahankan kekuasaan, dan memperkuat perpecahan ideologis. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada pemahaman tentang bagaimana bahasa berfungsi sebagai alat pengaruh politik dalam retorika populis kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Analisis wacana politik; ideologi; kekuasaan; analisis wacana kritis

A. INTRODUCTION

Political discourse serves as a fundamental mechanism through which societies interpret and negotiate concepts of power, identity, and national interest. It is not merely a vehicle for communication but a powerful tool that constructs political ideologies, shapes collective perceptions, and influences public opinion. In the contemporary era characterized by rapid information exchange via global media and heightened political polarization, the language used by political leaders assumes heightened significance, often steering societal attitudes and behaviors in profound ways. This paper undertakes a critical examination of political discourse with a particular focus on the speeches of former U.S. President Donald Trump. The choice of Trump as a case study is motivated by his distinctive rhetorical style, which is marked by a populist tone, repetitive phrasing, and strategic ambiguity. These features have distinguished his communication approach and contributed to his ability to mobilize political support. Notably, Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," encapsulates a communication strategy that relies heavily on emotive language and the construction of divisive binaries—framing national issues through the lens of “us versus them.” This framing resonates with core themes of nationalism and identity politics, making his speeches particularly rich material for discourse analysis. The primary aim of this research is to uncover the ideological foundations and manipulative linguistic strategies embedded in Trump's political speeches. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study seeks to reveal how Trump's linguistic choices operate to assert power, reinforce ideological positions, and persuade his audience. The central hypothesis is that Trump's rhetoric often contains contradictions yet employs emotionally charged and simplistic language that effectively shapes public perception and legitimizes his political agenda. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the broader understanding of how political figures leverage language not only to construct social realities but also to marginalize opponents and solidify their political base.

Politics can be defined in terms of exercising power, and putting some economic, political, and cultural values into practice. It is the fact of using political authority to organize society (Fairclough, 1989, p. 17). Some philosophers like Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes argue that human being is political by nature, that is, it is only in a well-organized and political society that humans can survive. Fairclough says that politics is a struggle over power among those who try to maintain it and others who seek to resist it (Fairclough, 1989, p. 43). Politicians use power to influence, to control, to tame, or to guide others'

behavior and to dominate their thoughts. Rousseau, according to Bayram, highlights this point of power saying, "The strongest is never strong unless he transforms his power into right and obedience into duty" (Rousseau, J.J., cited in the New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, 1999, p. 678). Wareing, according to Bayram, mentions that words can have a strong influence on our attitude, which word chosen affects people's perception on the internal and the external level, that is, their perception of themselves and others. Therefore, language plays an important role in the production and reproduction of political values. Similarly, Jones and Pecci, according to Bayram, point out that language can be used not only to steer people's thoughts and beliefs, but also to control their thoughts.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Political discourse analysis has long been a crucial tool for understanding how language shapes political ideologies and power relations. Fairclough (1989) laid the foundation for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by emphasizing the relationship between language, power, and society. He argued that discourse is not merely a reflection of social structures but an active medium through which power relations are reproduced and contested. Fairclough's work highlights the ways political language can normalize certain ideologies and marginalize dissenting voices, setting a framework for analyzing political speeches and texts critically. Van Dijk (2006) further extended CDA by focusing specifically on how discourse manipulates public opinion in political and media contexts. His study demonstrated that politicians often use subtle linguistic strategies such as presupposition, implicatures, and framing to shape perceptions and justify policies. Van Dijk's analysis revealed that such manipulative discourse tends to create polarized group identities ("us" vs "them"), fostering division and strengthening in-group cohesion. This is particularly relevant in the analysis of populist political rhetoric, where appeals to identity and emotion are pivotal. Lakoff (2016) provides a detailed examination of Donald Trump's rhetorical style, emphasizing his use of populist rhetoric characterized by simplification, repetition, and emotional appeal. Lakoff's study highlights how Trump's speeches employ strong binary oppositions ("good" vs. "evil," "us" vs. "them") to frame political issues in stark terms that resonate with his base. This approach simplifies complex issues, making them more accessible while reinforcing an "us-against-them" mentality. Lakoff also points to Trump's strategic ambiguity, which allows multiple interpretations and maintains broad appeal. Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a complementary approach by analyzing language as a social semiotic system that constructs meaning through choices at multiple levels: lexical, grammatical, and discourse. His work underlines the importance of modality, transitivity, and metaphor in shaping ideological meanings within texts. When applied to political speeches, SFL allows researchers to dissect how linguistic features contribute to constructing social realities, legitimizing power, and influencing audience perceptions. More recent empirical research by Charteris-Black (2018) investigates how Trump's use of metaphor and repetition functions as a political strategy to create memorable and persuasive messages. His findings indicate that Trump's metaphorical language

not only simplifies political discourse but also evokes emotional responses that reinforce nationalistic sentiments. The repetition of slogans like “Make America Great Again” serves as a powerful framing device that consolidates political identity and mobilizes supporters.

In their study, Chilton and Schäffner (2002) explored political discourse as a strategic tool for shaping national identity and legitimizing power. They found that political speeches often employ intertextual references and historical narratives to create a sense of continuity and shared purpose, which strengthens a leader's authority. Their research highlights how discourse can function to naturalize political agendas by embedding them in culturally familiar stories and values. Similarly, Wodak (2015) examined populist rhetoric across various political contexts and identified recurring features such as simplification, emotional appeal, and the construction of antagonistic binaries between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite.” Wodak's findings stress that such rhetoric mobilizes support by appealing to collective grievances and promoting an exclusionary us-versus-them worldview. Analyzing the role of language in political persuasion, Hart (2013) focused on metaphor use in presidential rhetoric and concluded that metaphors are essential cognitive tools that help audiences grasp complex political issues by linking them to everyday experiences. Hart's analysis showed that metaphors also shape the emotional tone of speeches and frame political opponents in a negative light, thus serving both explanatory and evaluative functions. Another key contribution comes from Richardson (2007), who applied CDA to media discourse and demonstrated how linguistic choices, such as nominalization and passive voice, subtly influence the representation of political events and actors, often obscuring agency and responsibility. Richardson's work underscores the importance of critically examining media language alongside political speeches to fully understand ideological constructions. Finally, Gee (2014) proposed a discourse analysis framework emphasizing the role of context, social practices, and identity construction in political communication. His research showed that politicians' language choices do not simply reflect beliefs but actively construct social realities and group identities, shaping how audiences understand their own position in society. Gee's approach draws attention to the dynamic and performative nature of political discourse, particularly relevant in analyzing leaders like Donald Trump, whose rhetoric frequently shifts to align with audience expectations and social contexts. Together, these studies enrich the understanding of political discourse by combining linguistic, cognitive, and social perspectives on how language operates as a powerful tool in politics.

C. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design centered on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is particularly suitable for examining the intricate relationship between language, power, and ideology in political communication. CDA, as articulated by Fairclough (1989, 1995), goes beyond the mere description of language features to uncover the underlying social and political power structures that discourse both reflects and constructs. By focusing on discourse as a form of social practice, CDA allows researchers to reveal how

political speeches can perpetuate inequalities or challenge dominant ideologies. This methodological approach aligns well with the study's aim to critically analyze Donald Trump's rhetorical strategies in shaping public perceptions. The interpretive and analytical approach taken in this study involves identifying linguistic patterns that signify manipulation, ideological positioning, and persuasive tactics. Van Dijk (2001) emphasizes the importance of analyzing not only the content but also the context of political discourse, including the social, historical, and cultural conditions in which the speeches are delivered. This contextual sensitivity is vital for interpreting Trump's speeches, given their performative nature and their targeting of specific audiences with varying expectations and values. Furthermore, Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework guides the analysis by examining the text (linguistic features), the discursive practice (production and consumption of texts), and the social practice (broader social and political structures). Data collection focuses on a purposive sampling of speeches, debates, and public statements by Donald Trump that address key foreign policy issues. This thematic selection ensures that the analysis remains focused on the discursive construction of national identity and political power in areas such as immigration, international relations, and security. Coding is performed using a framework inspired by both Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (2006), which incorporates categories such as metaphor, repetition, presupposition, modality, and intertextuality. This systematic approach enables a detailed exploration of how linguistic choices function to evoke emotional responses, construct binary oppositions, and legitimize political agendas. The analysis employs thematic coding to identify dominant rhetorical strategies and ideological motifs. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis provides a flexible yet rigorous method for organizing qualitative data and uncovering patterns across texts. The study's coding process is iterative, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data while being informed by theoretical constructs from CDA. Each identified theme is then critically examined to understand its role in the broader discursive formation of political meaning, power, and identity. This layered approach to analysis ensures both depth and clarity in interpreting the complex interplay between language and ideology in Trump's speeches.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Donald Trump's political speeches revolve centrally around the slogan "Make America Great Again," which presupposes a decline in America's status during previous administrations, particularly that of Obama. This slogan not only serves as a rallying cry but also frames the narrative that America's decline is caused by external enemies and failed policies that must be reversed. In his speeches, Trump frequently uses an "us versus them" discourse, positioning foreign countries such as China, Mexico, and groups like Islamic terrorists as threats responsible for America's loss of economic and political power. This xenophobic framing reflects social identity theory, where in-group superiority is asserted by demonizing out-groups, fostering nationalistic sentiments. For example, Trump's promise to "bring back our jobs" blames foreign nations for economic hardships and casts himself as the uniquely qualified leader capable of restoring American prosperity,

appealing to emotional rather than rational reasoning, a classic demagogic strategy (Mudde, 2017). Regarding immigration, Trump consistently employs fear appeals and warnings, linking immigrants from the Middle East and Mexico to security threats and crime. His rhetoric often includes presuppositions that previous administrations allowed dangerous policies, which his administration will rectify. This is evident in statements like “those days are over,” implying past immigration policies were naïve and harmful. Such discourse aligns with the concept of securitization in political communication, where immigration is framed as an existential threat justifying extraordinary policy measures (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998). Trump’s metaphor of immigrants “pouring” into the country evokes a powerful image of uncontrollable invasion, further reinforcing public anxiety and support for strict border control, including the controversial wall and its funding. His appeal to patriotism through possessive pronouns (“our country,” “our safety”) and repetition of “protect” reinforces in-group loyalty and the notion of defending a threatened national identity. On the issue of ISIS and terrorism, Trump’s speeches emphasize a need for strong military action and critique the Obama administration’s foreign policies, which he claims led to instability in the Middle East and the rise of ISIS. His rhetoric is marked by vivid descriptions of atrocities committed by ISIS, designed to evoke emotional outrage and justify aggressive counterterrorism measures. This approach follows traditional threat construction in political rhetoric, where the demonization of a foreign enemy is used to legitimize hardline policies (van Dijk, 1998). Trump’s suggestion of creating “safe zones” for refugees in collaboration with wealthy Gulf states reflects his attempt to externalize responsibility and limit immigration while positioning the US as prioritizing national security. Throughout his speeches, Trump uses simple language, short sentences, and repetition to maximize readability and emotional impact, making his message accessible and memorable. His communication style is direct and unambiguous, which helps in rallying support among his target audience by fostering a sense of urgency and crisis that only he can resolve. This study demonstrates that Trump’s discourse strategically employs presupposition, metaphor, scapegoating, and victimization to construct a narrative of decline and renewal, supporting theories of populist rhetoric and political communication that emphasize emotional mobilization over substantive policy discussion (Moffitt, 2016).

In his speeches and interviews, Donald Trump consistently frames the Iran nuclear deal as a catastrophic failure detrimental to U.S. interests and the security of its ally, Israel. He repeatedly accuses the Obama administration of incompetence and poor negotiation, portraying the deal as a product of “very, very stupid people.” For example, during a tea party rally, Trump stated, “I have never in my life seen any transaction so incompetently negotiated as our deal with Iran,” highlighting his self-positioning as a superior dealmaker compared to previous leaders. This comparison serves to bolster his image as a strong, capable leader while undermining his predecessor’s credibility. Trump’s rhetoric frequently employs blaming and scapegoating strategies by attributing the deal’s perceived failures to Obama’s policies. He claims that Obama’s administration “gave [Iran] trillions of dollars” and allowed Iran to “take over Iraq,” framing Iran

as a growing regional threat empowered by U.S. weakness. This aligns with Trump's broader pattern of constructing an "us versus them" narrative, where external enemies, here represented by Iran, are responsible for America's loss of influence and security. His use of the phrasal verb "take over" implies occupation and control, painting Iran's influence as illegitimate and dangerous. Moreover, Trump emphasizes Iran's role as a sponsor of "radical Islam," repeatedly linking the nuclear deal to the broader issue of terrorism in the Middle East. This connection heightens the emotional appeal of his message, mobilizing fear and urgency among his audience. Trump's portrayal of Iran as an existential threat to Israel further amplifies this effect. He warns that Israel "will not exist in 25 years" under current policies, thus setting up a stark choice between his leadership and the survival of a key U.S. ally. This tactic serves to polarize listeners and strengthen his populist appeal by dramatizing the consequences of political inaction. Trump's speech style, characterized by simple language, repetition, and informal asides, mirrors oral culture patterns and sales rhetoric, which scholar George Lakoff notes helps shape unconscious receptivity. Phrases such as "many people" and "believe me," often inserted after contentious claims, work to foster perceived credibility despite logical incoherence or non-sequiturs in his discourse. For instance, Trump's rambling remarks invoking his uncle's scientific expertise alongside unrelated observations reveal a style aimed more at emotional resonance than logical consistency. In terms of nonverbal communication, Trump employs frequent hand gestures such as the "L" shape, pinching, palms-out warnings, and pointing to emphasize points and convey confidence and precision. These physical cues reinforce his verbal messages about Iran and national security, aiding in audience persuasion. Overall, Trump's discourse about the Iran nuclear deal is marked by strategies of blame, demonization, and emotional mobilization. By portraying the deal as a "dummy deal" and an "embarrassment," he delegitimizes prior U.S. foreign policy, appeals to nationalist sentiment, and justifies his promise to dismantle the agreement and impose stricter sanctions. This approach exemplifies populist political rhetoric, which prioritizes emotional impact and simple dichotomies over detailed policy debate (Moffitt, 2016; Lakoff, 2016). Trump's narrative frames Iran as an opportunistic adversary empowered by weak leadership, and he presents himself as the decisive alternative capable of restoring American strength and protecting allies.

Trump vowed that North Korea cannot develop nuclear weapons capable of hitting the United States, tweeting, "It will not happen." He also questioned whether it would be better for Japan to have nuclear weapons if North Korea possesses them, noting Japan's proximity and fear of North Korea and emphasizing that the US should protect Japan. In response to missile tests, Trump offered reassuring statements to Americans, emphasizing that recent tests were not intercontinental missiles and downplaying their threat. He repeated points to stress his position, a rhetorical strategy noted by researchers in his speeches. Trump's approach involves standing by US allies while condemning North Korea's ballistic missile tests internationally. When questioned about whether China might be testing the US, Trump responded, "We will have to see what happens," signaling readiness for any scenario. The frequent use of the pronoun

"I" underscores Trump's personal engagement in policy and strategy implementation. Throughout the interview, Trump often gave vague responses about missile tests—using phrases like "we will see what happens" and "I would rather not discuss it"—which may indicate either a lack of a clear plan or a strategic choice to withhold details. He deflected responsibility for the ongoing North Korean situation onto previous administrations, criticizing Obama, Bush, and Clinton for failing to address the issue effectively. This critique contrasts with Trump's praise for Obama's sanctions strategy against North Korea through China, revealing a contradiction: while criticizing prior policies, Trump's own approach mirrors aspects of Obama's. Trump frequently used future modality, such as "He will have a better delivery system" and "if that happens, we cannot allow it," to warn about North Korea's potential missile advancements, while reassuring the public of his intent to prevent dangerous developments.

In a press conference regarding the issue of Russia's intervention in the US elections, Donald Trump's discourse throughout the conference constructs a strategic narrative aimed at legitimizing his authority while discrediting competing voices. From the outset, Trump stresses the confidentiality and classification of the intelligence briefing he received, emphasizing the seriousness of the information and his privileged access to it. This rhetorical strategy allows him to portray himself as being at the center of critical decision-making, while simultaneously casting suspicion on those who leaked the details. By calling the leaked information "false and fake," he delegitimizes the source and positions himself as the only credible narrator. This establishes a clear boundary between trustworthy authority (himself and untrustworthy entities such as intelligence agencies or media outlets). The repeated labeling of media reports as "fake news" serves to insulate him from criticism while undermining the legitimacy of journalism and institutional checks. Trump's references to Russia and Vladimir Putin demonstrate a complex balancing act. On one hand, he acknowledges that Russia may have been behind hacking efforts; on the other hand, he quickly moves to generalize the threat, suggesting that many countries, including China, also engage in such behavior. This relativization of Russia's alleged actions dilutes their severity and reframes the situation as a broader cyber-security issue, thus deflecting attention away from the unique threat posed by Russia. Moreover, his claim that he "respected" Putin's denial serves to validate the Russian leader's credibility and signals a willingness to move toward diplomatic engagement. In doing so, Trump challenges dominant narratives in U.S. political discourse that frame Russia as a primary adversary, instead reconfiguring the geopolitical landscape to align with his own foreign policy agenda. Throughout the discourse, Trump engages in polarizing rhetoric, drawing a stark line between allies and opponents. The Democratic Party is portrayed as incompetent, especially with regard to cyber security, while the Republican National Committee is praised for its effective defense. This "us versus them" binary not only simplifies the narrative but also serves to consolidate support from his political base by fostering a shared sense of moral and strategic superiority. The media, in particular, is singled out as a hostile force, morally deficient and complicit in spreading disinformation. Trump characterizes journalists as lacking a "moral compass" and

seeking to destabilize his administration, thereby constructing them as ideological enemies rather than impartial observers. This discursive framing intensifies public distrust of the media and functions to preemptively discredit any future reports that might be damaging to his image. He narrates an almost cinematic account of being warned about surveillance in hotel rooms and claims he is always accompanied by bodyguards, presenting himself as someone who cannot be easily compromised. This defense is not simply a denial but an effort to portray himself as savvy, careful, and invulnerable. At the same time, he references his refusal to release his tax returns but frames this not as a concealment but as a consequence of being under audit. This rhetorical maneuver attempts to reframe suspicion into procedural necessity, again placing himself in the role of a law-abiding actor constrained by external systems rather than personal choices. Trump also employs discursive strategies that blur the boundaries between truth and perception. By calling some information “phony stuff” and suggesting that only “sick people” could believe it, he delegitimizes not just the content of the reports but the motives and character of those who disseminate or accept them. His use of emotionally charged language reinforces a sense of moral righteousness and persecution, painting himself as the victim of a coordinated attack by dishonest forces. This language functions not only to polarize but also to rally his supporters around a shared sense of injustice and embattlement. By framing the press as aggressors and himself as a target, Trump appeals to emotions over facts, constructing a persuasive narrative that depends on loyalty rather than evidence. Finally, Trump's comments about cybersecurity reveal a deliberate reframing of the national discourse. Rather than dwelling on the singular threat posed by Russia, he shifts the focus to America's general lack of cyber preparedness. By noting that the U.S. ranks low in terms of protection, he suggests systemic failure that predates his administration. This redirection serves a dual purpose: it diminishes the urgency of holding Russia accountable while positioning Trump as the reformer who will address longstanding institutional weaknesses. His mention of assembling “the greatest computer minds” further solidifies his image as a problem-solver and innovator, rather than a passive inheritor of crisis. This forward-looking rhetoric positions his administration as active and competent, aiming to shift the discourse from blame to action.

E. CONCLUSION

To sum up, it's plausible to state that one of the core goals of Critical Discourse Analysis in relation to political discourse is to seek out ways in which language choice is manipulated for specific political effects. It endeavors to investigate multiple sides in every political speech, be it written or spoken. It seeks to find out those strategies and ways that politicians use to manifest power and ideology in their speeches. Throughout my analysis of Trump's political speeches, He tends to use different rhetorical devices. His logo “Make America Great Again” aims at making a revolution in US international policy. It seeks to renew the immigration policy, to create new strategies in fighting terrorism, to re-negotiate Iranian nuclear deal, to thwart North Korea's nuclear capability, and to stabilize ties with Russia. All of Trump's speeches in all the above covered issues share this common feature, which is based on reproaching and blaming

Democrat's for some of the problems that have faced America. Trump always seeks to remove his responsibility; it is all the time the poor policy of the current administration of Democrats in general and Obama in particular. Trump tends to use intense rhetoric in relation to terrorism, to ISIS, to immigration, to Iran, and to North Korea; he employs more illocutionary acts of threatening, reassuring and warning. However, he tends to use less intense language towards Russia; he tends to be cooperative and non-defensive. Trump's language, choice of words, tone of voice and verbal habits, are, undoubtedly, unique in the history of American presidents. Some of Trump's speeches appear to hold the so-called non sequitur, which makes his speeches lack coherence and relevance. Trump has also been observed to digress while addressing some issues like Iranian nuclear deal; he might not be aware of his digression just as he might not be aware of his contradictions.

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