

Critical Discourse Analysis of Polarization and Political Pronouns in President Donald Trump's 2024 Victory Speech

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Abstract

This study presents a Critical Discourse Analysis of polarization and political pronoun usage in Donald Trump's 2024 victory speeches. The research was prompted by the former President's unexpected landslide victory over a sitting government, raising questions about the rhetorical strategies that contributed to such success. The data for the analysis was sourced from publicly available speeches on the internet and was selected based on instances of polarization and the use of political pronouns—core concerns within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis draws on van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach (2006), which examines the relationship between discourse, cognition, and society. The findings indicate that minimal reference was made to the opposition, a strategic omission aimed at limiting their visibility and credibility. Furthermore, frequent use of political pronouns served to construct a public persona of Donald Trump as a caring, responsible, and relatable figure—portrayed simultaneously as a father, in-law, and citizen. These linguistic strategies appear to have played a significant role in shaping public perception and, arguably, contributed to the electoral outcome.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis, polarization and political pronouns

Introduction

Language functions as a medium for expressing ideas, opinions, and emotions. It serves as a tool through which individuals argue, persuade, and challenge one another. According to Fairclough (1992), ideology refers to the signification or construction of reality that is embedded within various dimensions of meaning in discursive practices. These practices, in turn, contribute to the production, reproduction, or transformation of relations of power and domination. Discourse analysis, therefore, reveals

how ideological structures influence communication and how ideologies are enacted and sustained through both ordinary and political discourse. Scholars such as Fairclough (1992), Fowler (1991), Hall (1982), and van Dijk (1993) emphasize the inseparable link between language and ideology. Language possesses the capacity not only to influence and persuade but also to transform belief systems, even across great distances.

The United States of America, as a global superpower, plays a significant role in shaping international political dynamics. It is noteworthy that Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, who was defeated by Joe Biden, has regained public support and has been re-elected as the 47th President. His rhetorical appeal and strategic use of language appear to have played a central role in this political comeback. Consequently, it is necessary to critically examine Trump's speeches to uncover the linguistic choices and discursive strategies that contributed to his renewed popularity. These will be identified, explained, and analyzed within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be historically traced to the Frankfurt School before the Second World War (Agger, 1992; Rasmussen, 1996). However, its practical application emerged prominently in the United Kingdom and Australia toward the late 1970s. CDA has since been associated with other critical philosophical developments within the social sciences, including sociolinguistics, psychology, and sociology, which explains the multiplicity of its definitions across disciplines (Ibañez & Iñiguez, 1997; Singh, 1996; Thomas, 1993). Fairclough (2001) defines CDA as a form of critical social science that seeks to illuminate the challenges individuals face in everyday social life and how such challenges might be overcome.

CDA is particularly concerned with how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted through discourse, especially within socio-political contexts. As an interdisciplinary analytical approach, CDA critically examines the roles of authority, domination, and social inequality in discourse. While discourse analysis can be applied to a

wide range of communicative contexts, CDA specifically focuses on social problems, particularly the role of language in constructing and maintaining systems of power and domination (van Dijk, 2001). Wodak (2021) underscores that CDA is primarily concerned with both transparent and opaque structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as they are embedded in language use. As for CDA Wodak (2001) claims that critical here means an indept study/examination thus dogging up the complexities, educationist dogmatism and diachotomies being self reflexist Fairclough and Wodak (1997) enlist eight categories or principles of CDA as:

- i. CDA address social problems.
- ii. Power relations are discursive.
- iii. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
- iv. Discourse does ideological work.
- v. Discourse is historical.
- vi. The link between text and society is mediated.
- vii. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.
- viii. Discourse is a form of social action.

CDA is generally used in analyzing texts of politicians in order to reveal their political agenda Cameron, (2001).

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)

van Dijk (2006) maintains the focus of PDA is on the analysis of political discourse particularly with the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse. Thus, both Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (2006) agree that PDA is basically above the discursive condition and consequence of social and political inequality that result from political domination. It is also imperative to note that PDA is a class of genre defined by the social domains (which is politics of educational discourse, scientific discourse, legal discourse, political

discourse which encompasses government deliberation, parliamentary debates, party programs, political interviews and speeches by politicians etc. PDA apparently devices such strategies as persuasions to examine such text.

Political discourse serves as a platform for spreading ideologies, propose policies and programs of politician and political parties. This promotes active democratic participation and citizenship. Analyzing political discourse helps electorate to actively participate and make inform decision during elections. It also helps to evaluate the purposes, legitimacy and expected outcomes of various political messages.

Persuasion in Language use

Persuasion is an important device that helps politicians to achieve their goals, it helps to convince people faster than any other devices Ferarri, (2012). Lakoff (1972) defines persuasion as the moves by a particular group of people/party to change the behaviors, feelings intentions or view point of another group/party. Pishghadam and Rasouli (2011). Maintains that persuasion is a direct speech act performed by a speaker with the intention of making listener to perform an action. Thereby reshaping/changing the listeners feeling, behaviors based on his/her ideology Gass, (2018) maintains that politicians used persuasion to influence their audience and gain their full support. Persuasion and rhetorics can be used interchangeably as was the practices in ancient Greece with philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, etc.

Rhetoric: Partington (2010) claims rhetoric in the art of persuasive discourse, Fairclough (2012) on the other hand states that persuasive language is written to cajole/persuade the audience to buy a product with the believe that it is the best. van Dijk (1997) states that rhetoric is the art or study of persuasive public discoursed which employs such Linguistics features as intensifiers, adjectives, lexical items as well as non-linguistic features like metaphor, personification, repetition to make discourse more expressive, persuasive develop an attractive.

Principle of Persuasion:

Cialdini (2001) postulates six principles

i. Reciprocation Principle

This is based on the law of karma which traditionally is believed that whatever one does to others to be revisited on him thus politicians make big promises in return for the peoples but.

ii. Principle of Scarcity:

Here the politicians create the impression that he is scarce to come by (that is his likes are not many around). Therefore, he is a messiah.

iii. The Principle of authority

The ranking of the person in the society is what matters here thus out of respect for a party leader his words are taken for real and he wins the people votes.

iv. The principle of Consistency:

consistency here refer to what is most liked/prioritized or desired by the people thus a constant repetition of such promises creates a sense of commitment.

v. The principle of Consensus

this principle is based on majority carry the vote Cialdini (2001) states that consensus is a principle of human behavior whereby people tend to determine what is correct and what is not by examining the action of others, i.e, they assume that an action is correct if pother person agree with it or when they are told that many other persons are doing it. Persuaders in political discourse tend to used this principle to project their candidates as consensus candidates who have gained national acceptance.

vi. The principle of liking

Here the politicians gain peoples votes base on their affection for him because they feel he likes them too, i.e., he identifies with them.

Rhetorical/persuasive Strategies

Many linguistic devices are used in discourse to persuade or convince the audience these items are referred to as rhetorical persuasive strategies. Obeng (1997). Van Dijk (2011). Thomas et al (2004) have suggested the following persuasive strategies.

- i. **Creativity:** this helps in structuring a political discourse towards a show of truthfulness.
- ii. **Indirectness:** Van Dijk (2011) claims this is similar to politeness whereby politicians spread negative ideas about their opponents through invendos metaphors, circumlocution etc.
- iii. **Intertextuality:** Genette (1983) says it's the presence of a text in another text Fairclough (1992) claims that all texts are intertextual as every text is a constituent of another. Intertextuality is used by politicians to strengthen their speech and reinforce religious, sociocultural and historical context. (Kitawa and Ozerova (2019). Obeng (1997) claims that intertextuality increases the credibility of a text and attracts the attention of the audience to believe in the speakers words.

Choice of lexis: the use of certain words highlights the seriousness of the speaker in concerning people (Aman, 2005). Denham and Roy (2005) claim the choice of vocabulary provides valuable insight into those words which surround or support a concept,

Cohesion: this is a grammatical and lexical connection that glue the text together to facilitate meaning. Halliday and Hassan 1976) maintain cordial relationship between sentence keeping relevance and harmony in between sentences.

Van Dijk (1984) maintain that whenever there is a social struggle or competition over different aspect of life contrast comes in to play. Van Dijk (2000) maintains that repetition is a device that can be found in many discourse, it is form at the word phrasal or sentential level and it is a current phenomenon.

Modality: modal verbs are used to modify different proportion in order to create many semantic functions such as probability, ability, possibility depending on the context of situation. A speaker can employ both ‘deontic’ epistemic’ modality which means he can used obligation, permission and probability or probability is his speech to exhibit power by giving command, making true claims and announcement

References: personal pronoun play an important role in sending persuasive message by political leader. Thomas et al (2004). Says the first person pronoun ‘I’ is use in emphasizing concept and in declaring some kind of responsibility ‘we’a third person pronoun is used to show togetherness, inclusiveness or exclusiveness is exemplified through the used of ‘our’we’us’ inclusive while the pronoun ‘they’their’ them’ is exclusive. Other rhetorical devices are metaphor which is a strong persuasive device representing abstract objects as concrete intities. Personification is when non human intities are represented as human. Evidence concretise the speakers claims or statement. Rhetorical questions state the obvious thus they do not need an answer. Anology creates comparison.

Ideology in politics: from the perspective of CDA Datondji and Amousu (2019) define ideology as a mental representation of the world with implication in power relation such as those of domination and suppression ideologies are abstract mental system that Dorham (2007) sees ideology as a political term an enlist it different conception thus:

- i. A political believe system
- ii. An action oriented set of political ideas
- iii. The ideas of the ruling class.
- iv. The world view of a particular social class or social group.
- v. Political ideas that embodied or articulate class or social interest.
- vi. Ideas that for propagate false consciousness among the exploited or oppressed.
- vii. Ideas that situate the individuals within a social context and generate a sense of collective belonging.

viii. An official sanctions set of ideas used to legitimize a political system or regime.

ix. Embracing political doctrine that claim a monopoly of truth.

Empirical Studies

Scholars have conducted research on various aspects of the theory of ideology and persuasion. Ehirechi (2014), for instance, critically examined the ideological functions of modal verbs used by Nigerian politicians during electioneering campaigns. Data for the study were drawn from the political manifestos of Barrister Rotimi Akeredolu of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Dr. Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party (LP) during the 2012 gubernatorial campaign. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the analytical framework, the study revealed that modal verbs such as *will* and *shall* appeared with the highest frequency, indicating that the manifestos were heavily laden with promises and pledges. Other modals, including *can*, *must*, and *may*, were strategically used to express obligations, intentions, and to solicit support—often with persuasive or manipulative undertones. In contrast, the present study is a Critical Discourse Analysis of polarization and the use of political pronouns in Donald Trump’s 2024 victory speech. Particular attention is paid to the deployment of inclusive pronouns such as *we*, *us*, and *our*, which are employed to construct a sense of solidarity and identification with the masses, thereby fostering collective identity and reinforcing political alignment.

Rashidi and Rasti. (2012) research into the textual modes used by the west to impose its own values and ideologies in its media representations especially with the strong sanction against Iran. Data was obtained often from four news report and stories taken from foremost US online Paper. The economists express, after applying Theo Van Leeuwen’s theory, the findings show. On the other hand, this research is a critical discourse analysis of polarization and political pronouns in Donald Trump’s (2024) victory speech with clear indication of the use of such inclusive pronouns as ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’ to show identification with the masses

Methodology

This consists of how data is collected, presented and analyzed.

Data Collection: here data for this research is downloaded from the internet.

Data Presentation and Analysis: Data is presented after a careful extraction of aspects of Donald Trumps Speech that highlight polarization and Pronouns (CDA Criteria). Analysis follows simultaneously alongside the data presentation for easy understanding, then discussion follow finally.

Theoretical Framework

Various theoretical frameworks have been developed for the analysis of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), but the theoretical model adopted in this study is Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach (2006). This approach operates on two levels of discourse analysis: the macro and the micro. The macro level addresses issues of power, dominance, and inequality between social groups, while the micro level focuses on language use, discourse structure, verbal interaction, and communicative practices.

According to Van Dijk, ideological discourse is generally organized around a dichotomous strategy of *positive self-presentation* (boasting) and *negative other-presentation* (derogation). He argues that CDA should not merely examine the relationship between discourse and social structure but should also account for the intervening cognitive dimensions of language users. These include mental models, goals, and broader social representations such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms, and values. Thus, the analysis of discourse must circulate among the triadic components of society (or culture/situation), cognition, and language. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model clarifies the ideological dimension of the *us* versus *them* binary and demonstrates the discursive structures and strategies employed to exercise and sustain dominant power relations. Unlike other frameworks, Van Dijk insists that discourse structures and social structures can only be meaningfully linked through the mental representations of language users, both as individuals and as members of specific social groups. These group-based ideologies, shaped by social institutions, in turn influence the discourse produced by group members,

and such discourse is then used to maintain and reproduce social interaction and ideological alignment.

Additionally, the socio-cognitive approach aims to address problems of power abuse, domination and resistance as found in discourse branching into three categories: cognitive, social and discourse components. While the cognitive includes memory, mental (personal cognition of the setting, participants, their identities, roles and relationships action and events and social cognition (socially shared knowledge, ideologies and opinions, the social components deals with intergroup and intergroup relationships.

Van Dijk (2007) proposes the following in analyzing ideologies:

- i. Emphasize positive-things about its;
- ii. Emphasize negative things about them;
- iii. De-emphasize negative things about its;
- iv. De-emphasize positive things about them;

Other ways of emphasizing or de-emphasizing positive and negative descriptions are headlining foregrounding, Topicalization, active structures examples and illustrations contrast paragraph order, metaphors, hyperboles, irony and some other rhetorical devices can be used to emphasize positive things about us and negative things about them. De-emphasize negative things about us and negative things about them can be done with passive structures, small letter, euphemism, implicit information, back grounding, hedging, vagueness modality disclaimers, synonym, paraphrase and low-level description among Van Dijk (2015)

- i. Polarization: this concerns representation of the agents i.e the positive representation of the in-group and negative depiction of out group.
- ii. The pronouns “we (us, our) and they (them, there are regarded as political pronouns. They are used to represent the actors and their enemies.
- iii. Emphasis of positive self description and negative other descriptions.

- iv. Activities; what the in-group does and must do are represented.
- v. Norms and values; what is good or bad depending on the ideologies of the group is depicted as the justification of what is right might not be generally right in the larger society.
- vi. Interest; it refers to the discourse representation of the groups struggle or interest. While analyzing the linguistic items used as persuasive/rhetorical strategies such as creativity, modality, intertextuality, coherence indirectness, reference among others will be used. Even though these strategies have been explained in the literature review. The ideological implications behind the use of such strategies by the politicians will be revealed.

Data presentation and analysis

Polarization concerns the representation of agents. These agents are the party/group members represented positively (+ve) as an in-group that is the peoples that belong to Trumps party while a negative depiction (-ve) of the out-group represents the other side (party members of Kamala Harris) that is the opposition. Therefore, extracts of representations will be made in their original contextual mode.

1. And I want to thank Mike Johnson. I think he's doing a terrific job.
I want to also thank my beautiful Wife Melania first Lady who has
the No. 1 bwst selling book in the country.

Trumps show of gratitude to a member of his party whom he felt had worked so hard and even his gratitude to his wife whom he already refers to as beautiful 'first lady' with 'No. 1- bestselling book in the country' shows +ve positive polarization because they belong to some party with him he tries to show positive qualities about them.

2. "... I want to thank my whole family, my amazing children and
they are amazing...everybody here thinks their children are
amazing but that's a good thing when you think they are
what a help"

The amazing and emphatic statement of gratitude is surprising and he also tried to carry along other party members too that have children saying everybody would love to commend his own child this selfishly concentrating on his family and the families of his party members (this

shows emphasis about positive actions of his own children as well as other people's children which has yielded positive fruit of success.

3. My father in-law Victor is tremendous. And we miss very much, Melania's mother Amalija. We miss Amalija don't we she was a great woman"

He doesn't leave out the deceased. Say his father in-law Victor was tremendous is positive commendation. His statement about 'missing' his mother in-law and restatement of missing her goes to show the respect he has for his wife's parents even for the sake of making an impact on the minds of peoples they will now see him as somebody with great feelings and regard for the deceased in-laws even though they're no more, these are all positive (+in-group) affair. He claims Melania's mother was good in and out in fact she was a great woman.

4. "I want to be the first to congratulate our great now, I can say vice President-elect of the United States and his absolutely remarkable and beautiful wife, "Usha Vance." This is a very powerful statement because he has intelligently announced whom amongst his party 'big wigs' he is going to elect as Vice President from the wife of course everyone knows whom the husband is he refers to the Vice President elect as great (+ve) absolutely remarkable and beautiful wife...." The three words here absolutely to show extremely remarkable (worth being commended, and commendable and beautiful are all +ve in-group affair showing appreciation for their loyalty and tireless hardwork, support throughout the campaign.

5. "Everybody up here is great. Everybody up here is very special"

The lexical items great and special makes his supporters to have a sense of belonging—they are referred to as great and very special thus showing them that they are regarded as executive party members/supporter this is also +ve in-group affair.

6. "Oh let me tell you, we have a new star. A star is born, Elon."

He has turned the Victory speech into a highly personalized conversation where he does a show off of knowing everybody by name and the various individual contributions they made. Elon in the quotation above refers to

Elon Musk regarded as the worlds richest man hence he refers to him as not just a star but ‘a star in born showing and implying that he was the backbone of most of the party’s financial expenditure dining the campaign. He appreciates the support of such a revered and important personality in the society this is still +ve and in-group.

7. “This campaign has been so historic in so many ways. We’ve built the biggest the broadest the most unified coalition”

Trumps boastfully tegs their party campaign as ‘historic’ because it is surprising for someone that was ousted from office as the 45th President to be reelected back as the 47th President. Therefore, it is not surprising that he used such lexical items as built, biggest, and broadest unified and coalition. This explains it all in nut shell as there was no breakthrough by the opposition through the ranks of his party supporters they got fused together and remained glued till the end of this is also +ve and in-group (emphasizing positive things about its. The polarization is more pronounced as not too much representation is highlight.

8. “... I’ve said go into the enemy camp” ‘Enemy camp’ here is an extreme negative –ve out-group, by reference to the opposition as ‘enemy’ he de-emphasis positive things about them.

9. “They’ve never seen anything like it is all of American history”. They’ve never seen it, young and old men and women, rural and urban...” they’ve never seen anything... is repeated twice thus emphasizing negative things about ‘them’ and impliedly showing they have never experienced an overall responsive and supportive crowd. This to de-emphases positive things about ‘them’ hence it is a –ve out-group characteristic. The lexical items history, young, old rural and urban further clarifies the polarity.

10. Political Pronouns: these are pronouns used specifically by politicians to represent their own party supportets as actors e.g ‘we’ (us, our) while ‘they’ ‘them’, their, is a detrimental way of referring to the opposition as ‘enemies’ thus de-emphasizing positive things.

11. “.... It’s going to reach a new level of importance because we’ve going to help our country heal-help our country heal”

We’re going to help our country heal ‘we’ indicates a combined effort so it’s not just the president that will be involved but the generality of

Americans is going to help 'our' is possessive it shows that the country (America) is in a bad state of health their combined effort is needed in order to get the country back on its feet.

12. "we made history for a reason tonight and the reason is going to be just that we overcame obstacles that nobody thought possible..."

'We' refers to actors thus it is positive because it shows achievement on the side of his party faithful as well as "...Overcame obstacles" implied topicalization of an important active structure i.e overcoming obstacles (the action of the opposition contesting against them at all) is seen as they emphasizing negative things about them.

13. "But it's a political victory that our country has never seen before, nothing like this"

The landslide victory is what is still being referred to with emphasis they emphasizing negative things about 'us 'our' country' above indicates that the country belongs to all of them. Thus its positive.

14. we're going to make you very proud of your vote" again 'we' refers to party/members executive.

While 'you' refers to the voters (Americans) making them proud is living up to the promises that have been made so this is emphasis of positive self description thus emphasizing positive things about its.

15. "... we're going to turn our country around, make it something very special, 'we' is third person plural pronoun with the speaker inclusive 'our' is possessive showing that the country does not voting to him alone but it belongs to all of them. Thus creating a sense of belonging in the minds of the people thus emphasizing positive things about its.

16. "we have to protect our geniuses. We don't have that many of them. We have to protect our super geniuses.

The task of securing such few gifted souls like Elon Musk is a task not just for one person but the whole nation as not too many of such people are around. The party members remain the actors thus emphasizing positive descriptions.

17. “.... We want great education; we want a strong and powerful military....” Here education is presented positively, the military is necessary to be strong while de-emphasizing idea of going to war its necessary to have a military for security purposes, thus de-emphasizing the negative aspect of war. (de-emphasis negative things about its) ‘they’ ‘them’ ‘their’ are third person pronouns used in reference to the enemy which is very sparing.

a. ‘They’ve never seen anything like it in all of American history’ ‘

‘they’ve above is a third person pronoun used to refer to the opposition (enemies) another shock at the Land-slide victory.

b. They’re never seen it, young and old, men and women rural and urban....” They here refer to the third party (the opposition) to justify and buttress the stated fact, thus represents the enemies tracing the victory down history here ‘whether young or old, rural or urban... no where was it ever recorded thus Trump emphasizes the negative things about them.

c. “They said, he will start a war. I am not going to start a war. I am going to stop wars”

‘They’ above is referring to the opposition de-emphasizing negative things about its and emphasizing positive things about us. ‘war’ has been topicalised and there is a strong statement not to promote or start a war in any way thus endearing himself to the generality of people and winning over supporters of the opposition as war has always been seen as detrimental to human lives and the opposition backed up and promoted wars during their years in office.

Conclusion

Donald Trump strategically focused on highlighting the achievements of his political party, aligning himself with the electorate by foregrounding issues of shared priority. His speech was characterized by the use of short, impactful statements that emphasized the positive accomplishments of his party members. Notably, he employed inclusive pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘us’, and ‘our’ to underscore a strong sense of unity and collective identity with his supporters and party affiliates. In contrast, non-inclusive pronouns such as ‘they’, ‘them’, and ‘their’ were used sparingly and primarily to

refer to the opposition, thereby minimizing their relevance and visibility within the discourse.

Trump also demonstrated a calculated effort to project humility and emotional intelligence by expressing appreciation for his major supporters and paying tribute to his late in-laws. This strategy countered public perceptions of him as ill-mannered or lacking decorum, revealing a more humanized and respectful persona. He further reinforced this image by calling out party members by name, acknowledging his own family as well as the families of his political allies, thereby promoting a message of equality and shared purpose. Additionally, Trump issued categorical statements against war promotion or support, using these declarations to criticize the opposition implicitly. His deliberate avoidance of naming or extensively discussing the opposing party, except through the occasional third-person references, helped to diminish their credibility and reinforce the ideological divide. This rhetorical strategy effectively elevated the identity and perceived value of his own group while delegitimizing the opposition through discursive exclusion.

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