

Polarization in Discourse: A Socio-Cognitive Discourse Analysis of Trump’s Presidential Bid Announcement Speech for 2024 Elections

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Abstract

The current study emphasizes the importance of understanding political discourse as an effective means for shaping social cognition and justifying political authority. It deals with how Trump uses the ideological positioning of “Us versus Them” in the 2022 Presidential Bid Speech to create political polarization and legitimize his 2024 campaign. Using Van Dijk’s Socio-cognitive Approach and the Ideological Square Model (1998, 2000a) for data analysis, the study reveals how Trump promotes positive portrayal of Republicans as patriotic Americans while negatively depicting Democrats, particularly, Biden and his administration. Such polarization is accomplished using macro propositional and super-structural strategies, such as national self-glorification, blames, comparisons, victimization, and hyperbole, which is maintained by microstructural elements such as strategic use of language: pronouns, modal verbs, repetition, and crisis-driven metaphors. The findings reveal that such discursive patterns use cognitive representations of both inclusion and exclusion to shape public perception and reinforce ideological control.

Keywords: Trump’s Speech, Polarization, Us vs. Them, Power, Covert Ideologies, Social Cognition

Introduction

Discourse is seen as “language in use,” or language used in actual social situations as opposed to an abstract system (Brown & Yule, 1983; Cook, 1989, as cited in Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015). It covers both written and oral

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communication which includes lexical and grammatical choices as well as the institutional contexts, power dynamics, and social norms that both influence and are influenced by language practices. According to this viewpoint, language is never neutral; rather, it is a site of negotiation for meanings, identities, and ideologies and is ingrained in social systems. Van Dijk (2000) argues that the foundation of power is exclusive access to important social resources including money, jobs, status, and, most importantly, control over public opinion. Those in position of power, who hold control of the public discourse, can reproduce social inequality by influencing the knowledge, views, and beliefs of others using discourse as a medium.

Power in discourse refers to the ability of individuals and organizations to influence discourse, establish opinions, and regulate the dissemination of information. On the other hand, ideology is the set of common values and beliefs that structure how groups are represented in society (Van Dijk, 1998). Language is used to enact, propagate, and legitimize ideologies; they are not only abstract mental constructions. Thus, discourse analysis becomes crucial in understanding the creation, development, and transformation of ideologies over time. This connection is especially noticeable in political settings. Ideologies are expressed, defended, and contested in politics, which is essentially a discursive space. Van Dijk (2006) asserts that political discourse enacts and reproduces political cognition, practices, entities, and systems, all of which are defined by ideologies. Moreover, Chilton (2004) also underscores how politicians strategically use discourse to advance ideological narratives, frequently using polarization to establish in-groups and out-groups. Political actors' contrast between 'Us' and 'Them' using linguistic techniques, giving the former positive attributes and the latter negative ones.

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) is a crucial method of analysis, especially, in the political discourse. CDA studies how language both reflects and reproduces underlying structures of power, control, discrimination, and domination (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). CDA places texts in larger sociopolitical contexts rather than seeing them as discrete linguistic constructs. According to Van Dijk (2000), CDA looks at how discourse in certain social and political contexts either legitimizes or opposes the misuse of social authority and injustice. The fundamental objective of CDA is to highlight the complex connections between discourse and social power by examining the ways in which dominant groups utilize language to uphold or justify their dominance. (Van Dijk, 2013) Focusing on mental models and social cognition is a fundamental component of Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive method, which

contends that discourse shapes audiences' interpretations of events and internalization of ideologies, particularly in situations where there are limited alternatives.

To reveal the deeply ingrained ideologies in political discourse, a significant number of studies have used CDA frameworks throughout the past few decades. Such as Ali et al. (2026) adopts a mixed-method approach and Van Dijk's Ideological Square Model to analyze Imran Khan's speech at the 74th session of the UN General Assembly. Their findings show that actor description (42%), authority (27%), and burden (18%) are the most common discursive techniques, and that both positive self-representation and negative other-representation are strategically used. In the same way, Alharahsheh (2025) uses Van Dijk's Ideological Square combined with Wodak and Reisigl's Discourse-Historical Approach (henceforth, DHA) to analyze speeches made by Muammar al-Qaddafi, Hosni Mubarak, and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali during the Arab Spring. Through topics of reform, sacrifice, and nationalistic rhetoric, these politicians have portrayed themselves favorably while demeaning demonstrators and foreign actors.

Additionally, the gendered aspects of political persuasion are also addressed. Othman and Salih (2024) compares the speeches of male and female politicians, emphasizing the disparities in their ideological stances and persuasive strategies through Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (2005). Using the Ideological Square Model, Mahfoud and Khaldouli (2023) examine Joe Biden's initial speech on the conflict in Ukraine in the United States, showing how democratic principles have been used to support sanctions against Russia. The "Us vs. Them" divide is created around American principles and political radicalism, according to Hamed's (2022) comparative CDA of Biden's Inaugural and First State of the Union (SoU) speeches. Beyond the politics of the United States, Nelson Mandela's speeches are critically analyzed using Positive Discourse Analysis by Khurshid and Janjua (2022), which demonstrates how inclusive pronouns and constructive word choices promotes nation-building and restoration. Moreover, Tariq et al. (2020) analyze Imran Khan's UNGA address applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model to highlight the ways in which textual, discursive, and sociocultural practices interact to create his image as a selfless leader. In a similar way, Faiz et al. (2020) also use Fairclough's 3D approach to analyze a Donald Trump address at the Israel Museum, uncovering discursive techniques that presented him as a peacemaker. In contrast, Nagi's (2019) study explores Theresa May's Brexit speeches using Wodak's DHA, showing how

different framing and argumentation reflected shifting political goals. Furthermore, by applying Wodak's DHA to Bernard Lewis's essay "The Roots of Muslim Rage," Ali and Soomro (2020) demonstrate how historical and ideological settings influence orientalist discourse.

After conducting a literature review, it is found that these studies show how effective CDA frameworks are in revealing ideological orientation, additional study is nonetheless necessary to understand how modern political figures create polarization in shifting political settings. The announcement speech of Donald Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, in particular, makes a compelling argument for analysis. The address, which was given in 2022, when Trump was out of office and opposing the Biden administration, reflects a complex discursive setting. This speech is the result of political contestation and an attempt at re-legitimation, in contrast to inauguration or presidential addresses that are given from a position of institutional authority.

While Wodak's DHA and Fairclough's 3D Model offer thorough frameworks for examining the interaction of text, discourse practice, and sociocultural context, Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach has distinct benefits in investigating the cognitive processes that underlie ideological polarization. A systematic study of the discursive construction of 'Us' and 'Them' is made possible by his Ideological Square Model, which emphasizes positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Additionally, the socio-cognitive dimension enables a thorough analysis of the ways in which rhetorical methods shape and modify shared social cognitions and mental models.

The current study argues that Trump discursively presents himself as a patriotic and compassionate leader dedicated to national restoration when he announces his 2024 presidential campaign, while portraying members of the outgroup, especially Biden and his administration, as inefficient and a threat to American interests. Through polarization tactics, such as discursive strategies, linguistic choices, and selective attention to detail, Trump upholds the "Us versus Them" division by highlighting his own accomplishments and downplaying those of his rivals. This study aims to reveal the hidden ideologies in Trump's spoken discourse and show how cognitive representations of inclusion and exclusion are intentionally produced by using Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach and the Ideological Square Model. By emphasizing the cognitive processes that govern discourse production and comprehension, the

study adds to the expanding body of CDA research. It highlights how critical it is to understand how political rhetoric serves as a tool for influencing social cognition and establishing the legitimacy of particular political objectives, in addition to serving as persuasive language. This study also emphasizes how political discourse is fundamentally discursive and how language plays a critical role in establishing, preserving, and challenging ideological dominance.

Methodology

The present research uses a descriptive qualitative research design paired with a deductive approach to critically evaluate Donald Trump's speech announcing his 2024 Presidential bid through a combination of CDA's Socio-cognitive Model and Ideological Square Theory, proposed by Van Dijk. The data for analysis consists of a speech that is sixty-four minutes and thirty-one seconds long. A total of 8820 words is included in the speech transcript. To uncover the hidden ideology of Trump's political rhetoric, stress how political discourse is fundamentally discursive, and how language plays a critical role in establishing, preserving, and challenging ideological dominance, the data analysis will be focused on particular usage of linguistic and discursive techniques.

Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model of CDA (1993; 2001; 2005) is comprised of three elements: society, discourse, and cognition. The socio-cognitive viewpoint of CDA holds that cognition acts as a mediator in the relationship between discourse structures and society. Power, control, and inequality amongst social groups are challenges at the macro level of society, which consists of local interlocutors and global societal institutions. His theory defines social power as the capacity to affect both individual and collective attitudes and actions. Discourse at the micro level refers to the language used in both written and spoken communications that reflects beliefs. The usage of pronouns is linked to polarization, as members of the in-group refer to themselves as 'Us' (We) and view members of the out-group as 'Them' (They), discursively creating positive impressions of themselves and negative representations of others. To determine the relationships between in-groups and out-groups, as well as their interests and attitudes, Van Dijk identified a few ideological discursive structures.

Van Dijk (2000a) proposes the following discursive strategies for ideological assessment: national self-glorification, negative other presentation, positive self-

presentation, populism, presupposition, actor description, authority, disclaimers, example/illustration, burden, categorization, comparison, hyperbole, implication, irony, lexicalization, metaphor, norm expression, number game, euphemism, evidentiality, polarization, vagueness, counterfactuals, generalization, and victimization. The interplay between ideology, cognition, and discourse, that strategically build the “Us Versus Them” contrast, results in an Ideological Square presented by Van Dijk (1998, 2000a), with four major principles of analysis as follows: a. Express/emphasize favorable information about ‘Us,’ b. Express/emphasize unfavorable information about ‘Them,’ c. Suppress/minimize favorable information about ‘Them,’ and d. Suppress/minimize unfavorable information about ‘Us.’

Van Dijk (2006) states that polarization in discourse can be accomplished either “explicitly by propositional means (topics, meanings)” or “implicitly through discursive tactics” that stress “Our Good and Their Bad actions” while suppressing “Our Bad and Their Good actions.” Therefore, the data is analyzed at three levels: macro propositional, super-structural, and microstructural.

- At the macro propositional level, the key topics and topical participants in Trump’s address are identified.
- The super-structural level illustrates Van Dijk’s Ideological Square Theory’s four moves along with his postulated micro-discursive tactics (or structures), which include national self-glorification, victimization, polarization, blames, comparisons, and hyperbole.
- The microstructural level includes lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical aspects (primarily pronouns, modal verbs, repetition, and metaphors), as well as how they contribute to the overarching covert ideology of the discourse.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Given its global prominence, the politics of the United States commands great interest around the world. Biden, a Democrat, won against Trump, a Republican, in the 2020 US presidential election. However, Trump refused to recognize the election results, accusing voting fraud and putting the vote-counting process into question. Despite his frequent speeches asserting widespread fraud, Trump was unable to alter the outcome. Following midterm losses, it became clear that Joe Biden and his administration represented powerful political opposition. On November 15, 2022, at his Mar-a-Lago estate, Trump announced his campaign for the 2024 presidential

election. The study critically evaluates Trump's announcement speech, employing Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive and Ideological Square Theory of CDA.

The Macro Propositional Level

Topics and topical participants are evaluated at the macro propositional level. Polarization toward a favorable assessment of 'Us' and a negative assessment of 'Them' is revealed by topic analysis. (Van Dijk, 1997). Economic performance, energy independence, border security, foreign policy, national decline, and the restoration of greatness are the main macro-propositional subjects of the speech. Declaring that America was a "great and glorious nation" earlier (during Trump administration) but that "we are a nation in decline" now, Trump (2022) points out his accomplishments in trade, tax cuts, deregulation, and global power. He defines national decline as the primary issue and offers himself as a fix by drawing a comparison between former prosperity under his rule and the current decline under Joe Biden.

All individuals or actors who participate in the political process, such as the general public and elite organizations, are considered topical participants (Van Dijk, 1997). Trump highlights that "Two years ago...Our nation was at the pinnacle of power...towering above all rivals, vanquishing all enemies and striding into the future...so strong" (2022). The opposition Biden, his party members, immigrants, and rival countries like China are represented as Them/They, while Trump, his Republican Administration, and the general public are represented as Us/We. He paints a strong and successful picture of the US throughout his reign. He points out that "two years ago, we were a great nation, and soon, we will be a great nation again" (2022), citing the highest rate of inflation in fifty years as an example. He subtly encourages voters to back him in the upcoming elections, claiming that only he can "make America great again." He seeks to highlight his administration's accomplishments and present himself as a capable leader who guided the country through a time of strength and prosperity. It serves to appeal to the audience's beliefs and sense of patriotism while improving his image and legitimacy.

The speech is undoubtedly polarizing on a macro-propositional level, emphasizing a positive portrayal of 'Us' and a negative representation of 'Them.' Trump presents himself as an effective and strong president by focusing on his achievements during his rule. In contrast to the portrayal of the Biden administration, immigrants, and other countries as 'Them,' he calls the American people and his administration 'Us,'

implying a sense of unity and shared identity. By portraying Trump and his supporters as the rightful defenders of American interests against internal and external threats, this contrast seeks to cultivate division and rivalry. Through his word choices, topic selection and narrative-building techniques, he promises a return to glory under his authority while focusing on the negative aspects and issues of the last two years (such as inflation and a lack of energy independence) in an effort to bring the people together and create a sense of unity.

The Super-Structural Level

At the super-structural level, Van Dijk (1997) suggests micro-discursive tactics (or structures) that underline the four steps within his Ideological Square. Such tactics include national self-glorification, polarization, hyperbole, victimization, comparisons, and blames. The Ideological Square Model's main claim is that politicians frequently highlight facts that are advantageous to 'Us' and detrimental to 'Them.' According to this argument, politicians purposefully develop narratives using a variety of linguistic and rhetorical strategies that demonize opposing groups or ideologies while favoring their own. The Ideological Square offers a framework for comprehending how language is employed in society to create and uphold ideological borders and power structures.

❖ Express/emphasize favorable information about 'Us'

Trump (2022) emphasizes the importance of his leadership throughout his speech by utilizing a number of rhetorical elements and productive self-representation techniques. In the beginning of the speech, he declares his presidency as a "golden age" of United States. He presents Republicans as the emblem of national strength while inspiring patriotism and solidarity through the use of positively charged terms like "power," "prosperity," "prestige," "confident," and "strong," as well as the inclusive phrase "Our nation." He goes on to say, "There was never a time like this," and that together, we developed the world's largest economy ever. The word "together" emphasizes shared responsibility and accomplishment.

Additionally, Trump portrays himself as an outsider and a representative of the public, claiming to be "your voice" and "not a politician." In order to make sure that other nations no longer exploit US, he points to achievements like renegotiating trade agreements like the USMCA and establishing benefacting deals with China. He presents himself as a decisive leader who took difficult choices on trade, border security, and the COVID-19, placing himself in opposition to the Washington elite

who allegedly want to silence him. He urges his followers to reject the left and accept his election endorsements as evidence of public trust, framing his agenda as a return to “national greatness and glory.”

- **National Self-Glorification**

Trump's (2022) political discourse demonstrates that he goes further than simply applauding the in-group, and focuses more on elevating himself in the eyes of the public. He asserts that “the United States stood ready for its golden age when I left the office two years ago,” implying that he was the one who took the country to that stage of prosperity and strength. He claims that he initiated decisive action to protect human lives and the US economy, thus emphasizing his personal agency. He further asserts that by October, America had seen the fastest recovery in the economy on record. This framing places him at the center of the worldwide coronavirus crisis, where he is tasked with protecting American people and the economy. He frequently uses ‘I’ instead of ‘we,’ which supports a personalized leadership approach and a willingness to take full credit for his achievements. Additionally, Trump uses direct comparisons with past presidents to improve his image, saying, “Before I came along, no president had ever sought or received \$1 for our country from China, and we were getting hundreds of billions of dollars” (2022). He presents himself as a highly innovative individual, better than his predecessors, and devoted to American interests by claiming to be the first to negotiate financial rewards from China. Trump creates a narrative in which his personal leadership is inextricably linked to national accomplishment through assertions of economic recovery, renegotiated trade deals, and successful international relations.

- **Polarization**

As a political tool, polarization entails presenting problems and opponents in manners that accentuate differences and deepen divisions. Trump (2022) presents his administration's accomplishments as remarkable and distinctive, arguing that it is far superior to the “incoming administration.” He compares his strong leadership in the handling of the coronavirus to what he describes as a government that intended to “sit back and watch,” implying incompetence and leadership failure. By highlighting economic growth and productive trade talks with China, he implies that his policies were better than others', creating a narrative of competitiveness and hostility between administrations. By portraying his leadership as the sole practical pathway to national prosperity, this favorable self-representation reinforces political

polarization especially in comparison with the alleged shortcomings of his successors.

Trump further creates a polarization narrative by explicitly labelling political opponents as negative. When he (2022) says, we will triumph over the “radical left Democrats” that are seeking to destroy our country from inside, he is presenting Democrats as extremists and internal enemies. Similarly, by portraying Joe Biden as the embodiment of “Washington corruption” and “left-wing failure”, he confines his opponent to a symbol of systemic dysfunction. Biden’s leadership is represented as unacceptable and destructive by remarks such as, we cannot afford four more years of Biden administration and that I will keep fighting to the end. Trump promises to reduce reliance on China and revive local manufacturing while criticizing the Green New Deal, the rate of inflation, and rising oil prices, calling it “a socialist disaster.” He presents his plan of action as a necessary reversal of destructive actions by drawing a stark contrast between his vision and the Biden administration’s objectives. Thus, reinforcing and elevating the “Us versus Them” political dynamic.

- **Hyperbole**

Hyperbole (exaggerated expressions) is a commonly used feature of Trump’s speeches. He exaggerates the distinctiveness and historical significance of his political movement by describing it as “unlike anything that has ever existed” and adding that “nothing like it has ever existed, and it is possible that nothing like it ever will.” In the same way, he asserts that we have developed the “greatest economy” in the world’s history, an assertion that puts the economic performance of his government above all others. He overstates his personal role in dealing with the pandemic, claiming that he alone took decisive action and rescued lives and the US economy when the virus reached the United States, reducing complex and multi-actor process to an individual accomplishment.

Trump exaggerates the success of his immigration and economic measures by asserting that the inflation rate was stabilized and that the southern border was also secured. His assertion that no president had ever asked for or received \$1 for our nation from China prior to my presidency and that we were receiving hundreds of billions of dollars, makes his strategy appear unique and extraordinarily effective, while his assertion that China was reeling back for the first time in history emphasizes the impact of his policies on China. These exaggerated claims serve to highlight achievements and support a tale of unparalleled leadership.

- **Victimization**

By juxtaposing the criticism of his government with his own positive representation of himself as a strong leader unfairly targeted by opponents who called him a “warmonger,” Trump (2022) creates a victimization narrative. He is seeking sympathy from the audience while highlighting his resilience and commitment by portraying himself as the victim of unfair charges. He positions himself as a president dedicated to diplomacy and peace rather than needless military intervention by characterizing going “decades without initiating a war” as a significant achievement. He skillfully uses the account of his sufferings and resilience to win over the audience’s compassion and support while solidifying his reputation as a leader who is steadfast in his resolve to protect the nation’s interests without needless military action.

- ❖ **Express/emphasize unfavorable information about ‘Them’**

Trump’s (2022) spoken discourse contains comparisons and negative depictions of other people. This type of strategy is used to draw attention to the bad qualities and actions of others in order to achieve crucial goals and interests (Van Dijk, 1995). Trump blames Biden of deliberately harming the nation, saying that Biden has intentionally given up on our energy independence and that US has been harmed, humiliated, and disgraced for everyone to see. He portrays the ruling officials as “radical left lunatics” who have brought America to its knees, accusing Biden and the “radical left” of being responsible for border instability, high gas costs and inflation. Trump adds to the negative portrayal of his political opponents in order to advance his own agenda by slamming Biden’s emphasis on environmental initiatives, such as the Green New Deal, more than nuclear weapons threats and calling him the epitome of “left-wing failure and Washington corruption.”

- **Comparisons**

Trump (2022) frequently makes use of comparisons to underline his administration’s apparent superiority over other governments, particularly Joe Biden’s. He compares his own administration, which he presents as a time of resilience, progress, and unity by means of economic success, with what he calls the country’s “downturn and failure” under Biden. He claims that his government departed from the set precedent and built the largest economy in the world’s history, citing “decades of globalist sellouts and one-sided trade deals.” He develops an argument that his measures were particularly successful in fostering growth,

managing the global epidemic, and guaranteeing swift economic recovery by contrasting the state of the economy before and after his presidency.

Trump also draws contrasts between his foreign policy and leadership and that of past administrations. He claims that gaining American energy independence is the fulfilment of an unattainable goal, implying that prior administrations were unable to reach this degree of autonomy and blaming Biden's administration of willfully giving up this accomplishment. In contrast to Biden's apparently weaker foreign policy, he claims that during his presidency, countries like North Korea, China, Russia, and Iran "respected" our nation and were kept "in control." He also presents the killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the fall of the ISIS caliphate as achievements that no previous president has been able to match.

He further contrasts the political, economic, and border records of his predecessor with his own in domestic and electoral affairs. "America's borders have been erased by Joe Biden," he declares, portraying his own administration as dedicated to border security while blaming Biden's policies for record-high petrol costs and inflation "the highest in more than 50 years." He calls the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan a "tragedy" that would not have happened under his leadership and highlights his efforts to construct the border wall. "In 2020, I received the largest number of votes of any sitting president in history by a lot," he says, emphasizing his electoral strength. He also vows that "we'll repeat the process this time with even more votes," further solidifying his reputation as a strong and popular political figure.

- **Blames**

In an effort to support his political narrative, Trump places blame on both domestic and foreign groups. Claiming that no other president had amassed as much as he did in taxes and tariffs from China, he accuses China of subtly meddling in the 2020 election, saying that "many people think that because of this, China played a very active role in the 2020 election" (2022). He diverts attention away from local problems and presents himself as a victim of outside influence by implying that his strong economic stance prompted international meddling. While pointing out that the success rate of his endorsement is "232 wins and only 22 losses," he accuses the media of biased reporting, saying, "That's not something you hear in the media." He subtly brings about the concept of "fake news media" to critique coverage that he says favors political "others." He supports his broader argument of deterioration under his successor by accusing the Joe Biden administration of border

mismanagement, inadequate national security, and foreign policy shortcomings toward the end of his address.

❖ **Suppress/minimize favorable information about ‘Them’**

The introductory speech of Trump to announce Presidential bid was delivered after Biden completed his two years in the office. In a news report, Perry (2022) highlighted twenty-three of Joe Biden's most notable achievements throughout his presidency. There have been some notable achievements throughout the first two years of the Biden administration. The adoption of a \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure program, which intends to improve the country's highways, bridges, internet services, and transportation networks, is one of the country's noteworthy achievements. Over five hundred million COVID-19 vaccinations were distributed through the American Rescue Plan. A large part of the initiatives Biden's administration implemented to lower gun violence and enhance background checks. They not only put an end to the protracted war in Afghanistan, but they also made large investments to fight climate change. Other accomplishments include lowering child poverty, limiting the cost of senior prescription medications, and developing international ties. Along with prioritizing jobs, healthcare, and environmental policies, his government also amended the Violence Against Women Act and re-entered the Paris Agreement. Trump deliberately withheld any positive information about 'them' (Biden administration), intentionally disregarding and overlooking their achievements in an attempt to prevent voters from considering voting for the Biden administration.

❖ **Suppress/minimize unfavorable information about ‘Us’**

Haass (2021) assesses Donald Trump's administration as both historically significant and intensely controversial in his article "Donald Trump's Costly Legacy." Haass acknowledges significant domestic and international accomplishments like tax cuts and trade agreements, but contends that these are outweighed by significant failures, such as attempts to sabotage the 2020 election results leading up to the events of January 6, 2021; an uneven response to the COVID-19 pandemic that caused significant economic damage and fatalities; and a foreign policy characterized by strained alliances and a perceived ease with authoritarian regimes that damaged America's standing globally. He arrives at the conclusion that Trump's legacy is a sharply divided country with less foreign influence. In alignment with this controversial legacy, Trump strategically uses both favorable self-representation and unfavorable other-representation in his speech, highlighting his

accomplishments, downplaying the shortcomings of his administration, and drawing attention to Biden's alleged shortcomings. Overall, the ideological square reveals his attempt to establish himself as the better qualified presidential contender.

The Microstructural Level

The microstructural level includes lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical aspects (primarily pronouns, modal verbs, repetition, and metaphors), as well as how they contribute to the overarching covert ideology of the discourse.

❖ Lexicon

The vocabulary of a language or subject of study is referred to as its lexicon. Word choice is crucial in political speeches because it shapes the narrative and influences the audience's perception about specific situations or occurrences. The expressions like, prosperity, confident, towering above all rivals, defeating all foes, prestige, pinnacle of power, strong, and extraordinary success rate, incredible movement are some of the positively-charged words used in this speech to characterize America during Trump presidency. The word "prosperity" suggests that the nation's economy grew and prospered under Trump's command. The United States people and leadership are positively described by adjectives like "strong" and "confident." The word "prestige" denotes a high level of value and admiration on a global level. The expressions such as, "towering above all rivals" and "vanquishing all enemies" emphasize the superiority and strength of the United States over other nations. The expression "pinnacle of power" implies that America's stature and strength on the world stage peaked under Trump's administration. The phrase "unprecedented success rate" suggests that Trump's achievements throughout his presidency were extraordinary and unmatched. The phrase "incredible movement" conveys a sense of enthusiasm and success, implying that America was a part of something unique under Trump's administration.

In the speech, terms such as embarrassed, weakened, humiliated, decline, pain, anxiety, hardship, despair, and cesspools of violent crimes" are used to represent America under Biden administration. The expression "cesspools of violent crimes" paints a terrible picture of the US, which is known for its high crime rate and turmoil. The adjectives "embarrassed" and "humiliated" imply that America is no longer regarded with respect abroad or is perceived as being weak. The words

“weakened” and “decline” suggest that people no longer think that America is as strong or prosperous as it formerly was. Words like “pain,” “hardship,” “anxiety,” and “despair” elicit emotions of agony and discomfort, suggesting that the Biden administration is causing a number of difficulties for the common people. It shows how specific narratives are supported in political speech by carefully selected words and phrases rather than by coincidence.

❖ Syntax

The speech conveys ideas and information in an array of ways by using a range of sentence forms, pronouns, and modal verbs. Declarative statements like “The United States stood ready for its golden age” and “Under our leadership, we were a great and glorious nation” are used to convey facts or make explicit claims (Trump, 2022). Imperative statements, like “America’s comeback starts right now” and “Look at what’s happening today,” are used to guide or educate the audience. “How about that?” and “Are you getting ready?” are examples of rhetorical questions he used to draw in the audience and put stress upon his point. Exclamatory phrases like “Never been anything like it!” and “How sad.” are used to convey strong emotions like surprise, awe, or enthusiasm. Narrative sentences, for instance, “when the virus hit our shores, I took decisive action...America was roaring back...,” are used to provide a thorough timeline of past events and experiences. He uses expository language like “Inflation was nonexistent, our southern border was by far the strongest ever” along with a variety of other complex, compound, and compound complex sentences to communicate information in a clear and thorough manner.

❖ Pronouns

Pronouns serve as strong ideological devices that create division, unity, and identities in the speech. Van Dijk (2005) maintains that in an attempt to create a sense of collective identity, speakers show ‘Us’ in a positive light while presenting “Them” negatively. Trump (2022) regularly emphasizes his leadership while relating to the audience by using the first-person singular (I) and plural pronouns such as, ‘We, Us, They, and Them’. He uses the pronoun “we” to denote collective accomplishment, for example, when he says, “There’s never been anything to compete with what we have all done.” However, he also emphasizes personal agency in the statement, “Two years ago when I left office, the United States stood ready for its golden age,” where the pronoun “I” highlights his crucial part in the prosperity and stability of the country. With this intended transition between “I” and “we,”

Trump positions himself both as the driving force behind achievements and the embodiment of the nation's shared resolve.

Moreover, the use of third-person pronouns creates resistance and political distance. Trump says, "All of the incoming administration and all they had to do was just sit back and watch," referring to the pandemic. The pronoun "they" separates Biden's administration from his own and suggests passiveness of the opposition. Similar to that, the difference between "I" and "our" in "No president had ever sought or received \$1 for our country from China until I came along" supports his personal initiative to benefit the country. With statements like "I am your voice," "our nation," and "our country," he strengthens in-group identity while bringing his supporters together against a perceived enemy as he comments: "the Washington establishment wants to silence us, but we will not let them do that." Repeatedly contrasting "us/we" with "them/they" creates a sense of shared struggle and deepens ideological differences.

Trump also uses pronouns to compare himself to Biden and make promises of action. His plan is presented as a popular cause by statements like "we will abolish every Biden COVID mandate" and "we will not stop, we will not quit." "And unlike Biden... I will keep America out of foolish and unnecessary foreign wars," on the other hand, he stresses upon his own leadership while setting his views apart from Biden administration. By giving a sarcastic remark like, "they say the ocean will rise... but don't worry about nuclear weapons," he criticizes the Green New Deal and nuclear goals. Moreover, the third-person plural pronoun "they" indicates misguided priorities of his opponents. As a whole, pronouns construct the speech's narrative by using "we" to create unity, "I" to assert authority, and "they" to create distance from the political opposition. This engages the audience on an emotional level and strengthens polarization prior to the 2024 election.

❖ **Modal Verbs**

In the speech, modal verbs serve as signs of certainty, obligation, determination, and likelihood, creating a narrative that is action-oriented and focused on the future. The most frequently used modal verb, 'will,' denotes commitment and determination. For instance, "We will win because we will fight with every measure of our strength...to lift up the working men and working women of America" conveys a strong resolve to win elections and rebuild national strength, while "Perhaps there will never be anything like it again" uses 'will' to indicate a potential future marked

with uncertainty. Likewise, claims like “We will again build the greatest economy ever,” and statements such as, “We will end Joe Biden’s war on American energy” and “I will fight like no one has ever fought before” demonstrate Trump’s unrestrained drive and establish him as a decisive leader determined to reverse the country’s history of economic decline and regain its former prosperity.

Moreover, the speech is filled with modal verbs. Additional modal verbs are used to convey a sense of urgency and duty. “It can only take so much” emphasizes the boundaries of national endurance, whereas “can” suggests the ability to alter current circumstances in “We can’t let it continue.” The word “could” is used to imply intolerability under Biden’s leadership in the statement, “Our country could not take four more years.” While “we should be protected from all of those nations out there” suggests moral obligation, “we must all work very hard” emphasizes communal responsibility. Missed chances are emphasized even in conditional forms, such as “It would have been great.” Overall, these modal choices create an appealing narrative of potential, urgency, and unwavering dedication, bringing the audience into accord with Trump’s planned objectives and future vision.

❖ Rhetoric

Two rhetorical devices used in this speech to draw attention to important subjects and persuade the audience of difficult concepts are repetition and metaphors.

• Repetition

Repetition serves as one of the key ideological strategies in the speech, strengthening in-group unity while discrediting the out-group. This pattern is in line with Van Dijk’s (1997, 2006) understanding which states that repetition emphasizes favored meanings and molds audiences’ mental models. Trump (2022) incorporates a progressive pledge of action and success into his frequent usage of the words “We will” to convey his resolve and determination. Repeated references to Latino and Hispanic voters support highlight their electoral relevance, while references to crucial election years (2020 and 2024) highlight urgency and the need for political reform. In an effort to instill hope and rebuild trust in his previous tenure, he also restates themes of prior achievements. Statements like “You don’t hear that from the media” and labels like “fake news media” are used repeatedly to portray the press as biased and antagonistic. The use of words like “safety” and “security” while discussing border policy reinforces a sense of threat and protection. Trump strengthens important ideological themes, promotes unity among

supporters, and highlights the differences between allies and enemies through the use of repetition.

- **Metaphors**

Van Dijk (2006) asserts that using metaphor is an effective ideological technique for creating both negative ‘other’ and positive self-representations. Metaphors in Trump’s (2022) speech strengthen emotional appeal while simplifying complicated political concerns. He presents his campaign as a historic struggle versus national decline by characterizing it as a “massive and incredible movement.” While the assertion that “our country is being invaded” metaphorically portrays immigration (especially Mexican) as a military threat, escalating fear and blaming Biden administration for negligence on national security. The phrase, “We turned the page on decades of globalist sellouts” frames his presidency as a new beginning following poor trade policies.

The use of other metaphors emphasizes ownership and urgency even more. By portraying domestic oil as a valuable national asset, the phrase “liquid gold under our feet” promotes economic self-sufficiency. By framing policy disagreement as deliberate animosity, the phrase “Joe Biden’s war on American energy” boosts perceptions of conflict. Authority and national ownership are emphasized even in symbolic references to regaining power, such as when authority is portrayed as something that the people must regain. Trump uses these metaphors to elicit strong feelings, clarify policy stances, and reinforce his ideological narrative of conflict, restoration, and national resolve.

Collectively, these discourse strategies and rhetorical devices help Trump achieve his broader political objectives of reclaiming and maintaining power by rousing patriotism, strengthening in-group unity, and portraying him as a powerful leader who can reverse the opposition’s purported failures.

Conclusion

Van Dijk’s Socio-cognitive Discourse Analysis paired with Ideological Square reveals that Trump discursively portrays the outgroup as ineffective and harmful to American interests while presenting himself as a patriotic and sympathetic leader committed to national restoration at the launch of his 2024 presidential campaign. The analysis shows how Trump deliberately uses national self-glorification,

comparisons, polarization, victimization, blaming, and to uphold a fixed “Us versus Them” division, highlighting the advantages of the in-group while bringing out the purported shortcomings of the out-group. He activates common cognitive models of disintegration and restoration that justify his political return through selective attention to information, exaggerated depictions of economic prosperity and national power under his rule, and crisis-driven metaphors like “war” and “invasion.” While distancing pronouns like “they” and “them” create exclusion and moral conflict, the frequent use of inclusive pronouns like “we,” “us,” and “our” promotes unity and collective identity. Similarly, forceful modal constructions like “we will” convey authority and commitment. Victimization motifs boost devotion and in-group solidarity by reinforcing his image as a strong leader unfairly singled out by elites. In combination, these linguistic and discursive techniques show how Trump’s political rhetoric serves as an ideologically motivated means of establishing legitimacy, influencing social cognition, and maintaining ideological dominance through deliberate creation of inclusion and exclusion, rather than simply employing persuasive language.

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