

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION IN DONALD TRUMP'S SPEECH AT THE 2025 WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

NABILAH AMANDA SABRINA¹, CITRA ANGGIA PUTRI²

^{1,2}UNIVERSITAS NEGERI MEDAN

Abstract

This research examines ideological constructions within Donald Trump's address to the 2025 World Economic Forum through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), utilizing Teun A. Van Dijk's Ideological Square framework (2011) alongside his 25 ideological discourse categories (2006). Analysis reveals Trump's speech employs strategic polarization, predominantly through positive in-group emphasis (63%) and negative out-group emphasis (27%), while minimizing in-group weaknesses (7%) and out-group strengths (3%). Qualitative textual examination uncovers prevalent deployment of rhetorical mechanisms including exaggeration, nationalistic valorization, and value-based assertions that construct a nationalist-populist discourse. Results indicate Trump's administration is discursively positioned as a revolutionary catalyst for American and global transformation, contrasted against portrayed inadequacies of prior leadership and international entities. Through analyzing these linguistic strategies, this research illuminates how political communication functions as an instrument for ideological construction and authority consolidation. This investigation enhances scholarly understanding of political rhetoric within international economic platforms, particularly regarding intersections of economic strategy, nationalism, and ideological division in constructing public consciousness and diplomatic relations.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Donald Trump, Economic Policy, Ideological Square, Political Rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a sophisticated tool through which political actors employ diverse manipulative techniques to accomplish their objectives (Kadim, 2022). Within political communication contexts, leaders deploy language beyond mere information transmission, they actively construct perceptions, generate meanings, and integrate ideological frameworks. As Wodak and Meyer (2001) observe, political discourse functions to structure and maintain belief systems. Fairclough's (1992) assertion that "language is a form of social practice" emphasizes discourse's dual role in mirroring and creating social realities (p. 63). Consequently, political oratory represents among the most powerful discourse forms, actively determining boundaries of feasibility, acceptability, and legitimacy within sociopolitical environments.

Within this framework, ideology transcends abstract conceptualization. Rather, it becomes embedded within linguistic structures, manifesting through lexical selections and issue

framing that influences audience comprehension of reality. Van Dijk (1995) conceptualizes ideologies as collective cognitive frameworks organizing group understanding of social positions, objectives and collective identities. He contends that "discourse plays a prominent role as the preferential site for the persuasive communication of ideological propositions" (p.18), especially via discursive mechanisms like "us" versus "them" polarization. Van Dijk (2002) further explicates how these mechanisms enable speakers to foreground in-group positive characteristics while emphasizing out-group deficiencies, thereby establishing group legitimacy through subtle yet influential means. Comprehending how linguistic choices reinforce ideological positions and authority within political speech necessitates frameworks like CDA, enabling critical investigation of discourse-ideology-power interconnections.

Wodak and Meyer (2001) characterize Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as focused on revealing language's contribution to generating and perpetuating social inequalities. This approach treats language as social practice simultaneously shaped by shaping power dynamics and ideological structures. Fairclough (1995) notes CDA examines institutional power's influence on discourse and discourse's capacity to either reinforce or contest dominant societal arrangements. Van Dijk (1993, 2001) foregrounds discourse-social cognition connections, arguing discourse embodies group ideologies while crucially controlling public comprehension through implicit meanings. Within political contexts, CDA proves particularly valuable for analyzing leaders' linguistic legitimization of policies, opinion influence, and authority maintenance.

Van Dijk's (2011) Ideological Square stands among the most prominent frameworks for investigating ideology within political communication, demonstrating how speakers discursively construct in-groups and out-groups through polarized language. Van Dijk (2011, p. 397) clarifies this model accentuates "us" positive attributes while spotlighting "them" negative characteristics, simultaneously downplaying in-group deficiencies and minimizing out-group accomplishments. This strategic polarization exposes how political actors employ discourse not merely for favorable self-representation but also for subtle yet persuasive opponent delegitimization. Such discursive operations enable political leaders to consolidate solidarity, rationalize policy stances, and project authority while portraying adversaries as menacing or failing. While the Ideological Square offers macro-level polarization comprehension, Van Dijk additionally developed granular frameworks examining ideology at micro-levels of linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms through his 25-category system of Ideological Discourse Analysis.

Complementing the ideological square, Van Dijk (2006) presents 25 ideological discourse analysis categories providing systematic approaches for revealing ideology within political language. These categories encompass strategies including actor representation, authority

invocation, burden emphasis, comparative framing, disclaimers, exaggeration, presupposition, among others each functioning as discursive maneuvers reflecting ideological positioning (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 734-739). By examining discourse across multiple dimensions—meaning, argumentation, style, and rhetoric, these categories furnish sophisticated instruments for identifying ideological embedding within political speech. This enables analysts to trace how language constructs polarized "us" and "them" representations through both overarching patterns and specific linguistic-rhetorical devices. Within this investigation, the 25 categories complement the ideological square framework, ensuring systematic analysis of both comprehensive polarization strategies and detailed linguistic ideological mechanisms within Donald Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum address.

Van Dijk's frameworks illuminate how political discourse generates in-group/out-group divisions through selective emphasis and framing. These strategies manifest clearly in Donald J. Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum (WEF) address, delivered following his White House return as the 48th U.S. President. Within a global economic landscape characterized by increasing protectionism, evolving energy policies, and post-pandemic recovery, Trump constructs narratives positioning his administration as remedy to previous policy inadequacies and globalist mismanagement. Through themes of economic deregulation, energy sovereignty, and protectionist trade approaches, Trump characterizes his leadership as national restoration pathways. His proclamation initiating the "golden age of America" signifies not merely political aspiration but deeper ideological positioning grounded in economic nationalism (Mercieca, 2020).

Trump's address exemplifies Van Dijk's (2011) "ideological square" concept, wherein positive in-group policy representation combined with negative opposing administration portrayal reinforces specific ideological perspectives. Simultaneously, numerous rhetorical maneuvers align with the 25 ideological discourse categories, including exaggeration, presupposition, and actor characterization. By framing administrative actions as rational and essential while depicting previous governmental policies as catastrophic, Trump's discourse establishes clear 'us' versus 'them' dichotomies, positioning his administration as national interest defender and previous government as economic-political failure source. This corresponds with Van Dijk's (1998; 2003; 2006) ideological frameworks emphasizing positive self-representation and negative other-representation as fundamental political discourse strategies, reinforced through specific rhetorical-semantic category selections.

These Ideological Discourse Structures operate synergistically within Trump's WEF 2025 address, constructing persuasive narratives presenting Trump's economic ideology. Trump legitimizes himself as embodying national will, frames his administration as transformative, and marginalizes dissenting perspectives. Through Van Dijk's ideological square and twenty-five

categories, ideology within political discourse emerges not merely as content but as linguistic mechanisms employed for polarization, inclusion-exclusion dynamics, and ultimately power reinforcement.

Ideological discourse investigation has gained widespread application across sociopolitical contexts through CDA lenses. Apirakvanalee and Zhai (2023) examined ideological discourse within BBC's podcast series "Chinese Dreams," exploring Western media's binary China-West representational constructions. Applying Van Dijk's framework, their investigation revealed consistent positive self-representation and negative other-representation emphasis across national contexts, advancing comprehension of Western ideological narratives. Similarly, Luo, He, and Yu (2022) investigated ideological strategies within Donald Trump's COVID-19 pandemic tweets. Their analysis demonstrated Trump's deployment of repetition, metaphorical language, capitalization, and evaluative terminology constructing favorable in-group imagery while critiquing perceived opponents. Correspondingly, Mahfoud and Khaldouy (2023) analyzed President Biden's Ukraine conflict speech, highlighting actor characterization, comparative framing, and national glorification employment legitimizing U.S. foreign policy positions. Each investigation demonstrates Van Dijk's Ideological Square utility for unpacking discursive strategies reinforcing group identities and political interests.

Contrasting aforementioned studies, this research specifically examines Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum address, providing insights into economic and political ideology's discursive construction on global platforms through ideological polarization strategies. This investigation consequently bridges domestic political rhetoric and international diplomatic discourse, offering enhanced insight into ideological strategies deployed within global forums. By expanding CDA application within formal international political settings, this research analyzes Trump's address revealing how political leaders construct public perception and legitimize authority through discourse, providing crucial insights for political communication and international relations scholarship.

Based on the presented context, this investigation addresses two research questions: (1) What ideological representations of 'us' and 'them' appear within Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum address? and (2) How are Trump's 'us' and 'them' ideological representations linguistically expressed within this address?

METHODOLOGY

This investigation employs qualitative research design emphasizing textual analysis, grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as conceptualized by Teun A. Van Dijk, particularly his ideological square model. Creswell (2016) identifies qualitative research as

optimal for investigating human behavior, language, and meaning-making process complexity and depth. Within this qualitative approach, textual analysis constitutes the primary investigative method. Fairclough (1995) contends textual analysis within CDA proves essential for examining how text linguistic features are simultaneously shaped by and shape social structures, ideologies, and power relations.

Primary data comprises sentences, words and phrases within Trump's address containing economic ideology. Data sources include transcript from remarks documentation on White House government website titled "President Trump gives virtual remarks to World Economic Forum" published January 21, 2025. The speech transcript spans 15 pages containing approximately 90 Trump sentences. Secondary data encompasses relevant theoretical texts, books and research articles providing contextualization and scholarly perspectives on CDA and Ideological Square.

FINDINGS

1. Ideological Representation Distribution within Trump's 2025 WEF Address

Ideological square analysis of Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum address demonstrates pronounced ideological polarization emphasis as conceptualized by Van Dijk (2011). Trump predominantly employed strategies of positive in-group emphasis while accentuating negative out-group characteristics; comparatively fewer instances involved minimizing in-group weaknesses or out-group strengths. Table 1 displays Ideological Square move distribution identified throughout the address:

Table 1. 1 Ideological Representation within Trump's 2025 WEF

No.	Ideological Square moves	Frequency	Percentage
1	Emphasize Our Good Things	44	63%
2	De-emphasize Our Bad Things	5	7%
3	Emphasize Their Bad Things	20	27%
4	De-emphasize Their Good Things	2	3%
Total		71	100%

Among 71 identified instances, the predominant strategy involves positive in-group emphasis at 63% (44 instances), dedicated to foregrounding administrative accomplishments and virtues, followed by negative out-group emphasis at 27% (20 instances), explicitly characterizing

political opponents, previous administrations, or foreign entities as incompetent, negligent, or threatening to national and global stability. The minimize in-group weakness strategy appeared in merely 7% (5 instances), functioning to diminish ingroup shortcomings, frequently by transferring blame for economic challenges such as inflation to former administrations, while minimizing out-group strength strategy appeared in only 3% (2 instances), employed for downplaying others' achievements. This distribution exemplifies Trump's dominant rhetorical pattern of nationalistic self-glorification and pronounced negative other-presentation, reinforcing 'us versus them' dichotomies at both domestic and international levels.

3.2 Ideological Discourse Categories within Trump's 2025 WEF Address

Following ideological representation analysis within Trump's 2025 WEF address, investigation further examined how ideological representations are linguistically manifested employing Van Dijk's (2006) Categories of Ideological Discourse Analysis. Findings indicate Trump's address extensively utilizes Van Dijk's (2006) categories, reflecting versatile yet patterned discourse strategy application. Analysis identified 23 of 25 available categories, totaling 119 instances. Table 2 presents these findings:

Table 1. 2 Ideological Discourse Categories Distribution in Trump's Address

No	Categories of Ideological Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 2006)	Frequency	Percentage
1	Hyperbole	17	14.3%
2	Norm Expression	13	10.9%
3	National Self-Glorification	10	8.4%
4	Implication	9	7.6%
5	Actor Description	8	6.7%
6	Burden	7	5.9%
7	Polarization	7	5.9%
8	Lexicalization	6	5.0%
9	Number game	5	4.2%
10	Irony	5	4.2%
11	Evidentiality	5	4.2%
12	Authority	4	3.4%
13	Categorization	3	2.5%
14	Comparison	3	2.5%
15	Presupposition	3	2.5%
16	Vagueness	3	2.5%
17	Victimization	3	2.5%
18	Generalization	2	1.7%
19	Metaphor	2	1.7%
20	Counterfactual	1	0.8%
21	Disclaimers	1	0.8%
22	Illustration	1	0.8%
23	Populism	1	0.8%

24	Euphemism	0	0%
25	Consensus	0	0%
Total		119	100%

The predominant category was Hyperbole at 14.3% (17 instances), which Trump deployed for dramatizing accomplishments, exaggerating crises, and magnifying contrasts between his administration and adversaries. This was succeeded by norm expression (13 instances, 10.9%) and national self-glorification (10 instances, 8.4%), both supporting moral authority and nationalism. Other frequently deployed categories included implication (7.6%), actor description (6.7%), burden and polarization (5.9% each), reflecting Trump's efforts shifting crisis responsibility and solidifying ideological boundaries. Less frequent categories including lexicalization (5%) and number games (4.2%) provided evaluative framing and statistical credibility. Conversely, least frequent categories were counterfactual, disclaimers, illustration, and populism (<1%), suggesting Trump minimally relied on hypothetical reasoning, defensive justification, or visual imagery, occasionally deploying direct populist appeals.

Investigation findings illuminate how Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum address employed rhetorical strategies accentuating national pride, economic revitalization, and opposition delegitimization through positive in-group and negative out-group emphasis. Trump's rhetoric, characterized by exaggeration, national glorification, and norm expression, aligns with comparable populist discourse strategies while reflecting specific geopolitical and economic contextual elements of his administration.

The most prominent strategy within Trump's address was hyperbole, constituting 14.3% of all ideological maneuvers. This parallels Luo, He, and Yu's (2022) findings analyzing Trump's hyperbole deployment during COVID-19 pandemic constructing American superiority narratives. Their investigation observed how Trump exaggerated national successes contrasted against other countries' failures, particularly China. Similarly, within the WEF address, Trump employed exaggerated assertions such as "We've accomplished more in less than four days than other administrations have in four years" promoting his leadership as uniquely effective. This hyperbolic rhetoric form characterizes populist discourse, wherein leader actions are presented as historically significant or transformative.

Furthermore, Trump's national self-glorification deployment, comprising 8.4% of rhetorical strategies, directly connects to his portrayal of America as globally dominant force. This approach resonates with Mahfoud and Khaldouy's (2023) work, also noting self-glorification usage in political leader speeches positioning nations as morally and politically superior. Just as Mahfoud and Khaldouy demonstrated U.S. framing as morally united and superior regarding

Ukraine war, Trump framed the U.S. as economic recovery and global stability leader, leveraging World Economic Forum platforms projecting strength and resilience.

Contrasting these self-promotion strategies, negative out-group emphasis served for criticizing opposition and foreign actors, accounting for 27% of total ideological maneuvers. Polarization and actor description usage appeared evident throughout Trump's address, particularly framing foreign actors including oil-producing countries and NATO allies as "freeloaders" or "enemies." This tactic dividing the world into moral us vs. them dichotomies mirrors Jiang and Qasim's (2021) analysis of Trump's COVID-19 pandemic rhetoric, wherein polarization positioned the U.S. as righteous actor and China (and other international adversaries) as unreliable others. While Jiang and Qasim focused on Trump's divisive strategies within health crisis contexts, this investigation extends their findings demonstrating such polarization's applicability to economic and international relations.

Trump's actor description deployment categorizing previous administrations and foreign leaders as inept or uncooperative aligns with minimizing out-group strength strategies, wherein others' successes are diminished or ignored. In this instance, previous administration policies were depicted as catastrophic, and foreign actors' contributions were framed as inadequate, thereby reinforcing Trump's role as national savior.

One significant contribution of this investigation is its focus on economic ideology embedded within Trump's address. While studies like Mahfoud and Khaldouy (2023) centered on conflict rhetoric, particularly surrounding Ukraine war, this investigation shifts attention toward economic diplomacy within global institutional settings. Trump's World Economic Forum address offered nuanced portrayal of U.S. economic policy and global leadership, wherein economic strength and national recovery constituted central themes. Unlike previous studies focusing on military conflicts or health crises, this analysis positions Trump's rhetoric within economic diplomacy contexts, illustrating how he employed hyperbole and polarization projecting economic power and deflecting policy criticism.

In summary, investigation findings confirm Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum address relied heavily on hyperbole, national self-glorification, and polarization constructing national and economic restoration narratives under his leadership. Analysis contributes to broader populist discourse literature, demonstrating how Trump employs rhetorical strategies emphasizing leadership successes while dismissing others' contributions. Comparing findings with existing research, including Luo, He, and Yu (2022) and Mahfoud and Khaldouy (2023), reveals Trump's rhetoric aligns with populist strategies emphasizing leader exceptionalism and moral superiority while framing opposition as ineffective or hostile. This investigation offers novel perspectives on economic ideology representation within formal institutional discourse,

extending populist rhetoric understanding beyond national borders into international economic relations realms.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Analysis of Trump's 2025 World Economic Forum address demonstrates his rhetorical strategy firmly grounds itself in ideological polarization as conceptualized by Van Dijk's Ideological Square (2011). The overwhelming positive in-group emphasis (44 instances; 63%) and negative out-group emphasis (20 instances; 27%) reflects consistent attempts glorifying the ingroup while delegitimizing the outgroup. Conversely, minimal proportions addressed minimizing ingroup shortcomings (5 instances; 7%) or downplaying others' achievements (2 instances; 3%). This distribution indicates Trump's discourse prioritizes maximizing positive self-presentation and intensifying negative other-presentation rather than presenting balanced narratives—hallmarks of populist and nationalist rhetoric.

Regarding Van Dijk's (2006) ideological discourse categories, findings demonstrate Trump employed extensive strategy spectrums—23 of 25 possible categories totaling 119 occurrences. The predominant category was hyperbole (17 instances; 14.3%), deployed for dramatizing achievements, exaggerating crises, and magnifying administrative-adversary contrasts. Hyperbole prevalence underscores his speech's persuasive and performative functions, appealing to emotions and grandeur perceptions. This was closely followed by norm expression (13 instances; 10.9%) and national self-glorification (10 instances; 8.4%), both aligning leadership with traditional values and national pride. Conversely, least frequent categories were counterfactual, disclaimers, illustration, and populism (1 instance each; <1%). Their limited usage suggests Trump minimally relied on hypothetical reasoning, defensive justification, or visual illustration, occasionally invoking overt populist appeals.

Collectively, these findings illuminate how Trump's discourse operates as calculated power performance: exaggerating success, framing leadership as indispensable, and attributing crises to others. Hyperbole predominance reveals reliance on dramatic, emotionally charged language inspiring confidence and consolidating support, while categories like disclaimers and counterfactuals' marginal presence indicates refusing to entertain alternative perspectives or accept responsibility. Thus, the address exemplifies how political communication functions simultaneously as persuasion and ideological reproduction, reinforcing speaker authority while deepening "us" and "them" polarization.

REFERENCES

- Apirakvanalee, L., & Zhai, Y. (2023). An ideological square analysis of the podcast discourse in "Chinese Dreams" of the BBC World Service. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 20(4), 379-395.
- Bonilla, K. L. (2023). From businessman to president: A critical discourse analysis of Donald Trump's political narratives. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 20(3), 311–330.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Jiang, H., & Qasim, H. (2021). A critical discourse analysis of Donald Trump's press briefings on COVID-19: Polarization, blame, and ideology. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 20(2), 220–241.
- Kadim, E. N. (2022). A critical discourse analysis of Trump's election campaign speeches. *Heliyon*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09256>
- Luo, X., He, M., & Yu, Z. (2022). An ideological analysis of the former president Donald Trump's Tweets during COVID-19. *Corpus Pragmatics*, 6(1), 23-38.
- Mahfoud, N., & Khaldouy, R. (2023). A critical discourse analysis of Biden's first speech on the war in Ukraine from the perspective of ideological square model. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 6(3), 132-143.
- Mercieca, J. R. (2020). *Demagogue for President: The rhetorical genius of Donald Trump*. Texas A&M University Press.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249–283.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis. In C. Schäffner & A. Wenden (Eds.), *Language and Peace*. Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. SAGE Publications.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, D. Schiffrin, & H. Hamilton (Eds.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 352–371). Blackwell.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2002). Political Discourse and Political Cognition. In P. Chilton & C. Schäffner (Eds.), *Politics as Text and Talk*. John Benjamins.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2003). *Discourse and Ideology*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Politics, ideology, and discourse. In K. Brown (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (2nd ed., Vol. 9, pp. 728–740). Elsevier.

- Van Dijk, T. A. (2011). Discourse and Ideology: The Ideological Square. *Discourse Studies*, 13(2), 396-400.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis. In *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2001). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. SAGE Publications.