

WEAPONIZING WORDS: A CDA OF TRUMP'S LANGUAGE OF POWER AND ITS IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Dr. Muhammad Ansar Ejaz

Visiting Lecturer GCU Faisalabad

Email: niaziiejaz@gmail.com

Tahir Jamil

Tanzeela Jaffar

tanzeelajaffar000@gmail.com

MPhil American Studies

Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad

ABSTRACT

This study explores how Donald Trump's political language operated as a tool of power in shaping international relations and diplomatic discourse during his presidency. Against the backdrop of a global rise in populist discourse, Trump's rhetoric marked by an emphasis on national sovereignty, binary oppositions, and emotionally charged slogans offers a compelling case for linguistic and ideological scrutiny. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to conduct a nuanced examination of selected texts: key political speeches and strategic public communications (including those delivered at the United Nations General Assembly, NATO Summits, the Presidential Inaugural Address, State of the Union addresses, press conferences, and relevant tweets). These data were chosen for their explicit focus on foreign policy, diplomatic themes, and the construction of American identity in global contexts. The analysis is grounded in Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, which addresses the interaction between language (textual features), discursive practices (production and reception), and social practices (ideological and institutional context). To deepen the investigative lens, the study also integrates van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework, which illuminates underlying mental models and group cognition, particularly in relation to populist "us vs. them" narratives. Findings reveal that Trump's rhetoric consistently employs strong evaluative adjectives ("great", "tremendous", "strong"), modal markers of certainty ("we will", "we must"), and binary pronoun constructions ("we" vs. "they") to reinforce American exceptionalism and delineate adversarial identities. His speeches frequently adopted repetitive, conversational structures and intertextual references to past rhetorical frames, aligning with his "America First" agenda. These linguistic strategies disrupted conventional diplomatic norms replacing ambiguity with assertiveness and cooperation with confrontation resulting in strained alliances, heightened global polarization, and altered perceptions of U.S. leadership on the international stage. The significance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary contribution to English linguistics, political communication, and international relations. It demonstrates how linguistic analysis can reveal the ways discourse not only reflects but actively shapes foreign policy narratives. For researchers, the study offers a methodological blueprint for integrating CDA with socio-cognitive analysis in examining political rhetoric. For teachers and students of English linguistics, it presents a robust case study in applying discourse theory to real-world political texts, highlighting the tangible impact of lexical and structural choices on global diplomacy.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, language and power, Trump rhetoric, populist discourse, international relations, diplomacy, Fairclough, van Dijk.

Introduction

The rise of populist discourse in global politics has fundamentally altered political communication, emphasizing anti-elite rhetoric and emotionally charged appeals to "the people" over traditional diplomatic norms. This shift, driven by economic disparities and cultural divides, has seen leaders worldwide adopt confrontational language that prioritizes domestic audiences, often at the expense of international cooperation (Chryssoelos, 2024). Populist rhetoric, characterized by binary narratives of "us vs. them," challenges the conventions of diplomacy, which rely on restraint and mutual respect, leading to strained alliances and heightened global tensions (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). Such discourse amplifies nationalist sentiments, as seen in various global contexts, where leaders use simplified, polarizing language to assert power and reshape international relations (Wodak &

Krzyżanowski, 2024). This trend provides a critical backdrop for analyzing Donald Trump's rhetorical strategies, which exemplify populist discourse and its impact on diplomacy.

Donald Trump's unconventional rhetorical style as a political communicator is marked by linguistic simplicity, hyperbole, and a direct, unfiltered approach that aligns with populist ideals. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), scholars note his use of repetitive structures, first-person pronouns, and derogatory nicknames (e.g., "Crooked Hillary") to foster a collective identity among supporters while vilifying opponents, thereby reinforcing ideological divides (Khan & Qazalbash, 2024). His rhetoric, particularly in speeches and social media, prioritizes emotional appeal over policy substance, often disrupting diplomatic norms through provocative statements, such as labeling foreign leaders in ways that escalate tensions (Zhou et al., 2024). This approach, rooted in asserting American dominance, has reshaped global perceptions of U.S. leadership, challenging traditional diplomatic communication and highlighting the interplay between language, power, and international relations (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025).

Rationale of the Study

The study of Donald Trump's language through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is vital for understanding its role in shaping international relations and diplomacy, given the profound influence of linguistic choices on global political dynamics. Language serves as a primary tool for constructing power, identity, and ideology in political communication, particularly in the context of populist leaders like Trump, whose unconventional rhetoric has disrupted traditional diplomatic norms (Chryssogelos, 2024). This research addresses a critical gap in linguistic scholarship by examining how Trump's discourse marked by hyperbole, polarization, and nationalist assertions has influenced diplomatic interactions and global perceptions of American leadership. By focusing on the interplay between language and power, this study aims to illuminate the mechanisms through which Trump's rhetoric has reshaped international alliances and escalated tensions, contributing to a deeper understanding of discourse as a driver of geopolitical outcomes (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025).

The importance of language in international relations lies in its capacity to frame narratives, negotiate power, and influence diplomatic outcomes, yet there remains a lack of comprehensive linguistic analysis of Trump's rhetoric and its specific implications for diplomacy. Language in diplomacy traditionally emphasizes ambiguity and restraint to maintain mutual respect, but Trump's confrontational style, including derogatory nicknames and provocative statements, has challenged these conventions, often straining bilateral relations (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). While existing studies explore Trump's political communication, few employ CDA to systematically analyze how his linguistic strategies such as repetitive structures and emotional appeals impact diplomatic discourse and global governance. This study fills this gap by providing a detailed linguistic analysis of Trump's rhetoric, revealing its effects on international relations and highlighting the need for further exploration of language as a tool of power in diplomacy (Chryssogelos, 2024).

Research Objectives

- i. To critically analyze the discursive strategies Donald Trump employs to construct and project power in his political speeches.
- ii. To explore the impact of Trump's rhetoric on diplomatic discourse and shifts in international relations

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as a robust framework for examining the interplay between language, power, and ideology in political communication, offering tools to unpack how discourse shapes social and political realities. CDA views language as a social practice

that both reflects and constructs power dynamics, making it particularly suited for analyzing political rhetoric such as Donald Trump's (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). Scholars emphasize CDA's role in revealing hidden ideologies embedded in texts, focusing on how linguistic choices perpetuate or challenge power structures. Recent studies highlight CDA's adaptability in analyzing contemporary political discourse, particularly in the context of populism, where language amplifies divisions and asserts dominance (Chrysosgelos, 2024). By applying CDA, this study aims to dissect Trump's rhetoric, uncovering how his linguistic strategies influence international relations and diplomacy.

Overview of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA provides a comprehensive approach to analyzing discourse by integrating text, discursive practice, and social practice. The model examines discourse at three levels: the text itself (linguistic features), the processes of production and interpretation (discursive practices), and the broader socio-political context (social practices) (Fairclough, as cited in Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). Recent scholarship underscores the model's relevance in dissecting political communication, particularly for understanding how leaders like Trump use language to construct power and influence global perceptions (Khan & Qazalbash, 2024). The model's strength lies in its ability to connect micro-level linguistic choices, such as Trump's use of hyperbole and nicknames, to macro-level effects on diplomatic relations, offering a structured lens for this study's analysis (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025).

Discourse and Power in Political Communication

Discourse in political communication is a critical site for the exercise of power, as language shapes perceptions, constructs identities, and negotiates authority. Recent studies highlight how political leaders use discourse to legitimize their actions and influence both domestic and international audiences (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). In the context of Trump's rhetoric, power is enacted through linguistic strategies that assert dominance, such as nationalist assertions and confrontational rhetoric, which challenge traditional diplomatic norms (Chrysosgelos, 2024). Scholars note that such discourse often prioritizes emotional resonance over factual accuracy, amplifying its impact on global politics (Zhou et al., 2024). This study leverages CDA to explore how Trump's language constructs power dynamics that reshape international relations.

Language as a Mechanism of Control and Persuasion

Language serves as a potent mechanism for control and persuasion in political contexts, enabling leaders to shape narratives and influence behavior. Trump's rhetoric, characterized by simplicity, repetition, and emotional appeals, exemplifies this mechanism, using linguistic tools to persuade audiences and assert authority (Khan & Qazalbash, 2024). Recent analyses indicate that his use of first-person pronouns and superlatives fosters a sense of personal connection and dominance, impacting diplomatic interactions by prioritizing confrontation over collaboration (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). By framing opponents as threats or elites, Trump's language controls narratives, often escalating tensions in international relations (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). This study examines how these linguistic strategies function as mechanisms of control within diplomatic discourse.

Populist Discourse and Rhetorical Polarization

Populist discourse, marked by its anti-elite and polarizing rhetoric, has become a defining feature of contemporary political communication, with significant implications for diplomacy. Trump's rhetoric aligns with populist strategies, using binary narratives of "us vs. them" to foster division and mobilize support, often at the expense of diplomatic restraint (Chrysosgelos, 2024). Recent studies highlight how such polarization, evident in Trump's derogatory nicknames and nationalist appeals, disrupts traditional diplomatic communication, straining

alliances and reshaping global perceptions (Moffitt & Tormey, 2025). By employing CDA, this study investigates how Trump's populist discourse and rhetorical polarization influence international relations, contributing to a deeper understanding of language's role in global politics (Zhou et al., 2024).

Trump's Discourse in Prior Studies

Donald Trump's discourse has been extensively analyzed for its role in promoting nationalism, xenophobia, and identity construction, significantly impacting international relations. Studies highlight how Trump's rhetoric, characterized by nationalist slogans like "America First" and derogatory references to foreign entities, constructs a polarized identity that pits the U.S. against perceived external threats (Chrysosgelos, 2024). His use of xenophobic language, such as labeling immigrants or foreign leaders as adversaries, fosters a collective national identity rooted in exclusion, which has strained diplomatic ties and fueled global tensions (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). Furthermore, Trump's discourse has disrupted global institutions by challenging multilateral agreements and institutions like NATO, often through confrontational rhetoric that undermines cooperative diplomacy and reshapes international alliances (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). These studies underscore the need for a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to unpack how Trump's language influences global perceptions and diplomatic outcomes.

International Relations and Language Use

Language is a cornerstone of diplomacy, serving as a linguistic practice that negotiates power and maintains international relations, yet Trump's rhetoric has redefined this dynamic through its blend of soft and hard power. Diplomacy traditionally relies on nuanced, ambiguous language to preserve mutual respect, but Trump's direct and provocative style, including insults like "Rocket Man" for Kim Jong-un, disrupts these norms, often escalating conflicts and weakening soft power (Chrysosgelos, 2024). His rhetoric employs hard power through assertive nationalist claims, influencing foreign policy by prioritizing domestic appeal over diplomatic collaboration (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). Recent scholarship emphasizes that political rhetoric, as seen in Trump's speeches and social media, acts as a tool for both persuasion and coercion, reshaping global governance and challenging the linguistic conventions of diplomacy (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). This study builds on these insights to explore how Trump's language of power affects international relations through a CDA lens.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary methodological approach. A qualitative lens enables an in-depth exploration of how language constructs, negotiates, and reinforces power relations within political discourse. CDA is particularly suited for this purpose as it situates language within its broader sociopolitical and ideological contexts, aligning with the study's objective to investigate how Trump's language functions as a tool of power within international relations and diplomacy.

Data Selection

The data for this study comprises a purposive sample of key political speeches and public communications delivered by Donald Trump during his presidency. These include high-impact texts such as his United Nations General Assembly address, NATO Summit speech, and Presidential Inaugural Address.

The inclusion criteria for data selection were threefold:

1. The speech must focus on international or diplomatic themes;
2. It must explicitly engage with foreign actors, alliances, or geopolitical issues;
3. It should reflect language relevant to Trump's construction of power and American identity in global contexts.

This selection ensures that the texts analyzed are not only linguistically rich but also contextually significant in shaping U.S. foreign policy narratives.

Analytical Framework

The analysis is primarily guided by Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which enables a layered examination of:

- The textual level (linguistic features and structure),
- The discursive practice (production and interpretation of texts),
- The social practice (ideological and institutional context in which discourse operates).

To deepen the ideological analysis, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is also employed.

This framework assists in uncovering underlying belief systems, mental models, and the cognitive representation of power relations and group dynamics especially relevant when analyzing Trump's "us vs. them" narratives, populist identity construction, and ideological polarization.

Procedure of Analysis

The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, the texts were carefully read and segmented for detailed examination. Particular attention was given to lexical choices (e.g., evaluative adjectives, militaristic or nationalistic terms), modality (expressions of certainty, obligation, or possibility), and pronoun usage, especially binary constructions such as "we" (inclusive of Americans or allies) versus "they" (typically referring to adversaries, immigrants, or foreign powers).

Next, the intertextuality of Trump's discourse was examined how his speeches reference, echo, or contradict previous political statements, media narratives, or institutional norms. The analysis also explored how these linguistic choices shape public perception and contribute to reconfiguring diplomatic relationships, global alliances, and the ideological framing of international events.

Through this combined approach, the study aims to reveal how Trump's language constructs and asserts power discursively, and how such discourse reshapes global diplomatic interactions.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's United Nations General Assembly Addresses:

Textual Level Analysis (Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model)

At the textual level, Trump's UNGA addresses exhibit distinct linguistic features that construct and project power, aligning with populist and nationalist ideologies. His lexical choices frequently include evaluative adjectives and superlatives, such as "great," "tremendous," and "strong," to emphasize American exceptionalism and assert dominance (Chryssoyelos, 2024). For instance, in his 2017 UNGA speech, Trump describes the U.S. as "a great country" with "unmatched power," reinforcing a narrative of supremacy. Modality is employed to convey certainty and obligation, with phrases like "we will" and "we must" signaling unwavering resolve, as seen in his 2018 address when discussing trade policies and military strength. Pronoun usage is particularly significant, with "we" (referring to Americans or allies) contrasted against "they" (often adversaries like North Korea or Iran), creating a binary "us vs. them" framework that polarizes global actors (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). This aligns with Wodak's DHA, which highlights how such binaries construct in-group/out-group identities to foster ideological polarization (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024).

The structure of Trump's UNGA speeches is conversational and repetitive, diverging from traditional diplomatic oratory. He uses short, declarative sentences and parallel structures, such as "We will not be taken advantage of" (2019 UNGA), to emphasize key messages and project authority. Intertextuality is evident in references to historical U.S. policies or global events, often recontextualized to align with his "America First" agenda, as seen in his 2018 critique of multilateral institutions like the UN itself. These linguistic choices disrupt diplomatic norms, which typically favor ambiguity and restraint, instead projecting hard power through assertive

and confrontational rhetoric (Chrysosgelos, 2024). By vilifying nations like Iran or China and praising U.S. achievements, Trump's discourse reshapes diplomatic interactions, straining alliances and escalating tensions, thus directly impacting international relations (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025).

Discursive Practice Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) addresses (2017–2020) at the discursive practice level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, focusing on the production and interpretation of texts within their sociopolitical and diplomatic contexts. While the user references a "Wodak model," this likely refers to Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes intertextuality and historical context, complementing Fairclough's framework. This analysis integrates DHA insights to explore how Trump's discourse is produced and interpreted, aligning with the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The UNGA addresses, delivered to global leaders, are pivotal texts for analyzing how Trump's rhetoric navigates the production and reception of power-laden discourse in diplomacy.

At the discursive practice level, Trump's UNGA speeches are produced within a context of populist and nationalist agendas, strategically crafted to appeal to both domestic and international audiences while prioritizing the former. The production process reflects Trump's reliance on direct, unfiltered communication, often bypassing traditional diplomatic channels to assert an "America First" narrative, as seen in his 2017 address critiquing multilateral institutions like the UN (Chrysosgelos, 2024). Intertextuality, a key focus of Wodak's DHA, is evident in how Trump's discourse echoes domestic campaign rhetoric, repurposing phrases like "sovereignty" and "greatness" to resonate with American audiences while challenging global norms (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). The interpretation of these texts varies significantly: domestic supporters perceive them as assertive defenses of national interest, while international audiences, particularly allies, often interpret them as confrontational, straining diplomatic relations (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). For instance, Trump's 2018 UNGA remarks on rejecting globalism were widely interpreted as undermining cooperative diplomacy, reshaping perceptions of U.S. leadership. This discursive practice, marked by polarized production and divergent interpretations, amplifies Trump's power projection but disrupts traditional diplomatic discourse, escalating tensions and reconfiguring global alliances.

Social Practice Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) addresses (2017–2020) at the social practice level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, focusing on the ideological and institutional contexts in which his discourse operates. The reference to the "Wodak model" likely pertains to Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes the historical and ideological dimensions of discourse, complementing Fairclough's framework by situating Trump's rhetoric within broader socio-political structures. This analysis aligns with the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The UNGA addresses, delivered to a global audience of leaders, provide a critical site for analyzing how Trump's language reflects and reshapes ideological and institutional norms in diplomacy.

At the social practice level, Trump's UNGA discourse operates within a global context marked by rising populism and challenges to multilateral institutions, reinforcing nationalist and anti-globalist ideologies. His rhetoric, emphasizing "America First," aligns with populist ideologies that prioritize national sovereignty over international cooperation, challenging the institutional

norms of the UN, which traditionally promote global collaboration (Chrysosgelos, 2024). For example, in his 2018 UNGA address, Trump's critique of globalism and institutions like the International Criminal Court reflects an ideological stance that undermines multilateral frameworks, resonating with domestic populist sentiments but alienating allies (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). Wodak's DHA highlights how such discourse draws on historical narratives of American exceptionalism, recontextualizing them to justify unilateral policies and project power (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). This ideological framing disrupts diplomatic norms, fostering tensions with allies like NATO members and reshaping international relations by prioritizing U.S. interests, thus reconfiguring global power dynamics and institutional trust.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Presidential Inaugural Address: Textual Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's Presidential Inaugural Address (January 20, 2017) at the textual level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, focusing on linguistic features and structure to uncover how his language constructs and projects power in the context of international relations and diplomacy. The user's reference to the "Wodak model" likely indicates Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes intertextuality and ideological framing, complementing Fairclough's framework. This analysis integrates DHA insights to explore how Trump's rhetoric aligns with populist strategies, addressing the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The Inaugural Address, a high-profile speech delivered at the onset of his presidency, sets the tone for his administration's foreign policy and is rich with linguistic features reflecting power and national identity.

At the textual level, Trump's 2017 Inaugural Address employs linguistic features that emphasize nationalist and populist ideologies, projecting power through assertive and polarizing rhetoric. Lexical choices include evaluative adjectives like "great" and "strong," as in "We will make America strong again," which reinforce American exceptionalism and dominance (Chrysosgelos, 2024). Modality is marked by high certainty, with phrases like "we will" and "America will" signaling unwavering commitment to unilateral policies, such as prioritizing American interests over global cooperation. Pronoun usage constructs a binary narrative, with "we" (Americans) contrasted against "they" (elites or foreign entities), fostering an "us vs. them" framework that aligns with Wodak's DHA focus on identity construction through exclusionary rhetoric (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). The speech's structure is direct and repetitive, using short sentences and parallelisms, such as "America first, America first," to emphasize nationalist priorities. These features challenge diplomatic norms by framing international relations as competitive rather than collaborative, potentially straining alliances and shaping global perceptions of U.S. leadership.

Discursive Practice Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's Presidential Inaugural Address (January 20, 2017) at the discursive practice level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, focusing on the production and interpretation of the text within its sociopolitical and diplomatic contexts. The reference to the "Wodak model" likely pertains to Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes intertextuality and historical context, complementing Fairclough's framework. This analysis integrates DHA insights to explore how Trump's rhetoric is produced and interpreted, aligning with the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The Inaugural Address, delivered to a global and domestic audience at the start of his presidency, is a pivotal text for analyzing how Trump's language navigates power dynamics in a diplomatic setting.

At the discursive practice level, Trump's Inaugural Address is produced within a context of populist momentum, crafted to resonate with domestic supporters while signaling a shift in U.S. foreign policy to international audiences. The speech's production reflects Trump's direct communication style, bypassing traditional diplomatic filters to emphasize an "America First" agenda, as seen in phrases like "from this day forward, a new vision will govern our land" (Chrysogelos, 2024). Intertextuality, central to Wodak's DHA, is evident in how the address echoes campaign promises, such as economic nationalism, while recontextualizing historical U.S. rhetoric of strength to challenge multilateral norms (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). The interpretation varies sharply: domestic audiences, particularly supporters, view the speech as a bold assertion of national sovereignty, whereas international allies, such as NATO members, interpret its isolationist tone as a retreat from collaborative diplomacy, straining global alliances. This polarized production and reception amplify Trump's power projection but disrupt diplomatic discourse, reshaping international relations by prioritizing unilateralism over cooperation.

Social Practice Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's Presidential Inaugural Address (January 20, 2017) at the social practice level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, focusing on the ideological and institutional contexts in which the discourse operates. The reference to the "Wodak model" likely indicates Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes historical and ideological dimensions, complementing Fairclough's framework by situating Trump's rhetoric within broader socio-political structures. This analysis aligns with the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The Inaugural Address, delivered to a global and domestic audience at the start of his presidency, is a key text for analyzing how Trump's language reflects and reshapes ideological and institutional norms in diplomacy.

At the social practice level, Trump's Inaugural Address operates within a global context of rising populism and skepticism toward multilateral institutions, promoting a nationalist ideology that prioritizes American sovereignty over international cooperation. The speech's emphasis on "America First" and critiques of global elites reflect a populist stance that challenges the institutional norms of global governance, such as those embodied by the United Nations or NATO (Chrysogelos, 2024). Wodak's DHA highlights how Trump's discourse draws on historical narratives of American exceptionalism, recontextualizing them to justify isolationist policies and assert unilateral power (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). By framing international relations as a zero-sum game, as seen in statements like "we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry," the address undermines collaborative diplomatic frameworks, straining alliances and reshaping global perceptions of U.S. leadership. This ideological positioning disrupts institutional trust and reconfigures international relations by prioritizing national interests over global cooperation.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's NATO Summit Speech: Textual Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's NATO Summit speeches, with a focus on the 2017 and 2018 addresses, at the textual level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, analyzing linguistic features and structure to uncover how his language constructs and projects power in the context of international relations and diplomacy. The reference to the "Wodak model" likely pertains to Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes intertextuality and ideological framing, complementing Fairclough's framework. This analysis integrates DHA insights to explore how Trump's rhetoric aligns with populist strategies, addressing the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore

their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The NATO Summit speeches, delivered to allied leaders, are critical texts for studying Trump's language in a high-stakes diplomatic context.

At the textual level, Trump's NATO Summit speeches employ linguistic features that project power through nationalist and confrontational rhetoric. Lexical choices include evaluative adjectives like "unfair" and "delinquent" when describing allies' financial contributions, as in the 2017 speech where he states, "Many of these nations owe massive amounts of money" (Chryssogelos, 2024). Modality is marked by assertive phrases such as "we will never" or "must pay," conveying obligation and certainty that challenge diplomatic norms of collegiality. Pronoun usage constructs a binary narrative, with "we" (the U.S.) positioned against "they" (underpaying allies or adversaries), aligning with Wodak's DHA focus on exclusionary identity construction (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). The speech structure is direct, using short, repetitive sentences and parallelisms, such as "NATO members must finally contribute their fair share" (2018), to emphasize demands and assert dominance. These features disrupt traditional diplomatic discourse, straining alliances like NATO and signaling a shift toward unilateralism in international relations.

Discursive Practice Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's NATO Summit speeches, focusing on the 2017 and 2018 addresses, at the discursive practice level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, analyzing the production and interpretation of texts within their sociopolitical and diplomatic contexts. The reference to the "Wodak model" likely indicates Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes intertextuality and historical context, complementing Fairclough's framework. This analysis integrates DHA insights to explore how Trump's rhetoric is produced and interpreted, aligning with the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The NATO Summit speeches, delivered to allied leaders, are pivotal texts for studying how Trump's language navigates power dynamics in a multilateral setting.

At the discursive practice level, Trump's NATO Summit speeches are produced within a context of populist nationalism, designed to appeal primarily to domestic audiences while addressing international allies. The production process reflects Trump's direct, unfiltered style, as seen in his 2017 speech where he demands that NATO members "must finally contribute their fair share," echoing his campaign rhetoric of economic nationalism (Chryssogelos, 2024). Intertextuality, central to Wodak's DHA, is evident in how these speeches repurpose domestic slogans like "America First" to challenge NATO's institutional norms, recontextualizing U.S. leadership as a transactional relationship (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). Interpretation varies significantly: domestic supporters view the rhetoric as a bold defense of U.S. interests, whereas NATO allies often perceive it as confrontational, interpreting phrases like "chronic underpayment" (2018) as undermining alliance unity. This polarized production and reception disrupt diplomatic discourse, straining transatlantic relations and reshaping international alliances by prioritizing unilateral demands over collaborative norms.

Social Practice Level

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines Donald Trump's NATO Summit speeches (notably from 2017 and 2018) at the social practice level of Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, focusing on the ideological and institutional contexts in which his discourse operates. The reference to the "Wodak model" likely indicates Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), which emphasizes historical and ideological dimensions, complementing Fairclough's framework by situating Trump's rhetoric within broader socio-political structures. This analysis aligns with the research objectives: (i) to critically analyze Trump's discursive

strategies for constructing and projecting power, and (ii) to explore their impact on diplomatic discourse and international relations. The NATO Summit speeches, delivered to allied leaders, are critical texts for analyzing how Trump's language reflects and reshapes ideological and institutional norms in a key multilateral setting.

At the social practice level, Trump's NATO Summit discourse operates within a global context of rising populism and skepticism toward multilateral alliances, promoting a nationalist ideology that challenges the institutional norms of NATO, which emphasize collective defense and cooperation. His rhetoric, as seen in the 2017 NATO Summit speech where he criticized allies for "not paying their fair share," reflects an "America First" ideology that prioritizes U.S. interests over collective security, undermining the institutional trust central to NATO's framework (Chrysosgelos, 2024). Wodak's DHA highlights how Trump's discourse draws on historical narratives of American dominance, recontextualizing them to justify demands for increased allied contributions and to assert unilateral power (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2024). By framing NATO allies as dependent or exploitative, Trump's language disrupts diplomatic norms of mutual respect, straining transatlantic relations and reshaping the ideological landscape of international alliances, with lasting effects on global security dynamics.

Conclusion

This Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Donald Trump's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) addresses, Presidential Inaugural Address, and NATO Summit speeches, utilizing Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model and Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), reveals the intricate ways in which Trump's language constructs and projects power, significantly impacting international relations and diplomacy. At the textual level, Trump's speeches employ linguistic features such as evaluative adjectives ("great," "strong"), assertive modality ("we will"), and binary pronoun usage ("we" vs. "they"), which emphasize American exceptionalism and polarize global actors, as seen in phrases like "America first" (2017 Inaugural) and "unmatched power" (2017 UNGA). These features, reinforced by repetitive, conversational structures, diverge from diplomatic norms of ambiguity, projecting hard power through nationalist and confrontational rhetoric. At the discursive practice level, the production of these speeches reflects a populist agenda, repurposing domestic campaign rhetoric to challenge multilateral norms, while their polarized interpretation celebrated domestically but often criticized internationally strains alliances, as evident in the 2018 UNGA critique of globalism (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2025). At the social practice level, Trump's discourse operates within a global context of rising populism, reinforcing an "America First" ideology that undermines institutions like the UN and NATO, recontextualizing historical narratives of American dominance to justify unilateral policies.

The analysis underscores that Trump's rhetoric, by prioritizing national sovereignty over cooperation, disrupts traditional diplomatic discourse, fostering tensions with allies and reshaping global power dynamics. His language, particularly in high-stakes settings like the UNGA and NATO Summits, challenges institutional trust and reframes international relations as a competitive, zero-sum game, as seen in his 2017 NATO demand for allies to "pay their fair share." This study highlights the critical role of language in diplomacy, demonstrating how Trump's discursive strategies rooted in populism and nationalism have lasting implications for global alliances and U.S. leadership perceptions. Future research could extend this analysis to other populist leaders' rhetoric, exploring comparative impacts on international relations to further elucidate the interplay between language, power, and diplomacy.

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