

## A STORY OF *US VS THEM* IN BENJAMIN NETANYAHU'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS IN 2024

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### Abstract

*Adopting Van Dijk's Ideological Square and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar this study conducts a critical discourse analysis of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress on July 25, 2024. It tries to uncover the discursive construction of the Self (Israel, US, allies) and Other ( Hamas, Iran, proxies) during the Gaza War. Five key themes— victimhood, self-power and defense, global threat of the Other, alliance and unity, and glorification of the Self—that frame Israel as a morally superior defender of civilization against a barbaric, existential threat are identified. Through transitivity structures, material processes position the Self as a proactive agent and the Other as a violent aggressor, while relational processes assign positive qualities to the Self and negative traits to the Other. Discursive strategies, including hyperbole, parallelism, and selective evidence, align with van Dijk's model by emphasizing the group polarization of the Us versus Them dichotomy. Netanyahu's speech reinforces a polarized narrative to justify Israel's military actions and rally US support. This study highlights how political discourse manipulates linguistic and ideological tools to shape power dynamics and public perception in times of conflict.*

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis; Ideological Square; Transitivity; Gaza War; Self/Other Representation.

### Introduction

One of the Middle East's oldest and most important national liberation movements is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has been an international issue since the establishment of the Zionist Entity in 1948, followed by many wars over the years, culminating in the most recent escalation with the Gaza War on October 7, 2023. It all began when Hamas attacked Israel, which led to the loss of 1,200 lives and the taking of 240 hostages (McGarvey, 2023). By then, Israel's revenge campaign in Gaza had killed more than 39,000 Palestinians, uprooted the majority of the population, and caused a humanitarian crisis (UNRWA, 2024). It had also drawn international condemnation and International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants for Netanyahu, which he dismissed as *utter nonsense* (Netanyahu, 2024).

Domestically, Netanyahu faced immense pressure, with protests in Tel Aviv putting popular opposition to the forefront, and poll results showing that two out of three of the Israeli public demanded his resignation over his management of the war and his failure to secure a hostage agreement (Israel Democracy Institute, 2024). The speech was delivered in a chaotic election year in America, after Biden had pulled out of the presidential race and after a failed assassination attempt on Trump. More than half a dozen Democrats boycotted the speech in protest over Gaza, but Republicans showed their approval by giving Netanyahu 58 standing ovations (Ravid, 2024).

The broader Middle Eastern context included Iran's April 2024 attack on Israel with over 200 missiles, countered by a US-led coalition, and ongoing threats from Hezbollah and the Houthis. Netanyahu framed the Gaza war as a shared US-Israel fight against Iran's "axis of terror," proposing an *Abraham Alliance* to confront Iran, building on the 2020 Abraham Accords (Netanyahu, 2024; U.S. State Department, 2020). However, the speech widened divisions, with 92 legislators boycotting it, protests, flag-burning, disruptions, and critics like Nancy Pelosi calling it the *worst* by a visiting foreign leader for lacking a peace vision (Politico, 2024). With the Israeli-Palestinian conflict unresolved and American public opinion evolving, the speech highlighted the tense United States-Israel relations.

Political discourses are so effective in producing and reproducing unequal power relations between different groups (Taylor, 2013, p. 77). They are considered the primary means of influencing others using rhetoric to persuade and claim leadership (Klebanov et al. 2008). During times of war, politicians employ specific words and phrases to distort facts, justify their crimes, and influence public opinion (Bazzi, 2009; Bingtian, 2017). According to Abu Khaled (2020, p.34), critical discourse analysis of such political speeches helps the reader critically evaluate the information presented.

Previous studies by Rababah and Hamdan (2019), Alsemeiri et al. (2024), and Aljurjia et al. (2024) analyze Netanyahu's speeches, focusing on his use of van Dijk's Ideological Square to polarize the *Self* and the *Other* as a threat. This study aligns with these findings, noting similar strategies in Netanyahu's 2024 US Congress speech, such as selective evidence and emotional appeals to glorify the "Self" and demonize the "Other". However, it differs by integrating Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) for a detailed linguistic analysis, focusing solely on the 2024 Congress speech. It emphasizes how distinct ideological perspectives are articulated through discursive strategies, showing the unique context of US-Israel relations during a divisive election year, unlike the comparative approach of Rababah and Hamdan (2019). Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1- What are the principal themes employed in the speech delivered by the Israeli Prime Minister to US Congress to underscore the *Us vs Them* dichotomy?
- 2- What role do transitivity structures play in reflecting the ideology of the speaker in terms of in-group and out-group representations within the discourse?
- 3- To what extent do the discursive strategies in the speech exemplify van Dijk's Ideological Square in relation to *Self-Other* presentation?

## Literature Review

### Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach covering almost every aspect of language use in either social or political matters. Most recently, it has been argued that CDA is an increasingly important tool for critical-qualitative-communication research (Reynolds 2018). Fairclough (2013) argued that CDA is a framework for the analysis of language in relation to power and ideology. Van Dijk ((1985, p. 352, as cited in Wang, 2010, p. 256)) has stressed that, "Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context". The foremost focus of CDA is to highlight how applied power in discourse is used to counter and control the minds and actions of the dominant groups, and to protect their interests. CDA thus places particular emphasis on the ways in which certain events or persons are legitimized within certain ideological beliefs. The primary aim of CDA is to fill the gap between micro and macro level approaches that are usually established by sociological construction within a society. CDA helps uncover the subtle techniques writers and speakers employ to present a particular viewpoint in indirect and understated ways (Ashipu & Odey, 2016, p. 19). Furthermore, it must be noted that CDA provides the tools and methods that are necessary in order to conduct analysis of the dialogical relations between discourse and ideology. The following section outlines the outstanding contribution of van Dijk to CDA.

### Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach

In his remarkable contributions to CDA, van Dijk articulates a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates ideology, politics, cognition, and discourse (Tenorio, 2015). He argues that his Socio-cognitive Approach is influenced by meaning (van Dijk, 2008). That is, a person can do anything to achieve his/her goal. Therefore, vanDijk tried to connect textual,

cognitive, and social structures. According to him, textual structure and social structure are intervened by social cognition. What distinguishes his discourse analysis from traditional content studies is focusing on a systematic description of semantic and syntactic features of text. One of the key approaches that focuses upon *the self-other* schema is the Ideological Square.

### Ideological Square Model

Accordingly, VanDijk (2004, 2006) asserts that this analytical framework is well suited for exploring and highlighting the polarization of "us" vs. "Them", where the speaker and his or her allies are considered to be 'us or in-group', while his or her opponents are placed in the 'them' or 'out- group' category. The ideological square emphasizes the oppositions in the self-other representations, where the self or the in-group is often represented as positive, while the other, the out-group, is represented as negative. In the representation of the self, the positive aspects of the self are always highlighted alongside the negative aspects of the other. Furthermore, the negative aspects of the self are almost always mitigated and then played down, alongside the positive aspects of the other. The researchers strongly feel that VanDijk's ideological square is an appropriate analytical tool to reveal how Netanyahu always presents himself, along with US and allies (us) as positive, while simultaneously portraying Hamas, Iran and proxies (them) in a negative way. Similarly, the approach also allows the researchers to highlight how Netanyahu mitigates his own bad also allows the researchers to highlight how Trump mitigates his own bad actions and statements towards the Muslim community, while hiding or mitigating the Muslims' contributions and efforts for the betterment of the United States. Van Dijk (2004) posits that there are two stages of the analysis; macro-analysis; and, micro-analysis. For the macro-analysis, Van Dijk (2004) has identified four basic strategies that are used in order to legitimize the self and de-legitimize the other;

1. Emphasize positive things about 'us'.
2. Emphasize negative things about 'them'
3. De-emphasize negative things about 'us'.
4. De-emphasize positive things about 'them'.

Thus, in terms of macro-analysis, the research's epistemic underpinning focuses upon the self-other binary is as demonstrated below;

**Netanyahu:** Self, We, Us → In-group

**Others:** They, Them → Out-group

In terms of the micro-analysis, this model comprises 26 key terms or can be said as rhetorical discursive strategies (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 735). These micro-strategies are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

List of Van Dijk's Discursive Strategies (Van Dijk, 2005, pp. 735-36)

Actor description	Authority	Burden
Categorization	Comparison	Consensus
Counterfactuals	Disclaimers	Euphemism
Evidentiality	Example/Illustration	Generalization
Hyperbole	Implication	Irony
Lexicalization	Metaphor	National Self-Glorification
Negative Other-representation	Norm Expression	Number Game
Polarization	Populism	Positive Self-Representation
Presupposition	Vagueness	Victimization

### Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic functional grammar (SFG) is a form of grammatical analysis developed by Michael Halliday (1985) in which systemic refers to the view of language paradigm for conceptualizing language as a social semiotic system (Eggins, 2004, p. 2). Functional means Halliday's opinion that language has inherently evolved to be functional. He refers to the "functional components" of language which "determines the form taken by grammatical structure" Halliday refers to his functions of language as "Metafunctions", which can be generalized as : Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 29–30). Nevertheless, for space limitation, the analysis focuses only on the ideational function.

#### Ideational Function

It represents human experience of the external real world as well as the internal world of consciousness, including individuals' perceptions, reactions, and understandings (Halliday, 1970, p. 332). It consists mainly of "Transitivity" and "Voice" in grammar, where the clause is the meaningful grammatical unit that expresses what is happening, what is being done, etc (Wang, 2010). Transitivity has three components:

- 1- The process itself, which is realized by a verbal group.
- 2- The participants involved in the process, realized by nominal groups functioning as subjects or objects.
- 3- The circumstances associated with the process, realized by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases (Thabit, 2020, p. 487).

The transitivity system encompasses six types of processes: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential. See the following table (Thabit, 2020, p. 487).

**Table 2**

*Overview of process types (Wang, 2010)*

Process types	Core meaning	Participants	Example
<b>Material</b>	<i>doing, happening</i>	Actor, Goal	The girl eats a banana
<b>Mental</b>	<i>sensing</i>	Sensor, phenomenon	Jane loves Sara
<b>Relational</b>	<i>being</i>		My father is tall, Your sister is my friend
<b>Verbal</b>	<i>saying</i>	Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage	My father told me to stand up I had to explain the problem again
<b>Behavioral</b>	<i>behaving</i>	Behaver	I don’t worry about the future
<b>Existential</b>	<i>existing</i>	Existent	There is a park near my house

### Methodology

This study adopts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) articulated by van Dijk and Halliday, operating at both micro- and macro-analytical levels. As illustrated above, Van Dijk’s *Ideological Squar*’ model prioritizes social variables—such as power and ideology—over linguistic forms. Conversely, Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) emphasizes linguistic textual analysis, with a particular focus on lexico-syntactic structures. It offers linguistically grounded insights into the social functions of discourse (Clarence-Fincham, 2001, p. 25). Consequently, SFG serves as a robust instrument for detailed linguistic analysis, addressing potential limitations in CDA’s textual granularity. The integration of these two frameworks thus bridges the linguistic and social dimensions of analysis. In other words, this methodology synthesizes micro-level patterns within a text with macro-level patterns reflective of broader cultural and societal contexts.

## Data Collection

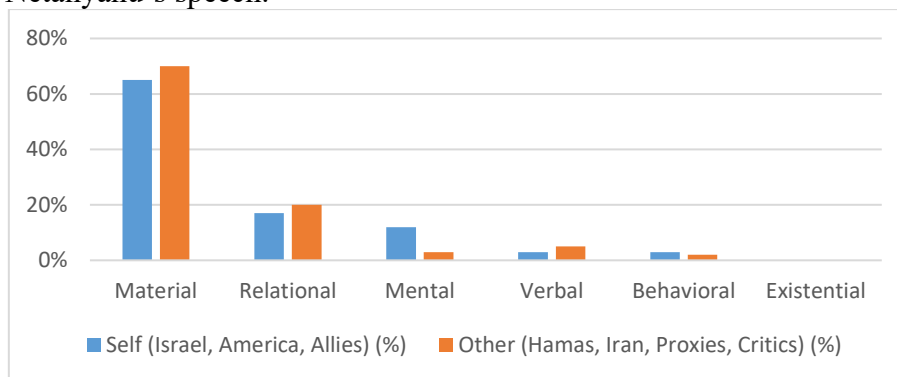
In this study, the data analyzed is the one-hour-long speech delivered by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the United States Congress on July 25, 2024. The full text of the speech is available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/were-protecting-you-full-text-of-netanyahus-address-to-congress/>. The researcher selected this speech which is approximately 4,500 words, for its high-profile context amid the Gaza War and US election year tensions, thus providing a rich dataset for analyzing ideological polarization.

## Analysis and Discussion

The transcript was manually segmented into approximately 1,200 clauses using Halliday's (1994) clause-as-message framework, where each clause represents a single process. Clauses were coded based on process types (e.g., material: *Hamas butchered 1,200 people*; relational: *Israel is a proud democracy*) following Wang's (2010) definitions. The analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods.

### Quantitative Analysis of Transitivity Processes

Quantitatively, clauses are extracted from the transcript and categorized by process type to calculate frequency distributions. The figure below presents the frequency of transitivity processes used to represent the Self (Israel, America, Allies) and the Other (Hamas, Iran, proxies) in Netanyahu's speech.



**Figure 1**

### *Processes of the Self and Other in Netanyahu's Speech*

As shown above, the distribution mirrors an action-oriented discourse with material processes organizing conflict dynamics and relational processes reinforcing ideological polarization. Material processes are predominant in the speech, foregrounding actions for both parties, at 65% for the *Self* and 70% for the *Other*. This indicates a concern with agency and events, with slightly greater emphasis on actions of the *Other*, presumably to underscore their threat. Relational processes, describing attributes and states, account for 17% (*Self*) and 20% (*Other*), indicating a sustained effort to build the *Other's* negative identity (e.g., "sheer evil") and the *Self's* positive identity (e.g., "proud democracy"). Mental processes appear more frequently regarding the *Self* (12%) compared to the *Other* (3%), highlighting the *Self's* moral consciousness and determination (e.g., *we deeply regret*), and rarely assigning cognitive attributes to the *Other*, hence dehumanizing them. Verbal Processes are scarce (3% *Self*, 2% *Other*), utilized minimally for conveying the *Self's* authoritative opinions (e.g., statements by Biden) and the misrepresentations by the *Other* (demonstrated through ICC allegations). The absence of Existential Processes in both models indicates that the speech concentrates on action and identity, rather than existence.

### Qualitative Analysis of Netanyahu's Speech (July 25, 2024)

Qualitatively, van Dijk's Ideological Square is applied to identify discursive strategies (e.g., hyperbole, parallelism, selective evidence) that construct the *Self* and *Other*, organized into

five thematic categories: victimhood, self-power, global threat, alliance, and glorification. SFG's transitivity system examines clause-level structures, focusing on material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes to reveal agency and attribute assignments. Qualitative analysis selected representative examples for each theme, cross-referenced with Van Dijk's discursive strategies (e.g., hyperbole: "20 9/11s"). The focus on SFG's ideational function was chosen to prioritize ideological content over interpersonal engagement or textual cohesion, as the research questions center on Self/Other representation. The most dominant themes identified are illustrated in the following subsections.

### Victimhood Theme

The victimhood narrative portrays Israel as an innocent victim of unjustified aggression by Hamas, Iran, and their proxies, projecting the same suffering onto allied nations such as America. The examples below illustrate how Netanyahu's 2024 speech employs transitivity to portray Hamas as an aggressor, thereby casting Israel as a passive victim of the October 7 assault.

1. "Three thousand Hamas terrorists **stormed** into Israel". (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 6) (Material: Actor = Hamas, Goal = Israel)
2. "They **butchered** 1,200 people... **raped** women, **beheaded** men, **burnt** babies alive" (para. 6) (Material: Actor = Hamas, Goal = victims).
3. "They **dragged** 255 people... into the dark dungeons of Gaza" (para. 6) (Material: Actor = Hamas, Goal = hostages).
4. "October 7th is a day that will forever live in infamy" (para. 5) (Carrier = October 7, Attribute = infamy).
5. "The pain these families have endured is beyond words" (para. 15) (Carrier = pain, Attribute = beyond words).
6. "The entire world saw Noa's look of desperation" (para. 8) (Sensor = world, Phenomenon = Noa's desperation).
7. "At 6:29 a.m., as children were still sleeping soundly" (para. 6) (Circumstance = time, manner).
8. "In the towns and kibbutzim next to Gaza" (para. 6) (Circumstance = place).

As the examples from (1) to (3) show, Hamas is consistently the Actor in material processes, acting violence upon Israel as the Goal, constructing Israel as a passive victim. Graphic verbs (*butchered, raped, burnt*) intensify Hamas's violence. Adjectives like (*brutal, evil, genocidal, radical, murderous*) represent Hamas as monsters, and subhuman threats, stripping them of virtue. The graphic details—*they burnt babies alive, monstrous evil*-- create horror and sympathy, opposing *Us (life sanctifying)* to *Them (death glorifying)*. These dehumanizing metaphors are common in political rhetoric to represent opponents as enemies (Knoblock, 2022 p. 142). Relational processes in (4) and (5) assign long-term trauma to the *Self*, enhancing victimhood's emotional gravity. Mental process in (6) involves global sympathy, augmenting the *Self's* pain through shared perception. Circumstances of time and place (e.g., *during a vacation, in a tranquil environment*) increase the unprovoked nature of the attack, amplifying victimhood. Accordingly, the speech graphically defines actors in order to shore up ideological positions. The following are some examples of how Netanyahu's 2024 speech employs transitivity in representing Iran and its proxies as active aggressors, posing a threat to America and Israel globally.

9-"Iran's terrorist proxies targeted America" (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 62) (Material: Actor = proxies, Goal = America).

10-"They killed 241 U.S. servicemen" (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 62) (Material: Actor = proxies, Goal = servicemen).

11- “They even brazenly threatened to assassinate President Trump” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 62)

(Material: Actor = Iran, Goal = Trump).

12- The Houthis attacked Tel Aviv with a deadly drone. (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 70)

(Material: Actor=the Houthis, Goal=TelAviv’ Circustaanee=deadly drone)

Iran and its proxies are framed as a burden to international security. Iran is described as *virtually behind all the terrorism, and all the turmoil*. They are Actors concentrated on America, extending victimhood to the *Self’s* best friend, reinforcing a shared risk. The following examples show how Netanyahu employs transitivity to frame anti-Israel protesters and the ICC as unjust accusers, reinforcing Israel’s victimhood by aligning them with evil.

13- “The prosecutor... accused Israel of deliberately starving the people of Gaza”

(Netanyahu, 2024, para. 41) (Verbal: Sayer = ICC, Verbiage = accusation).

14-“These protesters stand with rapists and murderers” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 25)

(Relational: Carrier = protesters, Attribute = aligned with evil).

Verbal and relational processes in (13) and (14) frame protesters and the ICC as unfairly targeting Israel, depicting the *Self* as a victim of *malicious lies* comparable to historical antisemitism (e.g., *blood libels*). Netanyahu appeals to populism in criticizing elite establishments like Harvard, Penn, and MIT presidents who *couldn’t condemn calls for genocide*, and the ICC prosecutor’s *fancy silk robes*, i.e., out of touch, contrasting with the *vast majority of Americans* who aid Israel. For him, protesters are *Iran’s useful idiots* who are *siding with evil*. Sarcasm (*Chickens for KFC*) and accusations ignorance (*F in geography*) suppress *Their* legitimacy. This irony underscored the absurdity of their stance (Macagno & Walton, 2017). He extends the out-group to include dissenters and the ICC, whose claims are disregarded as *utter complete nonsense*. In another way, hyperbolic language intensifies the narrative (Clark & Clark, 2005, p. 29). Hamas’s attack is likened to *20 9/11s* in one day, and Iran’s plans are *maniacal to impose radical Islam on the world.*” Protesters are mocked as holding signs akin to *Chickens for KFC*.

To sum up, Hamas’s material processes position it as an active aggressor, contrasting with Israel’s passive role as the Goal, emphasizing the Other’s negative actions. **Actor’s description** vividly portrays Hamas as *monsters*. Israel’s victimhood is emphasized by including America and allies, aligning with van Dijk’s strategy of positive *Self*-presentation through shared suffering. The ICC and protesters are delegitimized via verbal processes labeled as *nonsense* and relational attributes tying them to *evil*, de-emphasizing any positive critique they might offer. In other words, the *Self* (Israel, America) is depicted as innocent, suffering unjustly, with narratives like Noa Argamani’s abduction and hostage families’ pain evoking sympathy (e.g., *two beautiful red-haired children taken hostage*). This aligns Israel with universal human values. Hamas is labeled *monsters*”who commit heinous acts (e.g., *burnt babies alive*), and Iran’s proxies are blamed for global terrorism (e.g., *killed 241 U.S. servicemen*). The apocalyptic imagery (*deadly drone*) escalates the stakes to justify action. This maximizes the *Other’s* evil. The speech omits Israel’s military actions as a context for October 7, focusing solely on Hamas’s aggression, thus avoiding scrutiny of the *Self’s* role. No positive motives or contexts for Hamas or Iran are acknowledged, reducing them to *barbarism* and erasing any legitimacy.

### Self-Power and Defense Theme

After establishing victimhood, Netanyahu shifts to portray Israel and its allies as powerful, resolute agents of defense and civilization, contrasting sharply with the *Other’s* barbarism. Transitivity structures illustrate this through: (1) Israel’s defensive actions, (2) America’s support, (3) moral superiority, (4) de-emphasizing negatives, and (5) parallel structures. Consider the following examples that show Israel’s defensive actions and America’s support:

15- “Israel has already brought home 135 hostages” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 7) (Material: Actor = Israel, Goal = hostages).

16- “I authorized a breathtaking commando rescue operation” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 9) (Material: Actor = Netanyahu, Goal = operation).

17- “We will fight until we destroy Hamas’ military capabilities” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 66) (Material: Actor = Israel, Goal = Hamas).

18- “He dispatched two aircraft carriers” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 18) (Material: Actor = Biden, Goal = carriers).

19- “We’ve jointly developed... sophisticated weapons” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 65) (Material: Actor = Israel/America, Goal = weapons).

Israel is the Actor in material processes of rescue and combat, as in (16) and (17), depicting strength and agency. Verbs like *brought*, *authorized*, and *destroyed* convey decisiveness. America’s material processes in (18) and (19) reinforce its role as a powerful ally, enhancing the *Self*’s collective strength. They highlight the speech’s emphasis on a symbiotic partnership. Sentences like—*Our enemies are your enemies, our fight is your fight*—mirror the speech’s focus on *shared values* and *interests*. Netanyahu’s lexical choices (*jointly developed*, *indispensable ally*) and historical analogies (e.g., Churchill’s *give us the tools*) position Israel as a frontline defender of Western civilization, a narrative amplified by adjectives like *great*, *loyal*, and *steadfast*. It presupposes Israel’s actions are defensive, ignoring prior contexts, and that protests are Iran-funded without direct proof. This positive self-presentation legitimizes Israel’s demand for fast-tracked US military aid, framed as a mutual investment to *expedite an end to the war in Gaza*. He also invokes President Biden’s support, quoting him calling Hamas *sheer evil*, and historical figures like *Winston Churchill* to draw parallels. Moral superiority, conveyed through relational and mental processes, attributing democratic values and remorse to the *Self*, is illustrated below:

20- “Israel is a proud pro-American democracy” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 56) (Relational: Carrier = Israel, Attribute = democracy).

21- “America remains the beacon of liberty” (para. 75) (Relational: Carrier = America, Attribute = beacon).

22- “These are the soldiers of Israel—unbowed, undaunted, unafraid” (para. 27) (Carrier = soldiers, Attribute = resilient).

23- “We deeply regret every single civilian casualty” (para. 48) (Mental: Sensor = Israel, Phenomenon = casualties).

As shown above, relational processes attribute positive qualities such as democracy, liberty, and courage to the *Self*, reinforcing its moral and physical strength, while mental processes like *regret* in (23) humanize Israel, contrasting with the *Other*’s lack of remorse. Netanyahu’s Zionist worldview aligns with his *civilization vs. barbarism* dichotomy, constructing *Us* as morally superior and *Them* as existential threats. This justifies Israel’s policies while deflecting Palestinian or international perspectives. Netanyahu began to de-emphasize negatives, employing agentless passives and euphemisms to minimize civilian casualties, as in the following examples:

24- “Palestinian civilians were... unintentionally killed” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 51) (Material: Goal = civilians, Actor omitted, Circumstance = unintentionally).

25- “Practically none [civilians killed]... with the exception of a single incident” (para. 51) (Relational: Carrier = civilian deaths, Attribute = minimal, Circumstance = exception).

26- “Israel got the civilians out of harm’s way. (para. 51) (Material: Actor = Israel, Goal = civilians, Circumstance = out of harm’s way).

Negative actions by Israel, such as civilian casualties in Gaza, are minimized or reframed. Netanyahu claims Israel takes unprecedented measures to avoid civilian harm, citing *millions*

of flyers and hundreds of thousands of phone calls to evacuate civilians. He asserts that in Rafah, civilian deaths were *practically none*, attributing any casualties to incidental causes like *shrapnel from a bomb*. Euphemisms are used here to minimize Israel's actions and soften the impact of violence. Moreover, Netanyahu cites authoritative figures to lend credibility. He cites Colonel John Spencer; head of urban warfare studies at West Point, *who claims Israel takes unprecedented precautions to minimize civilian harm*, and President Biden, who called Hamas *sheer evil*. This de-emphasizes potential criticisms of Israel's military actions, aligning with the ideological goal of maintaining a positive *Self*-image.

Agentless passives and circumstantial qualifiers (e.g., *unintentionally, practically none*) minimize Israel's responsibility for civilian deaths, framing them as anomalies. Material processes like *dropped flyers* and *sent text messages* emphasize protective efforts. It is noted the conspicuous avoidance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a silence my analysis expands with the erasure of pre-October 7 context (e.g., blockade, settlements). Netanyahu's vision—*Palestinians must no longer be taught to hate Jews*—reduces *Their* agency to negativity, suppressing any positive framing of resistance or culture. Disclaimers acknowledged civilian deaths as *tragic* but *inevitable*, while counterfactuals (e.g., *if Hamas surrendered, the war would end*) shifted blame. This aligns with Van Dijk's critique of hegemonic discourse suppressing alternative perspectives.

Netanyahu resorts to parallelism, contrasting Israel's benevolence with Hamas's malevolence via semantic opposites, amplifying ideological legitimacy through emotive storytelling. Consider the following:

27-“Israel... dropped millions of flyers... to get Palestinian civilians out of harm's way” vs. “Hamas does everything... to put Palestinian civilians in harm's way” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 29) (Material: Actor = Israel/Hamas, Goal = civilians).

28-“For Israel, every civilian death is a tragedy” vs “For Hamas, it's a strategy” (para. 30) (Relational: Carrier = Israel/Hamas, Attribute = tragedy/strategy).

29- It's a clash between those who glorify death and those who sanctify life. (para. 3)

30-to transform a troubled region, from a backwater of oppression,.....into a thriving oasis of dignity. (para. 52)

According to (Aarts et al., 2019), parallelism is commonly used to emphasize negative properties of opponents in a memorized way (p. 676). Parallel transitivity structures contrast Israel's benevolence with Hamas's malevolence, using semantic opposites (*sanctify life* vs *glorify death, backwater of oppression* vs. *a thriving oasis of dignity*) to sharpen moral distinctions. Netanyahu's call for a *thriving oasis of dignity* in the Middle East was poetic but lacked policy substance, sidestepping contentious issues like settlement expansion or the pre-October 7 Gaza blockade. This vagueness served to de-emphasize *Our bad* by ignoring Israel's role in the conflict's structural conditions, aligning with positive *Self*-presentation by focusing on lofty ideals.

Material processes depict Israel as a capable Actor, shifting from victim to defender, aligning with positive *Self*-presentation. Stories of soldiers like *Asa Sofer* and *Ashraf al Bahiri* highlight diversity and heroism. Storytelling is a highly effective persuasive tool, as emotions significantly influence rational thinking, particularly in decision-making processes (Ferretti, 2022, p. 20). Relational processes (e.g., *lions of Judah*) glorify the *Self* as resilient and righteous. Mental processes construct the *Self* as virtuous and humane, reinforcing ideological legitimacy. The *Other's* aggression (e.g., *Hamas... fire rockets from schools*) contrasts with the *Self's* defensive actions, reinforcing the *Other's* immorality. Civilian casualties are downplayed via passives and qualifiers (e.g., *shrapnel... unintentionally killed*), aligning with minimizing the *Self's* flaws. The *Other's* military or political strategies are ignored, focusing only on their “strategy” of civilian deaths. Parallel structures amplify the *Self's* moral

superiority, positioning Hamas as the antithesis of civilization, fulfilling negative *Other*-presentation.

### Global Threat of the Other

The global threat of the *Other* theme in Netanyahu's speech constructs Hamas and Iran as a unified, existential danger to global civilization, justifying collective action. Transitivity structures, including material processes depicting their violence, relational processes categorizing them as terroristic, and verbal processes highlighting their depravity, frame a cohesive enemy, aligning with Van Dijk's negative *Other*-presentation and persuasive storytelling as shown below:

31- "Hamas... came into the kibbutzim... murdered the babies" (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 19) (Material: Actor = Hamas, Goal = babies).

32- "When we fight Hamas, we're fighting Iran" (para. 38) (Material: Actor = Israel, Goal = Hamas/Iran).

33- "Iran is virtually behind all the terrorism" (para. 34) (Relational: Carrier = Iran, Attribute = source of terrorism).

34- "He boasted that Palestinian women and children excel at being human shields" (para. 29) (Sayer = Hamas official, Verbiage = boast).

Material processes in (31- 32)) depict the *Other* as a relentless Actor and detailing their violence. Relational process in (33) categorizes Iran as a unified threat, with material processes. Verbal processes in (34) attribute depravity to the *Other*, reinforcing their moral bankruptcy. According to Hodges (2007), "adequation is a tactic not only used by a group to identify itself, but used from an outside position of power to impose sufficient sameness on others for political purposes" (p.83). Material processes equate Hamas with Iran's proxies, constructing a cohesive enemy, aligning with Van Dijk's negative *Other*-presentation through imposed sameness. The globalized threat justifies international support, aligning with positive *Self*-presentation by positioning Israel as a bulwark for civilization. By framing the *Self* as a bulwark against a global threat, Israel's fight gains universal significance (e.g., *we're protecting you*). The *Other* is a cohesive *axis of terror*, with material processes (e.g., *targeted America*) and relational attributes (e.g., radical Islam) maximizing their danger. The *Self*'s role in escalating regional tensions is omitted, focusing on the *Other*'s aggression. No political or social contexts for Hamas or Iran are acknowledged, reducing them to a singular evil entity.

### Alliance and Unity Theme

Netanyahu claims broad support stating that *the vast majority of Americans... continue to support Israel* and thanking bipartisan congressional support. He suggests a regional consensus via the *Abraham Alliance*, citing cooperation on April 14 against Iranian missiles. This theme emphasizes Israel-U.S. solidarity and proposes a regional *Abraham Alliance* to counter Iran, rooted in shared values and interests.

35- "We've jointly developed... sophisticated weapons" (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 44) (Actor = Israel/America, Goal = weapons).

36- "More than half a dozen nations worked alongside Israel" (para. 48) (Actor = nations, Goal = neutralize missiles).

37- "America and Israel must stand together" (para. 3) (Carrier = America/Israel, Attribute = united).

38- "Israel will always be your loyal friend" (para. 52) (Carrier = Israel, Attribute = loyal).

39- "I know that America has our back" (para. 43) (Senser = Netanyahu, Phenomenon = America's support).

Material processes depict collective action, with verbs like *developed* and *worked* highlighting cooperation. Relational processes build a unified identity, attributing loyalty and shared destiny to the *Self*. Mental processes express trust, reinforcing alliance strength. The *Self* is a cohesive

unit of democracies (e.g., *great alliance*), with material processes (e.g., *forged peace*) emphasizing constructive collaboration. The *Other's* threat (e.g., *Iran's axis*) necessitates this alliance, contrasting with the *Self's* peace-seeking nature. Potential criticisms of the alliance (e.g., exclusionary aspects) are ignored, focusing on unity. The *Other's* alliances or regional influences are dismissed as terror-driven. This tone cultivates a sense of moral obligation. The frequent use of inclusive pronouns (*we, our, us*) merges Israeli and American identities. Phrases like *we stand together* and *our victory will be your victory* foster an interpersonal bond, aligning the audience with Israel's cause. Netanyahu's direct address—*My friends, "Honorable Members of Congress"*—and personal anecdotes (e.g., *meeting hostage families*) enhance this connection, appealing to the audience's emotions and reinforcing *Us* as a united front. When discussing the future of Gaza or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Netanyahu utilized vague, aspirational language to avoid committing to specific political solutions, such as a two-state solution or Palestinian statehood. He suggested a vision for a *demilitarized* and *deradicalized* Gaza, stating, *Palestinians must no longer be taught to hate Jews*, but offered no clear mechanism or timeline for achieving this. The terms *demilitarized* and *deradicalized* are abstract, implying a desirable goal without addressing practical challenges, such as Gaza's governance or reconstruction.

### **Glorification of the Self**

The speech also culminates in glorifying Israel and America as innovative, resilient democracies. This can be captured through the speech on Israel's Achievements and the American role as illustrated below:

40-“We built a powerful and vibrant democracy” (Netanyahu, 2024, para. 50) (Material: Actor = Israel, Goal = democracy).

41-“We restored our sovereignty in our ancient homeland” (para. 50) (Material: Actor = Jewish people, Goal = sovereignty).

42-“America remains the beacon of liberty” (para. 51) (Relational: Carrier = America, Attribute = beacon).

43- “America will continue to be a force for light” (para. 51) (Relational: Carrier = America, Attribute = force).

Material processes in (40) and (41) highlight Israel's agency in overcoming adversity. Relational processes attribute timeless virtues to America, reinforcing the alliance. Glorification through material and relational processes maximizes positive Self-presentation (e.g., *vibrant democracy*, depicting the *Self* as a moral and innovative leader. Netanyahu appeals to norms like democracy, liberty, and justice. He states, *There is no room for political violence in democracies*, and calls for condemning antisemitism *without exception*, aligning the *Self* with universal values. The speech consistently portrays Israel and America as defenders of civilization, democracy, and liberty. Israel is depicted as a *proud pro-American democracy* fighting for *life* against *barbarism* (e.g., *For the forces of civilization to triumph, America and Israel must stand together*). America is lauded as the *guardian of Western civilization* and a *beacon of liberty*. Historical references (e.g., *Abraham, Isaac, and ancient homeland*) refuting colonialist accusations, aligning with van Dijk's strategy of refuting the *Other's* claims. Netanyahu provides specific evidence to counter such accusations. He cites *40,000 aid trucks* delivering *half a million tons of food* to refute starvation claims. He also gives precise figures, like *1,203 terrorists* killed in Rafah to persuade the audience and bolster his claims. The *Other's* actions (e.g., *chant 'Death to Israel'*) contrast with the *Self's* creativity and morality. Controversies like settlement policies are omitted, focusing on innovation and democracy. The *Other's* cultural or historical narratives are ignored, reinforcing the *Self's* unique legitimacy. The synergy of these strategies constructs a polarized narrative where the *Self* is unequivocally righteous, and the *Other* is irredeemably evil, reinforcing the ideological goal of garnering US

support for Israel's policies. Metaphors frame the conflict vividly. The world is at a *crossroads of history*, with a *clash between barbarism and civilization*. *Soldiers rise like lions*, and the Middle East could become a *thriving oasis* versus a *backwater of oppression*.

### Conclusion

This study provides a critical discourse analysis of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the US Congress on July 25, 2024. It adopts van Dijk's Ideological Square and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to construct a polarized *Us* (Israel, America, Allies) versus *Them* ( Hamas, Iran, Proxies) narrative in the context of the Gaza War. Netanyahu's address to the US Congress is a rhetorically sophisticated effort to gain American support for Israel's actions in the Gaza conflict.

Through thematic emphasis on victimhood, self-power, global threats, alliance, and glorification, Netanyahu depicts Israel and the US as morally superior defenders of civilization against the barbarism of Hamas, Iran, and their proxies. Netanyahu victimizes *the in-group* while framing the *out-group* as an existential danger, thereby justifying Israel's military actions and rallying US support. A micro-level analysis uncovers embedded ideological patterns, with transitivity structures encoding positive *Self*-presentation and negative *Other*-presentation. The *Self* is consistently positioned as the Actor in material processes, constructing Israel and its allies as proactive defenders of civilization, while the *Other* is portrayed through relational processes as a carrier of negative attributes, such as violence and depravity. Circumstances of manner underscore senses of threat, in-group suffering, and moral superiority, amplified by parallel grammatical structures and polarized lexicalization (e.g., *sanctify life* vs *glorify death*). Discursive strategies, including hyperbole, parallelism, and selective evidence, align with van Dijk's model by maximizing positive *Self*-presentation and negative *Other*-presentation. Meanwhile, they de-emphasize Israel's controversies, such as civilian casualties or the broader Palestinian context. By highlighting the *Other's* atrocities and de-emphasizing the *Self's* controversies, Netanyahu's discourse aggravates the out-group's negative image and reinforces a polarized narrative aligning with his strategic agenda of securing US military and political support. By framing the conflict as a shared struggle, Netanyahu strengthens the US-Israel alliance and justifies increased military aid, though the speech's omissions and polarized framing deepen divisions, as evidenced by congressional boycotts and protests. This analysis underscores how political discourse manipulates linguistic and ideological tools to reinforce power dynamics and shape public perception in times of conflict.

Further research on Benjamin Netanyahu's 2024 US Congress speech could explore comparative analyses with discourses from Palestinian leaders or US politicians. This may uncover competing ideological narratives, conduct longitudinal studies of Netanyahu's rhetoric to track evolving strategies, and investigate audience reception across diverse groups to assess persuasive impact.

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