

# A Critical Discourse Analysis of President Donald Trump's Speeches during the Coronavirus Pandemic Crisis<sup>1</sup>

Noor Al-Deen Awawdeh<sup>1</sup>, & Linda Al-Abbas<sup>1 2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Middle East University, Amman, Jordan

<sup>2</sup> Applied Science Research Center, Applied Science Private University, Amman, Jordan

Correspondence: Linda Al-Abbas, Middle East University, Amman, Jordan.

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## Abstract

This study investigates the potential ideological stances reflected in President Trump's speeches during the coronavirus crisis through the use of certain lexical items and grammatical constructions, including modal structures, comparative and superlative forms and pronouns. Two speeches delivered by Trump in two different phases of the coronavirus crisis are selected and analyzed in light of Fairclough's (1995) CDA three-dimensional model. The study found that Trump used linguistic devices to emphasize concepts related to America's superiority and supremacy, national unity, citizens' involvement, and self-glorification. In addition, egoism was also stressed through the use of the pronouns "I" and "we".

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, political speeches, Donald Trump, Coronavirus, Fairclough's model

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Communication between people is facilitated by language that is used to achieve many functions. According to Brown and Yule (1983), language serves two functions: transactional and interactional functions. A transactional function involves using language to transmit factual or propositional information and aims to develop cultural ideas, literature, laws, etc. On the other hand, an interactional function is characterized by using language to establish and maintain social relationships.

Discourse is the primary societal manifestation of communication. It refers to all forms of language interlocutors use in society (Fairclough, 1993; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 1997). It is the process of exchanging linguistic sentences between the speaker or writer and the listener or reader. Van Dijk (1997, p.2) defines discourse as "the form that people make of language to convey ideas, thoughts, or beliefs within a social context".

Discourse analysis (DA) is a linguistic field of inquiry that analyzes language at the context level from a grammatical standpoint (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Yule (2022) states that DA investigates how language users interpret and understand social and contextual messages communicated in linguistic texts.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) involves approaches that analyze vocal and written use of language related to evaluative procedures. Fairclough (1995) states that CDA is a kind of discourse analysis that investigates the frequency of ambiguous relations of determination and causality between texts, events, and the discursive practices and processes of social and cultural structures filled by the associations of struggles over power and ideology. Besides, Wodak (1995) assumes that CDA is an analysis that examines other ambiguous and unambiguous structural relationships of power, discrimination, control, and dominance, which can be found in language.

Among the domains that attract the attention of discourse analysts are presidential speeches. In late 2019, the coronavirus pandemic started in China and swept the whole world. During this period, the US President delivered many speeches during press conferences, updating the public on the latest news on the coronavirus outbreak and stressing his administration's efforts to confront the novel virus. His speeches utilized different linguistic strategies that may carry over and covert meanings. This study investigates the patterns of utterances in Trump's speeches in press conferences during the coronavirus pandemic. It explores the hidden implications of power and ideology in his speeches by analyzing the word choice and grammatical aspects, including modal structures, comparative and superlative forms, and pronouns. It mainly attempts to answer the following question:

1. What are the possible implications of Trump's choice of certain lexical items in his speeches during the coronavirus crisis?

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<sup>1</sup> This article is extracted from a Master's thesis in Middle East University, Amman, Jordan. <https://meu.edu.jo/libraryTheses/A%20Critical%20Discourse%20Analysis%20of%20President%20Donald%20Trump%E2%80%99s%20Speeches%20during.pdf>

2. What are the ideological stands reflected in Trump’s usage of specific grammatical constructions, including modal structures, comparative and superlative forms, and pronouns?

1.2 Political Discourse

Political discourse is an interdisciplinary subject in which different fields of study interact, such as politics, sociology, psychology, sociolinguistics, etc. Its importance stems from this discourse’s influence on the nation’s future. People know very well that politicians have a direct impact on the economic, social, cultural, and political aspects of life. However, it is politics which closely affects the decisions of war, peace, stability, or conflict. For this reason, political speeches have attracted the attention of scholars, trying to interpret all message types, whether implicit or explicit, and uncover what they mean in reality (Sheveleva, 2012).

Political discourse is usually spoken. It is delivered by an effective speaker; president, king, deputy parliament, minister, etc. Effective speakers should have the advantage of voice quality which helps them influence listeners. They have to pay attention to what they say and plan the outcomes of the speech. Hence, politicians seek effective speech to control and manipulate people’s minds. They use language to send their messages and achieve their goals.

Political language is usually simple because the speaker tries to communicate with people who cannot understand the complex language. Moreover, political speeches have a number of functions. First, it is used to transform and deepen a particular phenomenon. Second, it is used to convince listeners of the speaker’s ideas using techniques such as analysis and explanation. Seidel (1985) argued that political speech might constitute a domain, field or genre. Similarly, Van Dijk (1998) states that political discourse analysis deals with political authority abuse, supremacy or dominance. Thus, it is viewed as a class of genres defined by the domain of politics but not a genre by itself. Therefore, political speeches, electoral debates, parliamentary deliberations, political programs and government discussions are some of the politics-related genres.

The current study is concerned with the political discourse of President Donald Trump during the coronavirus pandemic. It investigates the structures that reveal some aspects of his political attitudes and ideologies.

1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method of analysis in relation to ideology and power (Fairclough, 2013). It is an approach that examines all aspects of language use in political or social domains. Jorgensen and Philips (2011) state that CDA has supplied methods for the empirical study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in various social domains.

Van Dijk (1998) argued that CDA is a kind of discourse analytical research that studies how dominance, inequality and social power abuse are resisted, reproduced and enacted by the talk and text in the political and social context. From the abovementioned, we can say that CDA focuses on revealing the hidden meaning of the text. It also highlights how the speaker or the writer applies the power in his discourse to control the dominant groups’ minds and actions and persuade them with his beliefs and thoughts. Fairclough (1989) focuses on the study of ideology in political discourses. He proposes a three-dimensional framework of analysis, description, interpretation and explanation. His approach is based on Halliday’s Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposed to explain theories of discourse, language and society associated with the linguistic theory analytical method (Halliday, 1979).

1.4 Fairclough’s (1995) CDA Model

Fairclough presented his model of CDA, which was considered the centre of the Critical Discourse Analysis. The (1995) model for CDA consists of three inter-related tactics of analysis tied to three inter-related dimensions of discourse, which are clarified in Figure (1) below (Locke, 2004, p. 42).

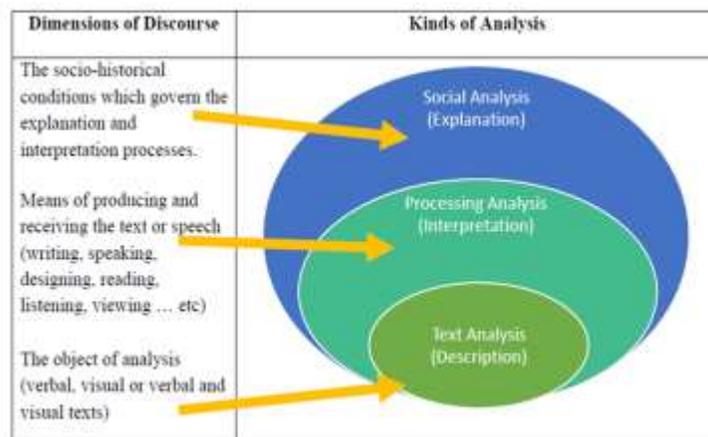


Figure 1. Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional CDA Model

These three dimensions include:

- (i) Object of evaluation (including verbal, visual or verbal and visible texts),

(ii) Processes via means by which the object is produced and acquired (writing/ speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) through human subjects.

(iii) Socio-historical conditions govern these processes (Fairclough, 1995, p.26).

According to Fairclough, each of these dimensions requires:

1. A unique form of textual content analysis (description). This step concentrates on text analysis. Sound system, vocabulary semantics, cohesion organization above the sentence level, and grammar analysis are part of linguistic analysis. Therefore, the text gives the necessary data for linguistic analysis. It is the primary source of grammar description.

2. Processing evaluation (interpretation).

Fairclough (1989, p.26) states that “interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as recourse in the process of interpretation”. At this stage, interpretation should be focused on the relationship between the discourse, its production and its consumption. Besides, discourse is not only considered as text but also a discursive practice. Attention should be drawn to other factors, such as intertextuality and speech acts because these factors link the text to its context. Interpretation contains two processes. A) institutional process or (editorial procedure), and the other is b) discourse process (the alteration that the text goes through in production and consumption). In other words, this step helps the researcher find the inter-textual relations among texts, discourse, and settings. Discourse is not only considered the linguistic version but also a kind of discursive practice. At this interpretation stage, the interpreter should consider factors that relate to how people produce and interpret discourse.

3. Social Practice (Explanation)

Fairclough (1989, p.26) mentioned that Explanation concentrates on the link or the relationship between social context and interaction with the social limitation of the process of interpretation and production and their social effects”. On the other hand, the analysis in this part is related to the social, cultural and historical contexts. Discourse is considered a kind of social practice, institution and sociality. The hidden information of power relations, language and ideology can be explored and explained in this stage by social and institutional contexts (Fairclough, 1995).

### *1.5 Review of Previous Studies*

Many linguists throughout the years were interested in studying political speeches using the CDA framework. Unvar and Rahimi (2013) explored the ideologies and attitudes reflected in Obama’s Victory Speech represented in the linguistic techniques of euphemization and derogation. The findings revealed that Obama used some terms to emphasize the importance of togetherness and standing as a nation. Some others stressed the concept of ‘US and THEM’ and showed how better WE are compared to THEM.

Likewise, Abed AL-Haq (2015) analyzed three speeches of King Abdullah II in terms of the linguistic strategies he used. The study found that King Abdullah II used creative expressions and intertextuality to persuade the American audience with his thoughts and ideas. Circumlocution was also utilized in order to magnify and highlight the American role in the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis.

Houda (2016) examined the discursive structures in Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential election campaign speech. Fairclough’s framework of critical discourse analysis was adopted. The findings revealed that Clinton’s discourse contained elements that indicated gendered language, persuasive techniques, and framing, which all imply her ideology.

Similarly, Hamood (2019) investigated Trump’s speech on recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of occupation. Van Dijk’s thematic theory was employed and the findings showed centrality in Trump’s decisions which were taken in isolation from others. Furthermore, his local political considerations on a rational and realistic approach to the external policy were uncovered.

Faiz, Chojimah, and Khasanah (2020) analyzed the illocutionary acts and the ideology of Trump in his speech about Jerusalem. They used Fairclough’s three models of CDA and found that there are five types of illocutionary acts, with representatives being the most frequently used by Trump. The language used proved that Trump wanted to use his power to create peace in Jerusalem.

Surveying preceding and recent annals of literature involving Rhetoric, CDA and SFL showcases that their focal attention mainly fixated on the investigation of political speeches based on different discursive structures (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014; Noor et al., 2015; Ali & Kazemian, 2015; Ali, Kazemian, & Bughio, 2015; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2017; Kazemian et al., 2021; Derakhshani et al., 2021 etc.). This study is also unique in that it deals with political speeches during the coronavirus crisis. As seen from the literature above, many studies investigated political speeches by different presidents. Some examined Trump’s speeches, but little attention has been paid to his speeches at the press conferences during the coronavirus crisis. This lends importance to this study being conducted in a critical period of time worldwide, namely, the coronavirus pandemic crisis.

## **2. Method**

This section describes the data collection and analysis adopted in this study. It explores the investigated speeches delivered by President Donald Trump during the coronavirus crisis and the justifications for their selection.

### 2.1 Data Collection

The end of 2019 was a critical period since the world was facing the killing disease, and all countries were trying hard to take the necessary measures to reduce its spread and prove their successful control of the virus. Therefore, speeches delivered by presidents at that time may involve different messages to their people. President Donald Trump appeared with his administration members in daily conferences during the coronavirus crisis to discuss the developments in the epidemiological situation in the USA and the world. In this study, the speeches delivered by Trump in two press conferences on the coronavirus updates were selected. The first conference press was held at the beginning of the pandemic on February 26, 2020. At that time, the number of infected cases was only 15. This speech was important for Trump, who needed to stress his country's readiness to defeat the novel virus. The press conference can be retrieved from: <http://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-coronavirus-press-conference-transcript-trump-and-cdc-give-coronavirus-updates>

The second conference remarks were delivered on April 27, 2020, when the infected cases surpassed a million. It must be noted that the USA was the first country to hit this record, and this may have been critical to Trump, who intended to keep the number of coronavirus cases down. This press conference can be retrieved from:

<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-coronavirus-press-conference-transcript-april-27>).

The videos of both conferences were downloaded from the internet in two forms: the video and the conference remarks transcript.

### 2.2 Data Analysis

This study adopted the theoretical framework of Fairclough's (1995) CDA model. The researchers provided linguistic tools for analyzing the structures, including word choice, pronouns, modal verbs and comparative and superlative forms. The researchers used such methods because they were suitable for the analysis and achieved the objectives of this study.

This qualitative research is based on Fairclough's three dimensions model of description, interpretation and explanation. In the description, the researchers focused on the text analysis using the linguistic tools mentioned above. This dimension was presented in chapter four. In interpretation and explanation dimensions, the researchers discussed and analyzed the results of the first dimension, answered the questions of the present study, and drew the conclusion.

## 3. Results

Since political speeches are highly constructed pieces of discourse, the present chapter critically assesses two discourses. The first speech was delivered on February 26, 2020 (Donald Trump Coronavirus Press Conference). The second was delivered on April 27, 2020 (Donald Trump Coronavirus Press Conference).

The research hypothesizes that Donald Trump's discourses may involve hidden views delivered by choice of words, elements of necessity modals, comparative and superlative forms, and pronouns. This part of the study attempts to reveal the underlying discursive structures adopting Fairclough's model of CDA. As mentioned in the second chapter, the analysis process contains three steps. First, text analysis which is concerned with investigating Donald Trump's language features in both speeches. It deals with vocabulary and grammar. Second, the discursive practice analysis which is concerned with both dimensions of explanation and interpretation. This means that Trump's ideological features are explored in both speeches. This framework, as hoped, helps make observations about the selected texts in particular. Although this may apply to different speeches delivered by Trump, the analysis results can't be generalized for all his other speeches.

### 3.1 Lexical Choice

This part is concerned with the diction of Donald Trump in both speeches. Examples of his word choices are selected and explained. Only two sets of words are analyzed as examples of his vocabulary. The first set relates to identity and belonging, and the second is beliefs and thoughts.

First, the researchers examined all the occurrences of the words that express identity and sense of belonging, namely, *American people*, *American citizens*, *Americans*, *the United States*, *States*, *world* and *country* in the two speeches under investigation. The main reason behind choosing these kinds of words is to be the base for further discussions about nationalism, racial attitudes, and ideology. The figure below shows the frequency of the abovementioned words.

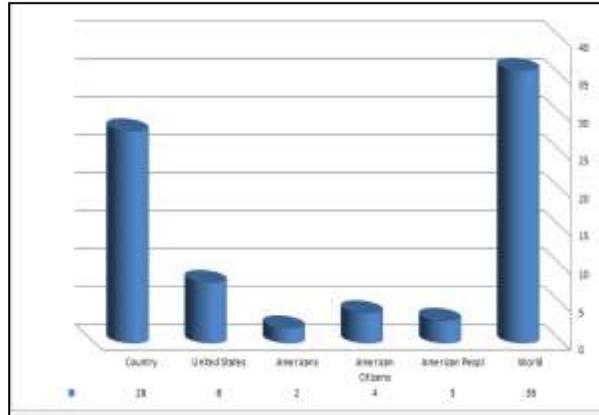


Figure 2. Frequency of words that express identity and belonging

After analyzing Trump’s remarks at the two conferences, the researchers found that he used the word “world” 36 times to refer to all people. In contrast, he used the word “country” 28 times to refer to America and its people. Trump also used “the United States” 8 times to refer to all states. It was also observed that he used “American citizens” 4 times, “American people” 3 times, and “Americans” only 2 times to refer to all the nation.

Second, the researchers examined all the occurrences of the words that express thoughts and beliefs, namely, *think*, *believe*, and *thought*. This set of words is selected as they express views and beliefs about certain issues, which may imply his ideological stands. The figure below shows the frequency of the abovementioned words.

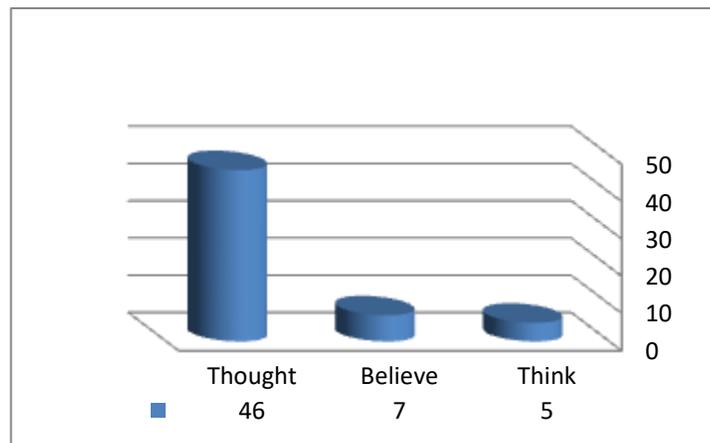


Figure 3. Frequency of words that express beliefs and thoughts

Noticeably, Trump used the verb “think” with the personal pronoun “I” 64 times. He also used the verb “believe” 7 times and the verb “thought” 5 times. Using these words may express a degree of certainty regarding some events, opinions, and beliefs based on past experience.

### 3.2 Grammatical Constructions

This part is concerned with the pronouns and grammatical constructions of necessity modals and comparative and superlative forms used by Donald Trump in the two conferences under study.

#### - Pronouns

The pronouns that are examined in this study are the subjective first-person singular and plural pronouns “I” and “we” and their possessive forms “my” and “our”. The figure below shows the frequency of use of these words.

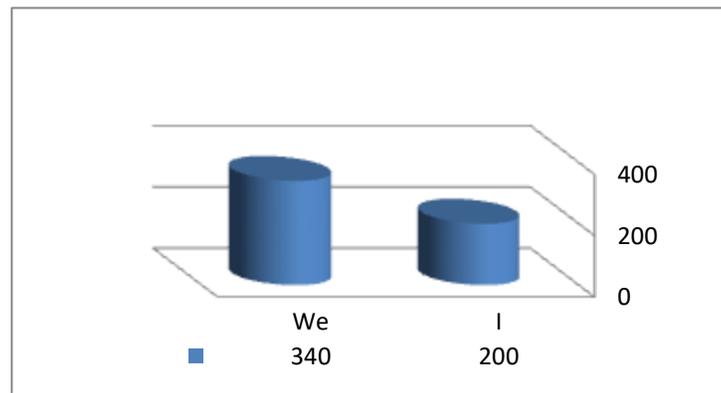


Figure 4. Frequency of pronouns

Noticeably, Trump used the personal pronoun “I” 200 times in both speeches, which is believed to reflect egoism. Another noticeable result is the use of the pronoun “we”. It was used 340 times in both speeches. It can be observed that the pronoun “we” is used more frequently than the pronoun “I” in his two conferences. “My” is the possessive state of the personal pronoun “I”. Trump used “my” 10 times in both speeches. He also used the possessive pronoun “our” 59 times in both conferences. Noticeably, the use of the possessive pronoun “our” is more frequent than that of the possessive pronoun “my .”

- *Modal Verbs*

In this section of the analysis, the researchers analyzed the structures of modal verbs as this helps explore the speaker’s intentions and degrees of certainty and may also reflect the speaker’s potential hopes, predictions, abilities, and decisions. The modal verbs *will, would, can, could, may, and have to* are investigated. The figure below shows the frequency of modal verbs in their affirmative and negative forms.

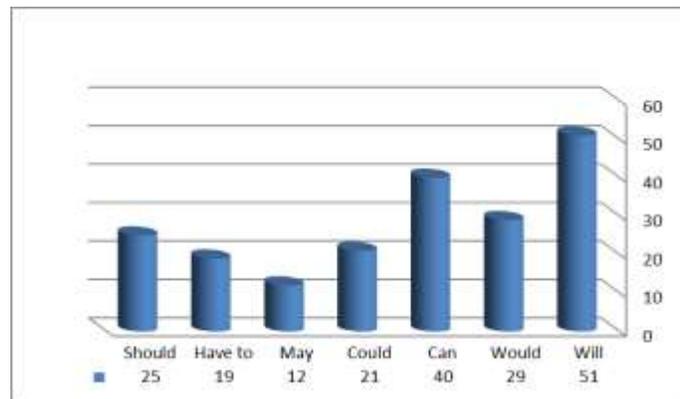


Figure 5. Frequency of modal verbs

The above figure shows that “will” is the most frequently used modal by Donald Trump. It was used 48 times in both conferences. “Can” was used 20 times, and “Could” was used 21 times which may express his ability to achieve his goals. Moreover, he used “should” 20 times in both conferences. Another noticeable aspect is the use of “have to” 19 times in order to express necessity and obligation. Trump also used “may” 16 times.

- *Comparative and Superlative Forms*

In this part of the analysis, the researchers analyzed the comparative and superlative forms since such structures help reflect the attitudes and views of the speaker. In the two speeches under investigation, Trump used these forms, as seen in the graph below.

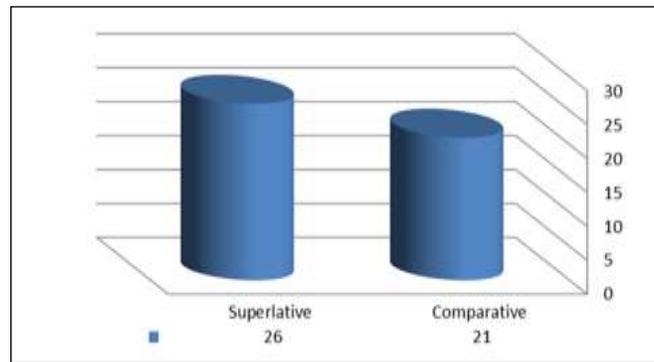


Figure 6. Frequency of comparative and superlative

Noticeably, superlative structures are more frequently used in both speeches. It was used 26 times which may express Trump's perfection in leading his country and the superiority of the United States in all areas. Moreover, he used the comparative structures 20 times. This may establish a comparison between his achievements with the past US leaders, on the one hand, and between his country and other countries, on the other hand.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1 Lexical Choice

###### - Words of Identity and Belonging

The words that express identity and sense of belonging, including "American people", "American citizens", "Americans", "the United States", "States", and "country", are discussed. In political speeches, national unity becomes one of the main concepts which underpin the speaker's ideas. This was emphasized by Trump's usage of such terms frequently in the speeches under investigation. In addition, he incorporates the concept of unity and caring for the nation, as can be seen in the following examples:

1. "We put a ban on China other than our citizens coming in. We had our **citizens**; you can't keep out **American citizens**." (April 27, 2020)
2. "We took in some from Japan, you heard about that because they're **American citizens** and they're in quarantine, and they're getting better, too. But we felt we had an obligation to do that." (February 26, 2020)
3. "We grieve by their side as one family, this great **American** family, and we do grieve. We also stand in solidarity with the **Americans** who are ill and waging a brave fight against the virus." (April 27, 2020)

Trump concentrated on using words that stress American citizenship, considering Americans to be one nation, one country, and one people with the same enemy, the coronavirus, and the same future. He also tried to express the feeling of "grief" that should be shared with other citizens as one family. Moreover, Trump supported his idea of unity by mentioning that he was doing his best to protect all Americans wherever they were.

It must be noted that when non-Americans are present in the context, the feelings of caring disappear, stressing the notion of "us versus them," as indicated in the following example:

4. "We've stopped **non-US citizens** from coming into America from China" (February 26, 2020)
5. Furthermore, Trump expressed the concept of the unity of the American people regardless of their ethnicity, as shown in the following example.:
6. "We had the best employment numbers and the best unemployment numbers for **Hispanic American**, for **African American**, for **Asian American**, for everybody, best stock market numbers." (April 27, 2020)

These examples enhance the sense of unity and caring about Americans irrespective of their ethnicity being Hispanic, African, or Asian. He then added the word "everybody" in order to include all American races to emphasize equality among all American ethnic groups. Equality involves opportunity, status and rights. It means that Americans have no differences related to different backgrounds, races, religions, and other social aspects. Trump disseminates this concept to strengthen his leadership, being a defender of that principle that all Americans favour.

Citizens are the determinant of any nation. Therefore, every decision made should be in their interest. He used the concept of "togetherness" to get Americans involved in national affairs, thus, sharing the responsibility. The concepts of citizen involvement were implicitly stated in his speeches. The following quotations are examples of that.

7. "We have to **all work together**." (February 26, 2020)
8. "I'm just saying we should **all be working together**." (February 26, 2020)
9. "Usually, it's we have to take less, and we should be working **together**." (February 26, 2020)

10. "I hope that it's going to be a very little problem, but we have to work **together** instead." (February 26, 2020)

Trump expresses citizen's involvement reflected in the use of the adverb "together". The word "together" shows that the actions are not done by Trump alone but also by the Americans. This way, both parties would share responsibility.

In addition to the idea of unity, Trump also wanted to confirm the concept of National Priority and Superiority. In his speeches, he tried to emphasize that the country exists to serve its citizens. Therefore, citizens should be the priority in all cases and every national development. This is the concept that Donald Trump was trying to build in the minds of his audiences. The quotations below reflect such a concept.

11. "We took in some from Japan, you heard about that because they're **American citizens** and they're in quarantine, and they're getting better, too. But we felt we had an **obligation** to do that." (February 26, 2020)
12. "And the **number one priority**, from our standpoint, is the health and safety of the American people" (February 26, 2020)
13. "We had our **citizens**; you can't keep out **American citizens**." (April 27, 2020)

It is observed that Trump has the concept of national priority. He mentioned that he was obligated to serve all American citizens and that their health was the top priority. This may indicate the qualifications of a good president which strongly support him for reelection.

- *Words of Thoughts and Beliefs*

The second set of lexical choices is the words that express thoughts and beliefs, namely, "think", "believe" and "thought". Again, the results showed that Trump used "think" more frequently than "believe", which may project hedging, uncertainty, or a lack of commitment to his past utterances. The examples below show this.

14. "But, I **think** you'll see a lot of schools open up, even if it's for a very short period of time. I **think** it would be a good thing. (April 27, 2020)
15. "I **think** the business that they lost will be picked up at a later date." (February 26, 2020)

The frequency of "think" means that Trump was not certain about his expectations and did not want to be committed to what he said if things go the opposite way. In addition, Trump used "think" with expressions encouraging people to reelect him, such as anticipating a good economic future in his upcoming era. The examples below indicate this.

16. "I **think** after I **win the election**, I **think** the stock market's **going to boom** like it's never boomed before. Just like it did by the way after I won the last election." (February 26, 2020)
17. "What we are doing is I **think** we're going to have, you're going to **see a big rise** in the third, but you're going to see an incredible fourth quarter and you're going to have an incredible next year. I **think** you're going to **have a recovery**." (April 27, 2020)

#### 4.2 Grammatical Constructions

- *Pronouns*

With regard to the use of pronouns, the results showed that Trump used the pronoun "we" more frequently in his speeches than "I" to express the institutional identity of America. According to Kazemian & Hashemi (2014), if the speeches are read and listened to critically and attentively, it will become clear that there are hidden meanings in each clause and sentence waiting to be revealed and signalled to the audience and readers. We-groups like "we," "our," and "us" are strategically used in political discourse to create a unified connection between politicians and the general public. Moreover, the choice between the pronouns "we" and "you" is associated with feelings of strength and unity. Pronouns in English do have a variety of correlative values. According to Fairclough (1989), there are typically two different types of "we" pronouns: inclusive "we", which applies to both the speaker and the audience, and exclusive "we", which refers to the speaker or writer in addition to one or more others but does not incorporate the addressee. In this study, it seems that Trump used this technique to convey the meaning of one team in which every member shares responsibility and is involved in serving the country. The following examples help illustrate this idea:

18. "**We** have, through some very good early decisions, decisions that were actually ridiculed at the beginning, **we** closed up our borders to flights coming in from certain areas. Areas that were hit by the coronavirus and hit pretty hard, and **we** did it very early." (February 26, 2020)

This utterance shows that Trump tried to get people engaged in the decisions he makes. He also wanted to prove the advantages of his early decision to close the borders of the United States to flights coming from the areas that were hit by the coronavirus. He was trying to imply that his decisions were wise and taken at the right time.

The notions of togetherness and unity were emphasized through the use of "we", as can be seen in the following utterance:

19. "**We** also stand in solidarity with the Americans who are ill and waging a brave fight against the virus. **We're** doing everything in our power to heal the sick and to gradually reopen our nation and to safely get our people back to work." (April 27, 2020)

Trump used impressive language to influence the emotions of his audiences to side with him, especially after the number of infected people has increased to more than a million. He might have been trying to gain popularity in order to win the elections.

Trump also united himself with the American people, being one of them. In addition to highlighting unity and caring about Americans, the president's speeches also stressed equality, as can be seen in the example below:

20. “**We** have to all work together.” (February 26. 2020)
21. “**We** continue to mourn with thousands of families across the country whose loved ones have been stolen from us by the invisible enemy” (April 27. 2020)

The pronoun “I” was frequently used in both speeches. This may imply superiority, especially when used in some contexts such as:

22. “**I** have two people that are very talented, and it’s something I feel good about. **I** don’t want to spare the horses. I have very talented people. **I** want to use them on this because **I** want it to stay low or as low as possible.” (February 26. 2020)
23. “**I** directed our Medicare program to make it easier for seniors to get the testing that they need and the pharmacies....” (April 27. 2020)
24. “**I** helped the farmers by giving them, two years ago, \$12 billion all coming from China.” (April 27. 2020)

These quotations show personal involvement, which can be especially useful when positive news is delivered. Trump wanted to persuade his audiences with his achievements, as stated in the billions he gave to farmers and by allowing the talented to work out a vaccine.

- *Modal Verbs*

Regarding the use of modals, it can be said that they can express attitudes towards the propositional content of the speech and as a mode of functioning to regulate interpersonal relationships.

The linguistic modal “will”, which constitutes an epistemic assumptive modality, was also used in a presidential speech. The modal verb “will”, in the negation or passive form, is dispersed in the texts and it references conditional consequences, central epistemic and futurity. (Huddleston & Pullum 2002). It also implies the feeling of power.

The results revealed that Trump used the modal “will” quite frequently in his speeches because he wanted to show that he was a powerful president with good experience enabling him to achieve the goals he set for himself and the American people. The researchers cited the following quotations to illustrate his presupposition.

25. “This **will** end, this will end.” (February 26, 2020)
26. “It **will** be a tremendous, tremendous comeback.” (April 27, 2020)
27. “the stock market **will** recover.” (February 26, 2020)

In the first quotation, the president promised his people that the pandemic would end and won’t spread further. On the contrary, it worsened, more people got infected, and more fatalities occurred. In the other examples, Trump showed a strong belief in himself as he decided determinately and believed that what he did was right.

The use of “will” implies determination. However, the researchers noticed that none of the promises was fulfilled, indicating Trump’s failure to handle the pandemic.

Trump also used the modal “can” in his conferences. This modal expresses ability, informal polite request, possibility, informal permission, or impossibility in the negative form (Azar 2002). In Trump’s speeches, the modal “can” mostly refer to ability. The results show that Trump used the modal “can” frequently. He tried to emphasize the United States’ ability to develop a vaccine for the coronavirus in the near future, as can be seen in the following example:

28. “The vaccine is coming along well, and then speaking to the doctors, we think this is something that we **can** develop fairly rapidly, a vaccine for the future, and coordinate with the support of our partners.” (February 26. 2020)
29. “We **can** now do 60,000 tests a day” (April 27, 2020)

Trump believed in the capabilities of America and the American experts. He wanted to prove that he could fulfill his goal well.

The modal “could” was also present at Trump’s conferences. Azar (2002) mentioned that the modal “could” expresses past ability, degree of certainty, polite request, suggestion, and impossibility in its negative form. Trump used this modal sometimes to expresses a tentative possibility, as in:

30. “As they get better, we take them off the list so that we’re going to be pretty soon at only five people, and we **could** be at just one or two people over the next short period of time.” (February 26. 2020)
31. “there’s a chance that it could get worse. There’s a chance it **could** get fairly substantially worse.” (February 26. 2020)

The president seemed unsure about the number of future cases and whether the coronavirus disease would get worse.

Trump also used “should” which is weaker than “must” and stronger than “may”. Collins (2009, p.45) stated that the modal “should” expresses medium strength modality. Meanwhile, Azar (2002) argued that advisability and certainty for future expectations could be represented by the modal “should”.

Trump used “should” which does not express a strong obligation. For example, in the following utterance, Trump advised the Democrat party to work with him and not just negatively criticize him and create panic, assuming he did very well in managing the pandemic.

32. “I’m just saying we **should** all be working together. She’s trying to create a panic, and there’s no reason to panic, because we have

done so good.” (February 26. 2020)

Another modal used by Trump was “have to”. The modal “have to” overlaps with “must” significantly. However, it is not the rival of the modal “must” in an epistemic sense. Still, they both express necessity. “Have to” focuses on an external, existent obligation that can be perceived or described independently of the speaker, whereas “must” serves as a very general marker of obligation, with more specific senses such as urgency, irresistibility, and unconditionality being attributable to pragmatic interpretation.” (Westney 1995, p.151). Furthermore, “The situation may change as “have to” becomes increasingly grammaticalized, with the likely consequence that its epistemic meaning will become more established via the process of subjectification” (Collins 2009, p. 59).

For example, Trump used this modal to imply the idea that working in a team is necessary to defeat the pandemic.

33. “We **have to** be on the same team. This is too important. We have to be on the same team.” (February 26. 2020)

34. “We **have to** all work together.” (February 26. 2020)

Both examples show that “have to” was mentioned with the subject “we”, which refers to the speaker and his audience and the Democratic Party, hence, establishing its epistemic meaning.

#### - Comparative and Superlative Forms

The last grammatical pattern to be discussed is the comparative and superlative forms used in Trump’s speeches at both conferences to confirm the idea of American superiority. The following quotations reveal that.

35. “Whatever happens, we’re totally prepared. We have the best people in the world. You see that from the study, we have the **best** prepared people, the best people in the world.” (February 26. 2020)

36. “We had the **greatest** experts, really, in the world right here.” (February 26. 2020)

37. “It’s the **greatest** tourism country in the world, so instead of leaving our country, leaving our shores, they’ll stay here, and again” (February 26. 2020)

38. “We have, as I said, we have the **greatest** people in the world.” (February 26. 2020)

39. “On Saturday alone, more than 200,000 test results were reported, which is a gigantic number, **bigger** than any country, anywhere in the world for a much longer period of time.” (April 27. 2020)

In these examples, Trump stated that the American people are the best in the world. He wanted to confirm the concept of the American people’s superiority over other races. The examples also indicate that America and the United States have better qualifications than others. This may point to the positive self-representation and negative other representation; in other words, the distinction between Us and Them. Showing Americans’ superiority may indirectly indicate others’ inferiority.

## 5. Conclusion

From the previous discussion and analyses of the various citations derived from the speeches of President Trump, the researchers concluded the following:

1. Nationalism and the supremacy of Americans are prevalent in Trump’s speeches, indicated by the frequency of using words which reflect the concepts of unity and caring for the nation, equality, citizen involvement, and national priority and superiority. However, the study also found that Trump uses some words to express self-glorification. This is consistent with Houda (2016), who found that Hillary Clinton used such words to persuade audiences in the US elections.

2. Egoism and exaggeration were also found in Trump’s speeches through the use of the pronouns of “I” and “we”.

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