

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's 2025 Inauguration Speech

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دراسة تحليلية نقدية لخطاب تنصيب الرئيس دونالد ترامب عام 2025

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Abstract

This paper attempted to conduct a critical analysis of Donald Trump's inauguration speech in 2025. The speech was analysed through Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. Three levels of analysis were employed: textual, cognitive, and social. The findings revealed that Trump employed several rhetorical appeals, including logos and pathos. Additionally, various rhetorical devices such as hyperbole, metaphors, and parallel structures were utilised to reinforce his ideas. The analysis also revealed underlying ideologies within the speech, including nationalism, inequality, and protectionism. Trump depicted Americans as law-abiding citizens, while he portrayed immigrants as criminals posing a serious threat to America. Furthermore, Trump effectively employed linguistic tools and rhetorical devices to characterise Biden's administration as weak and incompetent in managing social and economic issues, while presenting himself as a redeemer of America.

Keywords: CDA, discourse analysis, political discourse, rhetorical language.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم تحليل نقدي لخطاب تنصيب دونالد ترامب عام 2025، بالاعتماد على المنهج الاجتماعي-المعرفي لفان دايك. وقد جرى تناول الخطاب عبر ثلاثة مستويات من التحليل: المستوى النصي، والمستوى المعرفي، والمستوى الاجتماعي. أظهرت النتائج أن ترامب وظّف عدداً من الأساليب الإقناعية، بما في ذلك اللوغوس (المنطق/العقلانية) والباثوس (الاستمالة العاطفية). كما اعتمد على عدة أدوات بلاغية مثل المبالغة، والاستعارة، والبنى المتوازية لتدعيم أفكاره. وكشف التحليل أيضاً عن أيديولوجيات كامنة في الخطاب، من أبرزها القومية، واللامساواة، والنزعة الحمائية. وقد صوّر ترامب المواطنين الأمريكيين على أنهم ملتزمون بالقانون، في مقابل تصويره للمهاجرين كخطر إجرامي.

جسيم يهدد الولايات المتحدة. علاوة على ذلك، استثمر ترامب الأدوات اللغوية والتقنيات البلاغية بفاعلية لتأطير إدارة بايدن على أنها ضعيفة وغير كفوة في معالجة القضايا الاجتماعية والاقتصادية، في حين قدّم نفسه بوصفه المنقذ والمخلص لأمريكا.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التحليل النقدي للخطاب، تحليل الخطاب، الخطاب السياسي، اللغة البلاغية.

Introduction

The study of the relationship between language and politics can be traced to ancient Greece and Rome, when rhetoric was viewed as an important tool by Aristotle and Cicero in shaping beliefs and opinions (Dunmire, 2012). According to Martin (2014), “the ancient name given to the body of knowledge whose object is the practice of speech and persuasion is rhetoric” (p. 1). Rhetorical language is widespread in political discourse. To influence public opinion, politicians use a variety of rhetorical devices, such as allusion, hyperbole, and parallel structures. Additionally, rhetorical appeals like ethos, pathos, and logos are also commonly employed to shape audience perceptions. Beard (2000) emphasises the significance of studying political rhetoric to understand how language is used to mobilise people and secure compliance. Language is a powerful tool used to shape public ideologies and influence opinions. According to Wilson (1990), political discourse is not only a means of communication but also a way to manipulate, deceive, and persuade. Trump is well known for his nationalist ideology, which prioritises America's interests above those of other nations. This view is reflected in his campaign slogan, MAGA (Make America Great Again), suggesting that America has become weak and lost its greatness, and that Trump aims to restore its strength (Al-Ghazzi, 2021). This study is driven by the need to understand the language Trump uses to persuade his audience and the strategies he employs to convey his ideology. Furthermore, the analysis seeks to uncover the messages embedded in the discourse through rhetorical language. While Trump's 2017 inauguration speech has been analysed, little research has examined his 2025 address, which marks his return to power and reflects a heightened populist tone. This study aims to offer insights into how Trump's political speech reproduces power relations, reinforces inequality, and shapes collective mental models of identity, nationhood, and threat.

Research Questions

- What rhetorical devices and appeals are used by Trump to persuade his audience?
- How is Trump's ideology reflected in his speech?
- How does Trump's discourse reinforce social inequality and power dynamics?

Literature Review

Defining Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach that “focuses on social problems, and especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination” (van Dijk, 2001, p. 96). According to Fairclough (2001), CDA is:

“a form of critical social science geared to illuminating the problems which people are confronted with by particular forms of social life, and to contributing resources which people may be able to draw upon in tackling and overcoming those problems”. (p.125)

For instance, immigrants are sometimes referred to as aliens in some political speeches to persuade the audience that they pose a threat to the nation. Additionally, the word “waves” is sometimes associated with “refugees” to suggest that they are entering a country in large numbers in an uncontrollable, threatening manner (van Dijk, 2005).

One of the primary objectives of CDA is to investigate how power is exercised and expressed in political discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). According to Wodak (1995), CDA aims to

analyse “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (p. 204). Discourse plays a vital role in exercising power and can be a powerful tool for shaping public opinion (Van Dijk, 1997).

Political Discourse

Politicians utilise language to persuade people to believe in their ideas. According to Lakoff (1990), “language is politics, politics assigns power, and power governs how people talk and how they are understood” (p. 7). Language can reflect an individual’s political perspective and reveal their ideological stance. A study by Demszky et al. (2019) found that Republicans were 25% more likely than Democrats to describe shooters as “terrorists” when they were of African, Hispanic, or Middle Eastern origins. Conversely, Democrats were 25% more likely to use the same term when the attacker was white.

Therefore, language can be shaped by the types of ideologies people hold. In other words, an individual’s beliefs and principles can be reflected in the language they use. Additionally, language serves as a tool to persuade others of certain beliefs. For example, language can strongly influence people’s emotions. As Cuddon (1998, p. 257) states, “language is intended to express or arouse emotional reactions towards the subject matter or the addressee.”

According to Rozina & Karapetjana (2009, p. 114), political speech aims to:

- to persuade voters to be a party loyal and to turn up to vote,
- to move a floating voters’ party loyalty,
- to make people adopt general political or social attitudes in order to attract support for a present policy.

Language can be manipulated to shape others’ perceptions. Fairclough (1989) points out, “linguistic manipulation is the conscious use of language in a devious way to control others” (p. 6). Similarly, Atkinson (1984) notes that linguistic manipulation is a distinctive feature of political rhetoric, based on persuading people to take political actions or convince them to support a party or an individual.

A study by Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) explored how language affects people’s perceptions of crime. In their experiment, the researchers divided participants into two groups and gave them reports about crimes in the city of Addison. For one group, crime was described as “wild beast preying,” while for the other group, crime was characterised as “virus infecting.” When asked to suggest solutions to combat crime, the groups proposed different ideas. Most participants in the group who saw crime as a “wild beast” recommended enforcement as a solution. Conversely, most in the group where crime was labelled as “a virus infecting the city” believed criminals should undergo rehabilitation to reduce crime. This experiment demonstrates that language can be used to influence people’s thinking in a particular way. This example proves that language is a powerful tool that can influence people’s perspectives.

Rhetorical Language

Political discourse utilises rhetorical devices to persuade the audience. Rhetoric is described by Cockcroft and Cockcroft (1992) as the art of persuasive discourse. They classify the means of persuasion into three broad categories: (a) persuasion through personality and stance, (b) persuasion through the arousal of emotion, and (c) persuasion through reasoning.

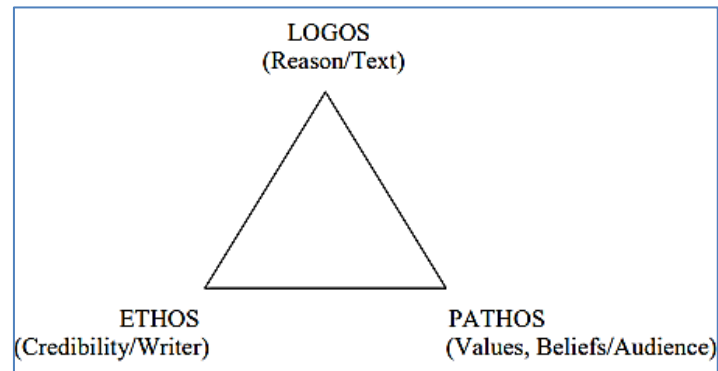


Figure 1: The Rhetorical Triangle (Lutzke & Henggeler, 2009).

Aristotle's rhetorical theory classifies rhetorical techniques into three categories: logos, ethos, and pathos. Logos involves using facts, statistics, and evidence to persuade the audience (Zaini et al., 2022). Pathos relates to techniques that appeal to the audience's emotions. Ethos aims to convince the audience to trust the speaker's credibility. For example, ethos can be demonstrated through experience and expertise in a specific field. Pathos appeals to the audience's emotions by sharing personal stories or discussing sensitive subjects, such as family, love, and equality.

Related Studies

Previous studies have shown that rhetorical devices and appeals are widely used in political speeches (Alisoy, 2025; Matos & Miller, 2023; Raissouni, 2020; Kayam, 2018). A study by Amaireh (2023) revealed that US President Joe Biden uses the pronouns “I” and “we” several times in his speeches to establish credibility and competence. Moreover, Biden attempts to trigger his audience's emotions by speaking about hope and love. Additionally, Biden cites facts, statistics, and authoritative sources such as the Bible to make his arguments more persuasive. Similarly, a CDA study by Garifullina et al. (2021), which analysed the language used in the inaugural speeches of Trump and Putin, revealed that both presidents used the pronouns “we” and “ours” to emphasise solidarity among people. Moreover, the analysis showed that Trump employed the future tense several times to persuade people that America under his administration would be more prosperous.

Another study by Balogun and Murana (2018) demonstrated that Trump employed the repetition strategy in his inaugural address in 2017 to reinforce people's belief in his commitment to making America a better country. The following is an excerpt from his 2017 address, which shows using the repetition strategy: “Together, we will make America strong again. We will make America wealthy again. We will make America proud again. We will make America safe again. And yes, together we will make America great again.”

In his first inaugural speech in 2017, Trump also relied on the polarisation strategy to create a division between American citizens and immigrants. According to Raza and Hassan (2024), Trump used polarisation to gain more popularity among the public, convincing them that he would prioritise the interests of the American people. For instance, he depicted immigrants as uncivilised and dangerous by stating: “We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs.” Such negative words might lower people's empathy towards immigrants and approve of any immigration harsh policies, such as border walls, deportation, and detention.

The language used by Trump in his speeches indicates that he holds a nationalist ideology, which he also aims to instil into his audience's minds. In his 2017 inaugural speech, he

emphasised the superiority of Americans and America by saying: “At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other.”. He also referenced the Bible to encourage Americans to be united (Alam, 2025).

Trump’s discourse is heavily influenced by the Paranoid Style, which involves inciting fear among the public to draw their attention to a particular issue (Hart, 2021). This style seeks to create division within society by linking threats and conspiracies to specific groups. Such a form of discourse is common among those who hold nationalist and populist views, as it helps them demonstrate that their primary interests lie with the nation and its citizens. Nationalist discourse fosters division and inequality in society and legitimises unfair policies towards people who have been characterised as outgroups (Rowland, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

According to Dijk, critical discourse analysis focuses on examining inequality, dominance, and bias within a discourse (van Dijk, 1998). He referred to his method as “socio-cognitive” because it combines cognitive and sociological perspectives in discourse analysis.

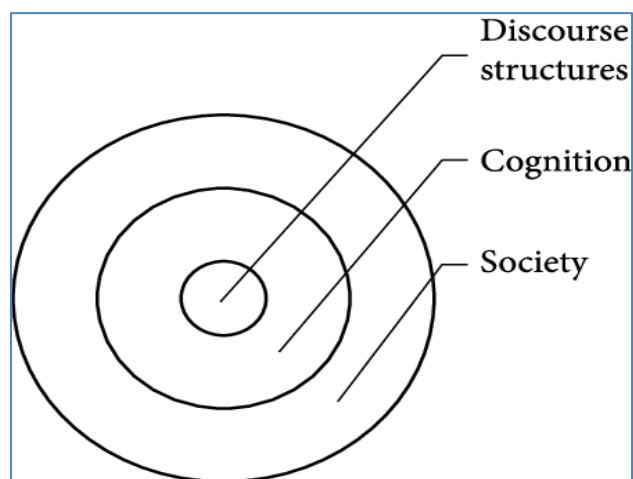


Figure 2: Socio-cognitive model of CDA (Dijk, 1998).

Van Dijk’s approach to CDA comprises three interconnected components: discourse, cognition, and society. Discourse pertains to the elements that make up communication, including verbal interactions, body language, signs, and written text (Dijk, 1995). The socio-cognitive model combines social and cognitive analyses with discourse analysis. Discourse analysis involves examining the vocabulary, grammar, and structures used in the text. Cognitive analysis relates to understanding how discourse can influence people’s perception of specific concepts and values such as equality, racism, and feminism (Othman & Salih, 2022). According to Van Dijk (1995), “cognition intercedes between ‘society’ and ‘discourse’ and that discourse analysis is directed at different talk and text structures” (p. 21). Cognition refers to the mental models, beliefs, and emotions held by particular groups (Bjaiya Al-Mas’udi, 2021). On the other hand, society concerns the societal structures, such as government frameworks and group relations within the community (Abboud, 2020). Society highlights the types of relationships that exist between groups, shedding light on aspects such as power, dominance, racism, and inequality (Bjaiya Al-Mas’udi, 2021).

Moreover, Dijk (1995) proposed a framework for analysing ideology, which, according to Luke (1998), refers to “the systems of ideas, beliefs and practices, and representations, which operate in the interests of an identifiable social class or cultural group” (p. 366). For the ideological analysis, Van Dijk (1995) has proposed four strategies that are used to legitimise the self and de-legitimise the other.

- emphasise positive things about ‘us’;
- emphasise negative things about ‘them’;
- de-emphasise negative things about ‘us’; and.
- de-emphasise positive things about ‘them’.

These strategies are used in discourse to emphasise and label a particular group as dominant and privileged, while belittling another group by highlighting its negative traits and concealing its positive contributions.

The square model shown in Figure 2 illustrates how the four strategies can be employed to create positive representations of in-groups and negative representations of out-groups.

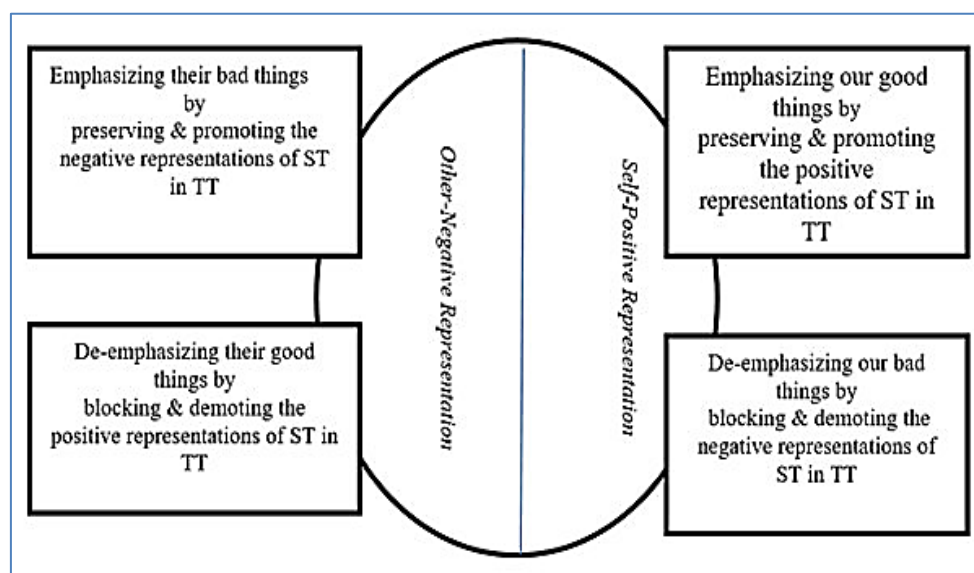


Figure 3: Illustration of Van Dijk Square Model (Daghigh et al., 2018).

In addition to the square model, Van Dijk (2004) has proposed six categories of ideological analysis that facilitate the depiction of Us versus Them as follows:

- Actor description: the ways we describe actors are based on our ideologies, for example, the description of the ingroup as positive and the out-group as negative.
- Authority: mentioning authorities to support one’s argument.
- Categorisation: classifying people into different groups and attributing to them positive or negative characteristics.
- Lexicalisation: the expression of lexical items creating an overall ideological strategy for negative other presentation.
- Polarisation: categorising people into in-groups and out-groups and assigning good attributes to Us and bad attributes to Them.
- Vagueness: using vague expressions which do not have definite referents.
- Victimisation: emphasising the “bad” nature of the out-group by telling horrible stories about them

In this research, the two models highlighted above are used as a lens to carry out the analysis. The researcher believes that combining these models helps conduct a deeper analysis of the discourse under investigation.

Methodology

On Monday, 20 January 2025, the new President of the US, Donald Trump, delivered an inaugural address at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. The speech took half an hour and consisted of 2910 words. The speech was taken from the official website of The White House. In this speech, he discussed critical issues such as immigration, the economy, and foreign policy. Trump's speeches are known for their richness in rhetorical devices that reflect his populist and nationalist views. Analysing his speech would provide valuable insights into how rhetoric can be used to shape public opinion and promote a particular ideology.

To carry out the analysis, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and square model of ideological analysis were utilised. The analysis was conducted according to Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach in three stages. The first stage involved textual analysis, during which vocabulary, grammar, pronouns, rhetorical devices, and rhetorical appeals were identified and highlighted. The next stage involved cognitive analysis of the strategies employed to promote specific ideologies. The third stage looked into what implications the speech has on society.

The analysis required textual coding to uncover the discursive strategies used. The coding was carried out manually using Microsoft Word's highlighting and review features to mark lexical, grammatical choices, rhetorical devices, and appeals. First, the speech was copied into a Word document. Then, review features were utilised to perform the initial coding. This involved highlighting interesting data in different colours. This stage helped the researcher become familiar with the data for more in-depth analysis later. Next, the comment feature was employed to add descriptions to the highlighted texts, categorising them as elements under the textual, cognitive, or social analysis. Finally, the researcher interpreted the use of these elements in relation to the social context.

Findings

This section presents the results from analysing the transcript of Trump's inauguration speech. The first subsection highlights the linguistic elements, including vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical devices and appeals used in the speech. The subsequent subsection sheds light on the cognitive dimension of the speech. This involves the strategies utilised to influence the audience's opinions and ideologies. Finally, the third subsection explores how social aspects are embedded in the speech, including power and inequality.

Discourse Analysis

The discourse analysis (DA) involved examining the language used to discuss the issues in the speech. It involved presenting the vocabulary, syntax, rhetorical devices, and appeals utilised in the speech.

Lexicalization

Trump used several positive words to describe the American people and himself. On the other hand, he utilised negative vocabulary to describe the previous government and the non-American citizens.

Table 1: Lexical analysis

Positive vocabulary	Negative vocabulary
<i>Flourish, golden age of America, proud prosperous and free, American patriots, thriving, equal and impartial justice, peacemaker and unifier, courage, greatest civilization, growing nation, expands, builds, compassion, courage</i>	<i>vicious, violent and unfair, crisis of trust, corrupt establishment, complete disrepair dangerous criminals, America's decline</i>

Additionally, some words were more commonly used than others in the speech.

Table 2: Most frequently used lexis

Lexis	Mentions
America	20
Nation	20
American	14
Country	15

As Table 2 shows, some words were more frequently used during the speech. Words such as “America”, “nation”, “American” and “country” indicate that Trump emphasised America’s interests, promoting a nationalistic ideology.

Syntax

Trump utilised the future tense many times in his speech to express future actions and plans and show his commitment to fulfilling his promises. Besides, he used the future tense to make commissive statements about what he would do to tackle the issues he presented:

- “I will declare a national emergency at our southern border.”
- “I will immediately begin the overhaul of our trade system to protect American workers and families.”
- “Today, I will sign a series of historic executive orders. With these actions, we will begin the complete restoration of America and the revolution of common sense.”
- “I will send troops to the southern border to repel the disastrous invasion of our country.”

With respect to pronouns, “we” and “our” were used extensively. Trump used “we” and “our” to convey the idea that he is working in a team and create a sense of unity among his supporters.

Table 3: Pronouns used in speech

Pronoun	Mentions
We	88
They	10
Our	71
I	36

By using “we” and “our”, he tried to make the audience feel that they are one group of which Trump is a member. Additionally, using the pronoun “I” reflected Trump’s power and established his control over institutions and policies. In contrast, he used “they” to refer to Biden’s administration, other nations, and immigrants, classifying them as an outgroup.

Rhetorical Analysis

The rhetorical analysis in this study involved examining the rhetorical appeals—namely, logos, pathos, and ethos—as well as the rhetorical devices employed in the speech.

Rhetorical Appeals

Table 4 demonstrates that Trump employs various rhetorical appeals to emphasise his political views. All three types of appeals are utilised. To persuade people of the significance of the Panama Canal, Trump relies on logos by showing that many people lost their lives during the construction of the Canal. He also uses pathos to appeal to the audience's emotions when discussing the wildfires, which left people homeless. Furthermore, he employs ethos by referring to his previous prosecutions, which he claims were unjust. He also mentions the assassination incident and presents his survival as a miracle, suggesting that God rescued him for a purpose — to restore America's greatness and put an end to the establishment's corruption.

Table 4: Rhetorical appeals in the speech.

Rhetorical appeals	Examples from speech
Pathos	• “The inflation crisis was caused by massive overspending and escalating energy prices.” • “The vicious, violent, and unfair weaponisation of the Justice Department and our government will end.” • “They don’t have a home any longer.” • “An assassin’s bullet ripped through my ear.”
Logos	• “Lost 38,000 lives in the building of the Panama Canal.” • “We had a powerful win in all seven swing states, and the popular vote we won by millions of people.” • “Like in 2017, we will again build the strongest military the world has ever seen.” • “Americans pushed thousands of miles through a rugged land of untamed wilderness.”
Ethos	• “I was saved by God to make America great again.” • “Over the past eight years I have been tested and challenged more than any president in our 250-year history.”

Rhetorical Devices

Several rhetorical devices were identified in the speech. Table 5 illustrates some of them and provides some examples of these devices in the speech.

Table 5: Examples of rhetorical devices in the speech.

Rhetorical device	Examples from speech
Metaphors	• It is that liquid gold under our feet • trying to socially engineer race and gender • plant the stars and stripes on the planet Mars
Antithesis	Instead of taxing our citizens to enrich other countries, we will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens

Hyperbole	• A tide of change is sweeping the country • millions and millions of criminal aliens • the disastrous invasion of our country • I have been tested and challenged more than any president in our 250-year history
Parallel structure	They crossed deserts, scaled mountains, braved untold dangers, won the Wild West, ended slavery, rescued millions from tyranny, lifted billions from poverty, harnessed electricity, split the atom, launched mankind into the heavens and put the universe of human knowledge into the palm of the human hand
Allusion	• Martin Luther King • President McKinley • Teddy Roosevelt

Numerous rhetorical devices were employed in the speech. For instance, Trump used hyperbole when he called immigrants “criminal aliens”, a powerful phrase that suggests American nationalism and fosters xenophobia among listeners. Furthermore, Trump depicted immigrants as invaders by describing them as a “disastrous invasion of the country”. This reveals Trump’s attitude towards immigrants, viewing them as a threat.

Cognitive Analysis

This section explores the strategies employed to shape the audience's mental models and beliefs. It emphasises the expressions used to identify key actors in the speech. Additionally, the techniques used to foster victimisation and polarisation are clarified.

Actor Description

The actors in the speech included Trump’s administration, Biden’s administration, Americans, and immigrants. The mental image held by Trump of non-Americans seems to influence his way of delivering the speech. That is, the way immigrants are described as “dangerous criminals” reflects Trump’s negative attitude towards non-Americans. Additionally, linking immigrants to crimes and drugs could foster anti-immigrant attitudes. He further emphasised this point when he said, “First, I will declare a national emergency at our southern border.” Then he continued by labelling immigrants as enemies, stating, “I will send troops to the southern border to repel the disastrous invasion of our country.” Trump used these statements to activate pre-existing mental models of immigration fear, job loss, and populism. He aimed to reinforce the belief that America is being exploited and that he would be the one to save America and return it to its people.

Through his speech, Trump portrayed the US as a weak country due to the actions and policies of the previous government, which did not prioritise the interests of American citizens. For example, he stated, “Our country can no longer give basic services in times of emergency.” Trump used strong negative words and phrases to describe former government officials. He used terms like “corrupt establishment” to refer to the previous government's abuse of power. Besides, he depicted Biden’s administration as unsuccessful in prioritising the needs of American citizens: “it fails to protect our magnificent law-abiding American citizens.” He also labelled immigrants as criminals by describing them as people who come from “prisons and mental institutions that have illegally entered our country from all over the world.”

On the other hand, words such as “prosperous,” “greatest civilisation,” and “growing nation” were used to portray America and its citizens positively. Furthermore, Trump described himself as a “peacemaker” and “unifier” who would make America a great nation.

Authority

To make his speech more convincing, Trump referenced key figures in US history. He called the day of his inauguration “Martin Luther King Day” because Martin Luther King represents a historic figure in the fight for equality and human rights. To support his tariff policy, he mentioned William McKinley, the 25th President of the United States, who led the US to victory in the Spanish-American War and raised protective tariffs to boost the American economy. Additionally, he used the famous slogan “drill, baby, drill”, which was employed by Michael Steele in his 2008 campaign to promote increased oil production.

Polarization

In his speech, Trump drew clear divisions between America and other nations, and between Americans and immigrants. He used positive language to portray America as a great nation. For example, he stated that he would prioritise American interests by saying “I will very simply put America first,” implying that no other nation holds equal importance. Moreover, he called American citizens “heroes” and “law-abiding citizens,” while describing citizens of other countries as “aliens” and “criminals,” portraying them as oppositional groups.

Table 6: Polarisation examples.

Ingroup	Outgroup
USA	China
Trump Administration	Biden Administration
American citizens	Immigrants

Additionally, the speech depicted the Biden administration as corrupt and neglectful of its citizens' interests, while portraying Trump's administration as a saviour for the American people, aiming to recover their lost rights:

We now have a government that cannot manage even a simple crisis at home, while at the same time stumbling into a continuing catalogue of catastrophic events abroad. It fails to protect our magnificent law-abiding American citizens, but provides sanctuary and protection for dangerous criminals, many from prisons and mental institutions that have illegally entered our country from all over the world.

The statement above could cause the public to see the previous government as ineffective in managing crises and to think that Trump's administration would resolve issues that have been left unaddressed.

Victimisation

Trump used the victimisation technique to portray the US as a vulnerable country being exploited by others. He depicted the US as being victimised at the Panama Canal: “American ships are being severely overcharged, not treated fairly in any way, shape, or form.” Additionally, Trump reminded the audience of the wildfires in Los Angeles and portrayed those who lost their homes as victims: “They don't have a home any longer.”

Besides, he characterised the people of North Carolina as victims due to the inappropriate reaction of the previous government to the hurricane which hit the state in September 2024,

“Our country can no longer give basic services in times of emergency, as recently shown by the wonderful people of North Carolina. Been treated so badly.”

Trump’s portrayal of American and US citizens as weak and exploited helps him gain more support for his administration and approval for the anti-immigrant policies he plans to implement.

Vagueness

A number of vague words and phrases were used in the speech to avoid candid statements. In criticising Biden’s immigration policy, Trump employed the adjective “unlimited” to persuade the audience that a substantial amount of money was spent to protect foreign territories rather than American soil: “We have a government that has given unlimited funding to the defence of foreign borders but refuses to defend American borders.” Furthermore, he did not specify the countries from which criminals entered the US: “dangerous criminals, many from prisons and mental institutions that have illegally entered our country from all over the world.” In addition, Trump used the indefinite pronoun “something” to refer to his impeachment by the House of Representatives, which was led by the Democrats at that time. He considers this impeachment an abuse of power: “Never again will the immense power of the state be weaponised to persecute political opponents, something I know something about.”

Positive-Self and Negative-Other Representations

Several statements were used to enhance Trump’s positive image, and emphasise others’ negative representations were employed. To highlight his positive image, he commented that his administration would utilise its power to promote peace rather than wage war: “Our power will stop all wars and bring a new spirit of unity to a world that has been angry, violent and totally unpredictable.” Moreover, Trump emphasised that his administration would secure justice and order, which had been lost during the previous administration: “Under my leadership, we will restore fair, equal and impartial justice under the constitutional rule of law. And we are going to bring law and order back to our cities.”

In contrast, Trump used several negative words, such as “aliens” and “criminals”, to describe immigrants and emphasise their negative traits. He also declared that immigrants represent a threat to the country by labelling them as “invaders”: “I will send troops to the southern border to repel the disastrous invasion of our country.”

This statement influences Trump’s audience’s beliefs about immigrants, who are viewed as dangerous and threatening to American society. Additionally, he subtly criticises Biden’s administration for harming the economy through excessive spending and mismanagement: “The inflation crisis was caused by massive overspending and escalating energy prices.”

The analysis above indicates that Trump holds an anti-immigrant ideology, which is common among conservatives in the Republican Party. Trump downplayed the positive contributions of immigrants by ignoring how they have benefited the US welfare system and economy. For example, many major companies like Google and Apple have been led by immigrants. Furthermore, immigrants in the US have played a crucial role in fostering a diverse culture and society. In contrast, he solely focused on their misconduct and blamed them for crimes in the US.

Social Analysis

Power

Trump relied on straightforward language and strong modal verbs to assert his authority. Additionally, he frequently used the personal pronoun “I” to demonstrate confidence when undertaking specific actions. Moreover, Trump displayed an anti-environmental stance when he stated that “we will end the Green New Deal and we will revoke the electric vehicle mandate.” This indicates that Trump intended to use his power to alter existing environmental policies, which he did immediately after being elected. Further, Trump demonstrates his power by making a commissive statement to stop media censorship: “I will also sign an executive order to immediately stop all government censorship and bring back free speech to America.” This statement suggests that the previous administration restricted free speech, and Trump would overturn the censorship policies to restore Americans' freedoms. The phrase “executive order” indicates that Trump possesses the authority and power to introduce new laws and reverse existing policies. Furthermore, Trump highlighted his military authority by stating: “As commander in chief, I have no higher responsibility than to defend our country from threats and invasions, and that is exactly what I am going to do.”

The use of fearful words like “threats” and “invasions” makes the audience more inclined to be convinced of Trump’s capability to act to overcome the immigration issues. Besides, the word “exactly” and the future structure “I am going to do” ensure the assertiveness and commitment which represent him as a powerful president.

Additionally, Trump demonstrates his power through his ability to overcome the economic crisis: “I will direct all members of my cabinet to marshal the vast powers at their disposal to defeat what was record inflation and rapidly bring down costs and prices.”

From the statement above, Trump portrays himself as a powerful leader with the authority to direct department heads to implement measures that lower prices and restore the economy.

Inequality

It is evident from the speech that Americans and foreigners are not equally represented. For example, he stated that he would deport all foreigners whom he labelled as criminals:

“By invoking the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, I will direct our government to use the full and immense power of federal and state law enforcement to eliminate the presence of all foreign gang criminal networks, bringing devastating crime to U.S. soil, including our cities and inner cities.”

The Alien Enemies Act of 1798 allows the U.S. government to detain, deport, or restrict non-citizens from enemy nations during wartime, regardless of whether they have committed crimes. As a result, individuals are mistreated solely because of their country of origin. Describing gangs as “foreign” fosters fear and xenophobia among the public. Moreover, Trump portrays city areas as unequal by using the term “inner cities,” which is linked to Black and Latino communities, implicitly associating them with crime. These areas refer to “the central part of a city where people live and where there are often problems because people are poor and there are few jobs and poor housing.” (Cambridge Advanced Learners’ Dictionary). Furthermore, Trump generalises that all American citizens are “law-abiding” attributing crimes to only those who came to the US from other countries:

“It fails to protect our magnificent law-abiding American citizens, but provides sanctuary and protection for dangerous criminals, many from prisons and mental institutions that have illegally entered our country from all over the world.”

Additionally, the statement, “Provides sanctuary and protection for dangerous criminals”, indicates that immigrants are given unfair advantages over American citizens, which manifests a populist anti-immigration ideology.

Discussion

Rhetorical Strategies as Tools of Persuasion

The results of the study revealed that Trump used the pronouns “I” and “we” several times to establish social integrity and competence. These findings are in harmony with the results of Amaireh (2023), which revealed that President Biden utilised these pronouns frequently in his speeches to emphasise his authority and foster a sense of belonging among his audience.

The repetitive use of the future tense demonstrates Trump’s strong commitment to undertake drastic changes in the economic and immigration systems. He used the auxiliary verb will to promise to put the interests of the American people first and stop immigrants from entering the country. These findings were echoed in Garifullina et al. (2021) analysis, which revealed that both Presidents Trump and Putin employ the future tense in their speeches to demonstrate commitments to make reforms in the future.

Additionally, Trump used the present simple tense to make statements about the current state of the US economy and prevailing issues, including unemployment, immigration, and foreign policy. Furthermore, Trump employed the present perfect tense to refer back to important events that occurred in the past and still impact the US. For instance, he stated “Panama Canal, which has foolishly been given to the country of Panama after the United States”. This quote indicates that the issue of the Panama Canal remains significant and requires attention.

Trump’s frequent use of the pronouns “we” and “our” seems to foster a sense of one community sharing a common identity. This tactic fosters a sense of belonging among the audience and highlights other groups, such as immigrants and Democrats, as out-groups.

By describing immigration as a “disastrous invasion,” Trump uses militarised metaphors that depict human mobility as an existential danger. These results are in line with (Raza & Hassan, 2024), who reported several negative words in Trump’s first inaugural address to classify immigrants as outgroups. This framing justifies exclusionary policies, aligns with right-wing populist discourses globally, and reinforces fear-based cognitive models among his supporters. Furthermore, Trump employed metaphors to persuade the audience of his reform plans. He used the word “gold” to depict oil as a valuable resource that can strengthen the US economy. Additionally, Trump employed allusion when he referenced Martin Luther King, who is known for his contributions to civil rights, and Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt, who were key figures in revitalising the economy. Trump also used the technique of antithesis to convince the audience of his commitment to reversing the previous administration’s taxation policies by imposing tariffs on foreign countries rather than taxing American citizens.

Ideological Reflections in the Speech

The speech centred on nationalist ideology. Trump repeatedly emphasised prioritising America’s interests over those of other nations. Trump portrayed himself as a strong leader who would restore America’s greatness and as a peacemaker aiming to end all wars and conflicts worldwide. His statements encouraged economic protectionism, xenophobia, and American exceptionalism. Instead of addressing internal issues, Trump focused people’s attention on external threats such as illegal immigration. He developed a cognitive model in which he blamed all failures and crises on the previous government.

The speech clearly shows that Americans and immigrants are not equally represented. Trump creates a clear division between American nationals and people from other countries. The use of vague words and phrases like “many” and “all over the world” makes the statement non-specific and therefore discriminatory. Moreover, America was portrayed as a superior nation by saying, “I will very simply put America first.” This statement clearly reflects Trump’s nationalist ideology, which suggests that non-Americans are less important and justifies anti-immigrant policies. This analysis is consistent with that of Hart (2021), which indicated that Trump adopted a paranoid style in which he made exaggerated claims regarding conspiracies attributed to immigrants.

Social Implications

The analysis has demonstrated that speech discourse is closely connected to social structures in the USA. Trump’s 2025 address was not merely a ceremonial speech. It aimed to reshape mental frameworks surrounding power, inequality, and xenophobia. The use of rhetorical strategies such as victimisation, polarisation, and negative portrayals helped maintain inequality and foster nationalism among the audience. The framing of in-groups and out-groups reinforces ideologies like xenophobia and supports the exclusion of immigrants. Slogans such as “America First” and “Golden Age Begins Now” reflect a nationalist ideology that encourages prioritising American interests. The employment of these strategies was reported by Rowland (2019), who argued that Trump’s utilisation of nationalist populism reinforces social inequality by appealing to in-group identities and downgrading out-groups.

Additionally, the use of religious expressions like “one glorious nation under God” suggests a religious identity and strengthens Christian nationalism. Moreover, Trump aimed to create social fear and division among Americans by dehumanising immigrants and justifying militarised border policies. As a result, the normalisation of force occurs as he seeks to persuade the public of the dangers posed by immigrants.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to critically analyse Donald Trump’s 2025 inauguration speech through the socio-cognitive approach.

The findings showed that Trump used several discursive techniques, such as lexicalisation, polarisation, and victimisation, to support his ideologies. Additionally, several rhetorical appeals and devices were used to make the speech more persuasive. The findings also revealed that Trump managed to demonstrate power through the use of particular words and structures, such as the repetitive use of the personal pronoun “I” and the auxiliary verb “will”. Besides, social inequality between Americans and immigrants was reflected in Trump’s choice of vocabulary, which negatively represented the immigrants. Further, the results of this study highlighted the role of political discourse in shaping the public’s opinions. In other words, the rhetoric and the discourse techniques can serve as tools to shape people’s views and establish new policies.

This study demonstrated that Trump’s 2025 inaugural speech strengthens his established populist discourse by using discursive strategies such as polarisation, victimisation, and positive-self/negative-other representation. Unlike his 2017 address, the 2025 speech relies more explicitly on religious ethos and militarised metaphors, reflecting a heightened nationalist agenda. The findings contribute to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis by demonstrating how political rhetoric not only reflects but also actively constructs power relations and

legitimises inequality. This analysis also emphasises the importance of studying contemporary political speeches to understand how language sustains populism in democratic contexts. This research was limited to analysing Trump's 2025 inauguration speech using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework. The coding was carried out manually using the Microsoft Word application. While this method allowed for close engagement with the data, it has limitations regarding reliability. Future studies could utilise qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo, Atlas.ti) or involve multiple coders to improve consistency. Other studies may adopt different CDA frameworks, such as those by Fairclough and Wodak, to examine the speech from various perspectives. Additionally, future research could compare the language used by Trump and other presidential candidates to explore how different ideologies may influence political speech.

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Compliance with ethical standards

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