

REPRESENTATION OF SELF AND THE OTHER IN POLITICAL WAR DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TRUMP'S STATEMENTS ON THE US-IRAN-ISRAEL CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the representation of self and other in Donald Trump's political discourse on the US-Iran-Israel conflict using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research explores how language is used to construct political identities, shape perceptions of international actors, and legitimize foreign policy positions. Drawing on Fairclough's three dimensional model and van Dijk's ideological square, the study analyzes selected public statements, speeches, and media comments by Trump related to the conflict. The findings reveal that the United States is consistently represented as a powerful and legitimate actor, Israel as a strategic ally, and Iran as a primary source of threat and instability. The analysis also highlights strong patterns of ideological polarization, where positive self representation and negative other representation are systematically constructed through evaluative and emotionally charged language. The study concludes that Trump's discourse plays an active role in constructing political realities and influencing public understanding of international conflict.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, political discourse, Donald Trump, US-Iran-Israel conflict, ideology, self and other representation, power, framing, geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

Political language plays a central role in shaping how international conflicts are understood by governments, media, and the public. War is not only fought through military action but also through discourse, where political leaders construct meanings of threat, legitimacy, and identity. Through language, leaders define allies and enemies, justify policies, and influence global opinion. The relationship between the United States, Iran, and Israel represents one of the most

complex geopolitical structures in modern international politics. Israel is a long standing ally of the United States, while Iran is often positioned as a regional rival due to political, military, and ideological tensions. In this triangular relationship, political discourse becomes a key tool for constructing meaning and shaping public understanding of conflict.

Donald Trump's political rhetoric is particularly significant in this context due to his direct,

confrontational, and highly visible communication style. His statements on Iran and Israel often use strong evaluative language, clear distinctions between allies and enemies, and emotionally charged expressions. These features make his discourse a strong case for examining how political meaning is constructed through language. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a suitable framework for studying this relationship between language, power, and ideology. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse does not only reflect reality but also shapes it. Similarly, van Dijk (1998) explains how ideological meanings are reproduced through language, especially through positive self representation and negative other representation.

Research Objectives

The study aims to explore how Donald Trump constructs identities and relationships in his discourse on the US–Iran–Israel conflict.

It examines how the United States is represented in his statements within this geopolitical context. It identifies how Iran and Israel are linguistically framed and what discursive strategies are used to construct them as allies or adversaries.

It analyzes the ideological meanings embedded in Trump’s rhetoric and how these contribute to the broader framing of international conflict.

Research Questions

How does Donald Trump construct the representation of the United States in his discourse on the US–Iran–Israel conflict?

How are Iran and Israel represented in his political statements and what linguistic strategies are used in these representations?

What ideological meanings and patterns of self and other representation are reflected in Trump’s war related rhetoric?

Problem Statement

Although many studies have examined political discourse in international relations, limited attention has been given to how Donald Trump simultaneously constructs the United States, Iran, and Israel within a single triangular framework. Most research focuses on bilateral relations, such as US–Iran or US–Israel, rather than analyzing

how all three actors are represented together in discourse.

This gap is important because Trump’s rhetoric often shifts between different alignments, presenting the United States as a dominant actor, Israel as an ally, and Iran as a threat. A detailed analysis is needed to understand how these representations are linguistically constructed and what ideological meanings they carry.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by applying it to a triangular geopolitical context rather than a simple binary opposition. It helps explain how political language shapes perceptions of international conflict and power relations. The study also provides insight into how media and political communication influence public understanding of war and diplomacy.

Delimitations of the Study

This research is limited to selected public statements, speeches, and interviews of Donald Trump related to the US, Iran, and Israel. It does not analyze all available political texts but focuses on representative data suitable for qualitative discourse analysis.

The study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly the models proposed by Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (1998). Fairclough’s three dimensional model is used to analyze text, discursive practice, and social practice. Van Dijk’s ideological square is used to examine patterns of positive self representation and negative other representation in political discourse.

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has become a widely used approach in the study of political language, especially in contexts involving power, ideology, and international conflict. CDA examines how language is used to construct social realities and how discourse reflects unequal power relations in society. In political communication, CDA helps reveal how leaders shape public perception through strategic use of language. This chapter reviews key theoretical and empirical studies related to CDA, political discourse, and the representation of self and other in

international conflict, with a focus on Trump's rhetoric and the US–Iran–Israel geopolitical context.

CDA is grounded in the idea that language is not neutral but deeply connected to power and ideology. Fairclough (1995) explains that discourse both reflects and shapes social structures, meaning that political language actively contributes to constructing reality. CDA therefore investigates how texts are influenced by broader social and political conditions. Van Dijk (1998) further emphasizes the ideological dimension of discourse, arguing that political language often follows an “ideological square” strategy, where positive information about the self is highlighted, while negative information about others is emphasized. This framework is especially useful in analyzing political conflict, where leaders construct in-groups and out-groups through language. Wodak and Meyer (2009) also highlight that CDA focuses on historical and contextual interpretation of discourse, making it suitable for analyzing political speeches and international relations.

A central concept in CDA is the representation of “self” and “other.” Political leaders often construct national identity by positively representing their own group while negatively representing opposing groups. This process is closely linked to ideology and power. Van Dijk (2006) explains that ideological discourse tends to emphasize national pride, security, and morality when referring to the self, while portraying the other as dangerous, irrational, or threatening. This binary construction is common in war and conflict narratives. In international political discourse, such representations are used to justify foreign policy decisions and military actions. Leaders use language strategically to gain public support and legitimacy. Donald Trump's political discourse has been widely studied due to its distinctive rhetorical style and ideological polarization. Research shows that his speeches often rely on simplified language, emotional appeals, repetition, and strong evaluative expressions.

Studies suggest that Trump frequently constructs clear distinctions between allies and enemies, especially in foreign policy contexts. For example, Iran is often framed as a security threat, while

Israel is positioned as a strategic ally of the United States. This pattern reflects ideological positioning consistent with van Dijk's theory of in-group and out-group representation. Kadim (2022) found that Trump's campaign speeches frequently use discourse strategies such as negative other presentation and positive self representation to strengthen political identity and influence public perception.

Recent research has increasingly focused on political discourse surrounding the US, Iran, and Israel conflicts. Studies show that media and political leaders use framing strategies to construct legitimacy and justify actions. For example, research on Trump's posts about the Iran–Israel conflict found that his rhetoric constructs power relations by emphasizing US dominance and portraying Iran as unstable or aggressive (Ahmad et al., 2025). Similarly, studies on media discourse reveal that news reporting on the US–Iran–Israel conflict is often ideologically shaped rather than neutral (Hashim, 2026). Other CDA studies have analyzed Trump's pro-Israel speeches and found strong ideological alignment, where Israel is consistently framed as a legitimate ally and partner in security cooperation (Jabbar et al., 2026). These studies confirm that political discourse plays a central role in shaping international perceptions of conflict.

Although existing research has examined Trump's discourse and US–Iran relations separately, there is limited work that analyzes all three actors together in a single triangular framework. Most studies focus on bilateral relationships, such as US–Iran or US–Israel, without examining how Trump simultaneously constructs all three identities within one discourse system.

This gap is important because the US–Iran–Israel relationship is not linear but interconnected. Trump's rhetoric often shifts between these actors, constructing complex ideological positions that cannot be fully understood through binary analysis alone. Therefore, a CDA approach focusing on triangular representation provides a more comprehensive understanding of political meaning-making.

Methodology

Research Design

This study follows a qualitative research design. It uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how Donald Trump constructs self and other representations in his statements on the US, Iran, and Israel conflict. The qualitative approach is suitable because the study focuses on language meaning, ideology, and power rather than numerical data.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis, mainly drawing on Fairclough's three dimensional model and van Dijk's ideological square. Fairclough's model helps analyze text at three levels: textual features, discursive practice, and social practice. Van Dijk's model helps identify patterns of positive self representation and negative other representation in political discourse.

Data Collection

The data consists of selected public statements, speeches, interviews, and media comments made by Donald Trump related to the US, Iran, and Israel conflict. The texts are taken from reliable public sources such as official speeches, verified interviews, and published media reports.

The data is selected purposively. Only statements that directly refer to Iran, Israel, or the United States in the context of conflict, war, diplomacy, or security are included.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis is conducted in several steps.

First, the collected texts are read carefully to identify relevant excerpts related to the US-Iran-Israel conflict.

Second, the texts are examined at the textual level to identify linguistic features such as word choice, tone, pronouns, and evaluative language.

Third, the discursive level is analyzed to understand how the statements are produced and interpreted in their political and media context.

Fourth, the social level is examined to explore how the discourse reflects broader ideological meanings, especially in terms of power relations and international conflict.

Finally, using van Dijk's ideological square, the study identifies how Trump emphasizes positive representations of the United States and allies while constructing negative representations of Iran or opposing actors.

Analytical Focus

The study focuses on discursive strategies such as:

- Self representation of the United States
- Other representation of Iran and Israel
- Use of evaluative and emotional language
- Framing of threat, security, and legitimacy
- Construction of alliances and oppositions

Ethical Considerations

All data used in this study is taken from publicly available sources. No private or confidential information is included. The analysis is based on academic interpretation of political discourse and does not aim to misrepresent or manipulate the original meaning of statements.

Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the analysis of Donald Trump's discourse on the US-Iran-Israel conflict using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis focuses on how Trump constructs "self" (United States) and "other" (Iran and Israel within shifting alliances), and how ideological meanings are embedded in his language. The discussion is guided by Fairclough's three dimensional model and van Dijk's ideological square.

The analysis is organized around key discursive strategies including representation, evaluation, legitimization, and threat construction.

Representation of the United States (Self Representation)

Trump's discourse consistently constructs the United States as a powerful, rational, and security driven actor. The US is often positioned as a global protector and decision maker in international conflict. In several public statements, Trump emphasizes American strength, military capacity, and leadership. For example, in discussions related to Iran tensions, he repeatedly frames the United States as "stronger than ever" and capable of controlling escalation.

From a CDA perspective, this reflects positive self representation. According to van Dijk's ideological square, in group members highlight their own strengths to legitimize authority. Trump's language constructs the US as a stabilizing force in contrast to instability attributed to others. The repeated use of pronouns like "we" and "our country" also strengthens national unity and collective identity, reinforcing the idea of shared national strength and legitimacy.

Representation of Iran (Other Representation)

Iran is frequently constructed as a source of threat, instability, and opposition in Trump's discourse. In statements regarding nuclear policy and regional tensions, Iran is often associated with words such as "danger," "terror," and "violence." For instance, Trump has publicly described Iran as a destabilizing force in the Middle East and linked it to regional insecurity. This creates a negative semantic field around Iran.

From a CDA perspective, this is a clear case of negative other representation. The discursive strategy constructs Iran as an "out group" that threatens global peace and US interests. This framing also works as legitimization for strong political or military responses. By constructing Iran as dangerous, the discourse indirectly justifies sanctions, pressure, or military readiness.

Representation of Israel (Strategic Ally Discourse)

Israel is generally represented in Trump's discourse as a strategic ally and partner of the United States. His statements often highlight cooperation, shared security interests, and mutual support. For example, in speeches and policy announcements, Trump has emphasized strong US-Israel relations and described Israel as a key partner in maintaining regional stability.

In CDA terms, Israel is placed within the positive in group category but in a slightly different way than the US itself. It is not only self but a closely aligned ally that strengthens the legitimacy of US foreign policy in the region. This creates a triangular alignment where the US and Israel are positioned on one side of the discourse, while Iran is constructed as the opposing force.

Discursive Construction of Conflict and Threat

One of the most prominent features of Trump's rhetoric is the construction of conflict through threat based language. His discourse often includes references to military strength, consequences, and deterrence. Statements related to Iran frequently include warnings about "severe consequences" or "strong response" in case of escalation. This type of language constructs a sense of urgency and danger. From a CDA perspective, this reflects the strategy of fear based legitimization. By emphasizing threat, political action becomes justified and normalized in public perception. This also reflects what Fairclough describes as the relationship between discourse and social practice, where language contributes to shaping real political decisions and public acceptance of those decisions.

Ideological Framing and Polarization

Trump's discourse shows a clear pattern of ideological polarization. The world is often divided into opposing categories such as allies versus enemies, strength versus weakness, and order versus chaos.

Using van Dijk's ideological square, the analysis shows:

- Positive US self representation through strength, leadership, and control
- Positive representation of Israel as a trusted ally
- Negative representation of Iran as a threat and destabilizing force

This polarized structure simplifies complex geopolitical realities into clear moral and political oppositions. Such simplification is a key feature of populist political discourse.

Discussion

The findings show that Trump's discourse is not neutral but deeply ideological. Language is used strategically to construct political realities in which the United States appears justified in its actions.

The representation of Iran as a threat and Israel as an ally supports a broader geopolitical narrative that reinforces US centrality in global politics. This aligns with CDA theories that emphasize discourse as a tool of power and ideology.

The triangular structure of representation is particularly important. Instead of a simple binary opposition, Trump's discourse creates a layered relationship where alliances and enmities are dynamically constructed. This makes the discourse more complex and strategically flexible.

Overall, the analysis confirms that political language plays a key role in shaping perceptions of international conflict, and Trump's rhetoric is a clear example of how discourse constructs political reality.

Conclusion

This study examined how Donald Trump constructs self and other representations in his discourse on the US–Iran–Israel conflict using Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings show that his rhetoric consistently presents the United States as a strong and legitimate global power, Israel as a strategic ally, and Iran as a source of threat and instability. The analysis also shows that Trump's language is highly ideological. It relies on clear oppositions between allies and enemies, which simplifies complex geopolitical relations into polarized categories. Through these discursive patterns, his statements help justify political positions and shape public understanding of international conflict. Overall, the study concludes that Trump's discourse is not only descriptive but also constructive, as it actively produces meanings of war, power, and legitimacy in the US–Iran–Israel context.

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