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Original article

A Multi-Methodological Discourse Analysis of the 2024 Trump Victory Speech

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Abstract
This paper presents a rigorous, multi-methodological critical discourse analysis of Donald J. Trump's 2024 presidential victory speech, demonstrating how micro-grammatical choices systematically build macro-political populist hegemony. Moving beyond impressionistic readings, the study utilizes an advanced triangulation model combining Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Teun van Dijk's Sociocognitive Approach (SCA), and Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), while integrating Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational perspective to examine the dynamic interplay between discourse and social structures. Through this integrated framework, the analysis tracks how political power is grammatically and cognitively organized. Specifically, DHA is deployed to dissect Wodak's five primary discursive strategies—nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation—while SCA maps the cognitive execution of the "Ideological Square" and the formation of populist mental models. SFL anchors these dimensions in micro-textual evidence, analyzing the speech across Ideational transitivity processes, Interpersonal pronoun shifts and modal commitments, and Textual Theme-Rheme progressions. Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative triangulation approach integrating DHA, SCA, and SFL to bridge micro-grammar and macro-ideology. The findings reveal that the discourse institutionalizes an informal populist style, monopolizes political agency, and deploys a "common sense" heuristic to marginalize alternative viewpoints, successfully reframing an electoral outcome as a moral, populist, and quasi-divine mandate for sweeping institutional reform. By cognitively blending the leader's persona with the ontological construct of "the people," the speech legitimizes radical structural transformation while maintaining rigid boundaries of socio-political exclusion
Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach, Sociocognitive Approach, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Populist Hegemony, Donald Trump.

Introduction

Political discourse is fundamentally a site of ideological struggle, identity negotiation, and power reproduction. Within contemporary political communication, the victory speech delivered by Donald J. Trump on November 6, 2024, represents a critical discursive juncture. Far from functioning merely as a conventional ritual of democratic transition or national reconciliation, the text serves as an aggressive consolidation of what may be termed "Magdiscourse" (MAGA discourse), a strategic reconfiguration of populist hegemony, and a linguistic blueprint for future institutional governance. For the discourse analyst, this text operates as a highly sophisticated linguistic artifact that demands systematic deconstruction rather than partisan critique.

A persistent challenge in political Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is avoiding impressionistic, biased readings that reduce textual analysis to mere political commentary. This paper achieves methodological rigor through analytical triangulation. By synthesizing Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Teun van Dijk's Sociocognitive Approach (SCA), and Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this study maps the complex trajectory between micro-textual grammar (the linguistic layer), cognitive mental models (the psychological layer), and macro-political historical contexts (the societal layer).

This investigation addresses four primary research questions:

- **RQ1:** How does the speech discursively and cognitively construct the boundaries of the in-group ("Us") versus the out-group ("Them") to build populist solidarity and exclusion?
- **RQ2:** In what ways do Wodak's five discursive strategies (nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification) operate to legitimize the electoral victory and frame future policy actions?
- **RQ3:** How do SFL transitivity process types, pronoun systems, modal commitments, and thematic progressions grammatically realize agency, moral obligation, and historical transition within the text?

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- **RQ4:** How does the integration of these three distinct discourse paradigms provide a comprehensive account of the structural mechanics underpinning contemporary populist hegemony?

Literature Review & Theoretical Justification

The Evolution of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)

Critical Discourse Studies is defined by its commitment to exposing how social power relations, dominance, and inequality are discursively produced, maintained, and resisted. Unlike descriptive linguistics, CDS is explicitly problem-oriented and explanatory. The field has evolved from early structuralist understandings of ideology toward multi-dimensional models that recognize the active role of language users. Norman Fairclough's pioneering dialectical-relational model conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that is both socially shaped and socially shaping. Fairclough emphasizes that discourse does not exist in a vacuum; it maintains a dialectical relationship with non-discursive social elements, such as institutional frameworks, political systems, and economic realities.

Wodak, van Dijk, and Halliday: Analytical Synergies

To operationalize CDS at a high level of academic rigor, this study rejects a monolithic approach, electing instead to synthesize the distinct methodologies of Wodak, van Dijk, and Halliday. Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) corrects purely textual forms of analysis by insisting on the integration of historical context into interpretation. DHA treats political texts as intertextual and interdiscursive networks, focusing on how social identities and national narratives are historically constructed and recontextualized across time. Wodak's framework is uniquely designed to trace the evolution of political arguments, specifically through the tracking of topoi—argumentative shortcuts that justify specific social and political actions.

However, the path from historical context to linguistic structure requires a cognitive bridge. Teun van Dijk's Sociocognitive Approach (SCA) fills this analytical gap by arguing that social macro-structures and textual micro-structures are mediated by social and personal cognition. Language users understand, produce, and interpret discourse based on internal mental models, which are stored in episodic memory and influenced by socially shared ideological representations (such as group values, attitudes, and cultural norms). Van Dijk's concept of the "Ideological Square" serves as a precise cognitive heuristic for analyzing how populist communication systematically polarizes representations of the self and the other.

Finally, Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides the necessary grammatical grounding for this study. SFL posits that language is not an abstract set of rules, but a functional resource for making meaning. It recognizes that every clause simultaneously enacts three metafunctions: the Ideational (representing experience), the Interpersonal (enacting social relationships), and the Textual (organizing information). SFL prevents the analyst from making impressionistic claims about ideology by providing a systematic system for measuring grammar, transitivity, and modality.

The Discursive Research Gap in Populist Communication

A substantial body of literature has examined the rhetorical style of Donald Trump, focusing primarily on his use of simple vocabulary, repetitive structures, and polarizing social media communications. Scholars have identified his communication strategy as archetypally populist, characterized by an ongoing appeal to "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite."

However, existing research often treats victory speeches as standard, highly formulaic texts focused on national unity. There is a distinct gap in empirical studies that systematically analyze how a populist victory speech can actively work to institutionalize an informal, disruptive communication style as a legitimate form of state governance.

Furthermore, few studies have applied a fully integrated multi-methodological framework (DHA-SCA-SFL) to a single political text. This study addresses this gap, providing an empirical model of how micro-grammatical choices directly build macro-political populist hegemony.

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Methodology

This paper conducts a multi-layered critical discourse analysis of the official verbatim transcript of Donald J. Trump's 2024 victory speech, "the primary data corpus for this study", cross-referenced with the audiovisual broadcast from C-SPAN. The speech, spanning approximately 25 minutes, was delivered at the Palm Beach County Convention Center, Florida, on November 6, 2024.

The analytical procedure is organized as follows:

1. **Linguistic Layer (SFL):** Exhaustive coding of the text for transitivity process types (Material, Relational, Mental, Verbal), pronoun networks (I, *We*, *You*, *They*), modal values (*will*, *going to*, *have to*), and Theme-Rheme progression.
2. **Socio-Cognitive Layer (SCA):** Mapping these linguistic features onto van Dijk's Ideological Square to determine how positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation are cognitively structured.
3. **Historical-Contextual Layer (DHA):** Linking these cognitive models to Wodak's five discursive strategies, with a particular focus on the identification of political topoi used to legitimize future state policies.

Comprehensive Multi-Methodological Analysis

Nomination, Predication, and the Ideological Square (Addresses RQ1 & RQ2)

The text establishes its populist framework through strategic choices in nomination and predication, which serve to execute the first and second quadrants of van Dijk's Ideological Square: *Emphasize positive things about Us* and *Emphasize negative things about Them*.

"These are our friends. We have thousands of friends on this incredible movement... frankly, this was, I believe, the greates t political movement of all time." (00:13)

DHA Analysis

Trump utilizes a highly personalized nominative strategy by substituting standard institutional terms like "voters" or "citizens" with the relational noun *"friends"*. The possessive pronoun *"our"* creates immediate intimacy, shrinking the distance between the political executive and the electorate.

The nominalization of the campaign as an *"incredible movement"* shifts the framing away from a bureaucratic political party toward an organic, unstoppable historical force.

The predication strategy is intensely positive, employing the absolute superlative *"the greatest... of all time"* to elevate the movement beyond normal historical comparison.

SFL Grammatical Grounding

This positive self-presentation is structurally realized through **Relational Identifying Processes**, which play a crucial role in presenting identities as objective, undeniable facts rather than mere subjective opinions. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this is achieved by mapping a **Token/Carrier** to a specific **Value/Attribute** through a relational process.

For instance, in the statement, *"These are our friends,"* "**These**" serves as the **Token**, linked by the relational process "**are**" to the Value, "**our friends.**" Similarly, in the phrase, *"This was the greatest political movement of all time,"* the relational process "**was**" establishes an objective equivalence between the Token "**This**" and the highly evaluative Value, "**the greatest political movement of all time.**"

The in-group is further expanded near the end of the speech through an extensive, syndetic list:

"Union, non-union, African American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, Arab-American, Muslim-American. We had everybody..." (20:45)

From a DHA perspective, this enumeration acts as a nominative strategy of **inclusion**. By explicitly listing traditionally diverse demographic groups and immediately unifying them under the SFL structure *"We had everybody,"* the text works to re-map the MAGA movement from a partisan faction into a universally representative national coalition.

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SCA Cognitive Mapping

In terms of van Dijk's Ideological Square, this inclusive strategy optimizes *positive self-presentation* by claiming total democratic representation. In contrast, the out-group ("Them") is consistently subjected to negative predication characterized by vagueness and systemic threat:

"I've said, go into the enemy camp, and the enemy camp is certain networks..." (07:16) *"...it was going bad and it was going bad fast."* (09:26)

The metaphoric nomination *"the enemy camp"* changes mainstream media organizations into hostile military adversaries. By relying on vague plural pronouns (*"they," "certain networks"*), the text keeps the specific actors behind the national decline grammatically hidden. This vagueness allows individual audience members to project their own personal grievances onto an unspecified, threatening "Them," maximizing the cognitive polarization between the moral in-group and the hostile out-group.

Argumentation and the Mobilization of Political Topoi (Addresses RQ2 and RQ3)

To establish a logical and moral justification for his upcoming policy agenda, Trump relies on six key political topoi.

1. The Topos of Crisis (and Salvation)

"We have a country that needs help and it needs help very badly. We're going to fix our borders. We're going to fix everything..." (00:13)

- **Argumentative Structure:** If the nation is in a state of existential emergency, then immediate, radical corrective measures are a absolute necessity.
- **SFL Realization:** From an SFL perspective, the discourse initially frames the national space as a passive, suffering entity through an obligative relational structure. Here, "**a country**" acts as the **Carrier**, positioned through the relational process "**needs**" as requiring the Attribute, "**help.**" However, this passive depiction is immediately countered by a strategic shift to high-agency Material Processes. The discourse transitions into an active, solution-oriented stance: "**We**" takes over as the active **Actor**, initiating the material process "**are going to fix**" directed at the Goal, "**everything.**"
- **SCA Interpretation:** The phrase *"fix everything"* lacks any concrete policy details. Cognitively, this generality functions as an effective heuristic shortcut. It bypasses detailed policy debate, replacing complex systemic problems with a simple mental model of direct personal action and total national restoration.

2. The Topos of Democratic Mandate

"America has given us an unprecedented and powerful mandate." (03:36)

- **Argumentative Structure:** If the electorate delivers a major statistical victory, then the leader possesses the authority to execute sweeping, unimpeded institutional change.
- **SFL Realization:** the text masterfully personifies the nation by positioning "**America**" as a single, active **Actor**. Through the material process "**has given,**" a highly complex, multi-layered electoral outcome is grammatically reconstructed as a direct, personal gift. In this transaction, "**us**" serves as the **Recipient** of an "**unprecedented mandate**" (the **Goal**). By framing a massive and diverse electorate as a singular, acting entity with a unified will, the discourse effectively naturalizes the political victory, transforming a statistical outcome into a personal endorsement.

3. The Topos of History and Quantitative Validation

"...the greatest political comeback in the history of the United States..." (08:39 - spoken by JD Vance) *"...carrying at least 315 electoral votes... We also have won the popular vote."* (02:17)

- **Argumentative Structure:** If our political path is historically unprecedented and statistically overwhelming, then our legitimacy is absolute and beyond conventional challenge.
- **DHA Function:** The discourse integrates hard numerical markers (*"315 electoral votes," "popular vote"*) to build an objectively verified, factual surface. This quantitative evidence shields the highly emotional populist narrative from accusations of bias, framing the victory as a historically irrefutable shift in power.

4. The Topos of Common Sense

"...uniting citizens of all backgrounds around a common core of common sense. We're the party of common sense." (20:45)

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- **Argumentative Structure:** If a political platform is based on "common sense," it is self-evidently correct; therefore, any opposition to it is not merely politically different, but inherently irrational.
- **SCA Cognitive Impact:** The topos of common sense functions as a cognitive boundary-policing mechanism. By framing contested partisan issues—such as total border closure or massive tax reductions—as basic *"common sense,"* Trump shuts down alternative viewpoints. Opponents are cognitively mapped not as legitimate political alternatives, but as actors detached from ordinary reason.

5. The Topos of Exceptionalism

"Can Russia do it? No. Can China do it? No. Can the United States do it other than you? No. Nobody can do that." (14:16)

- **Argumentative Structure:** If our nation and its citizens can achieve technological and resource feats that global rivals cannot, then we are inherently superior and must protect this exceptional status.
- **DHA/SFL Interaction:** Trump utilizes a series of rapid rhetorical questions followed by absolute, self-supplied negative answers. This structure creates an interactive, conversational rhythm. Yet, it completely closes the discursive space, leading the audience to a single, nationalistic conclusion: American superiority is absolute.

6. The Topos of Divine Purpose

"Many people have told me that God spared my life for a reason, and that reason was to save our country and to restore America to greatness." (22:22)

- **Argumentative Structure:** If a leader has survived a life-threatening event due to divine intervention, then his political leadership is a sacred mission, raising his governance above ordinary secular critique.
- **DHA Perspectivisation:** Trump strategically mitigates this monumental claim by attributing it to others: *"Many people have told me..."*. This indirect reporting reduces the risk of appearing overly self-glorifying while fully preserving the powerful, messianic appeal of the narrative.

Perspectivisation, Subjectivity, and Narrative Control (Addresses RQ2)

Through perspectivisation, Trump positions himself as both a direct witness to national events and the central actor in the country's restoration.

SFL Mental and Verbal Processes

To establish epistemic authority, Trump strategically combines Mental Processes of perception with Verbal Processes of direct reporting:

"I saw that rocket and I saw it coming down... I said, 'Elon, was that you?' He said, 'Yes, it was.'" (12:55 - 14:16)

Here, he first grounds his firsthand experience in a visual Mental Process:

- **I [Senser] + saw [Mental Process] + that rocket [Phenomenon]**

He then shifts to a Verbal Process to dramatize the interaction:

- **I [Sayer] + said [Verbal Process] + "Elon..." [Locution]**

By opting for direct, reported speech rather than detached commentary, Trump reframes a monumental technological milestone—the Starship landing—into an intimate personal narrative. This grammatical framing allows him to position himself not just as a direct witness to history, but as an equal peer to the world's leading innovator.

Socio-Cognitive Subjectivity

This narrative strategy reduces the cognitive distance between elite decision-making and the everyday experience of his audience. Rather than delivering a formal, institutional speech, Trump adopts the persona of a conversational storyteller. This approach reinforces his populist image of authenticity. He is seen not as a distant politician reading a scripted text, but as a direct, transparent leader who speaks from personal experience and genuine conviction.

Modality, Appraisal, and Interpersonal Solidarity (Addresses RQ3)

The interpersonal metafunction of SFL deals with how relationships of power, obligation, and solidarity are established through grammar.

Pronoun Shifts (Us vs. Them)

The pronoun *"We"* is the primary linguistic tool used to build populist solidarity in the speech. However, its reference shifts fluidly to serve different political purposes:

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1. **The Campaign/In-group "We":** *"We have won the popular vote."* (02:17)
2. **The Shared-Struggle "We":** *"We've been through so much together."* (18:35)
3. **The Inclusive National "We":** *"We can truly make America great again for all Americans."* (24:36)

By continually shifting the boundaries of *"we,"* Trump merges his campaign's success, his supporters' personal sacrifices, and the destiny of the entire nation into a single, unified project.

Conversely, the second-person pronoun *"you"* is used to position the audience as the direct beneficiaries of his personal protection:

"Every citizen, I will fight for you, for your family and your future... I will not rest..." (01:18)

Transitivity of Commitment

A striking tension in populist rhetoric is unveiled through the transitivity choices in Trump's expressions of commitment:

- **I [Actor] + will fight [Material Process] + for you [Client/Beneficiary]**

At first glance, this structure promises empowerment, yet the grammar tells a different story. By casting himself as the active, protective **Actor** and the people as passive **Beneficiaries**, Trump monopolizes the agency of change. While populist discourse theoretically celebrates "the power of the people," the actual grammatical configuration subtly positions the leader as the sole savior and executioner of action, reducing a collective movement to a one-way act of political guardianship.

Modality and Epistemic Certainty

Trump's future commitments rely on absolute, high-value modal verbs:

*"This **will** truly be the golden age of America... Success is **going to** bring us together."*

By choosing the high-certainty modal *"will"* and the predictive future *"going to"* rather than lower-value modals (*"may," "should," "can"*), Trump presents these future scenarios as inevitable facts rather than mere political goals.

This high epistemic certainty is balanced by the occasional, strategic use of **deontic necessity** (*"have to"*), which justifies painful or controversial actions:

*"We **have to** seal up those borders... We **have to** put our country first..."* (09:26 - 24:36)

This modality removes personal or political choice from the equation, framing these actions as natural, unavoidable obligations imposed by the national crisis itself.

Textual Metafunction and Theme-Rheme Progression (Addresses RQ3)

The textual metafunction examines how the speech is organized to create a cohesive and persuasive narrative flow. Trump's speech is structured around a clear three-part temporal journey: **Past Struggle /rightarrow Present Victory /rightarrow Future Restoration**.

This temporal movement is guided by **Marked Themes**. In SFL, the Theme is the starting point of the clause; when a speaker puts temporal or adverbial phrases in the Theme position, they are intentionally highlighting those concepts:

Theme		Rheme
"Every single day"	[Marked]	...I will be fighting for you.
"Yesterday"	[Marked]	...I stood at my last stop.
"But now"	[Marked]	...we're going onto something far more important.

By placing these temporal markers at the beginning of his clauses, Trump guides the audience through a clear narrative arc: the struggles of yesterday are gone, and a new era of national recovery begins right now.

Lexical Cohesion and Parallelism

Cohesion is also maintained through highly repetitive, rhythmic lists of comparative adjectives:

"...bigger, better, bolder, richer, safer, and stronger..." (24:36)

This parallel structure creates a driving, musical cadence in spoken delivery. It bypasses analytical processing, relying instead on pure rhetorical momentum to build a strong feeling of national optimism and inevitable success.

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The Dialectical-Relational Dimension: Incorporating Fairclough (Addresses RQ4)

While Wodak's DHA illuminates historical legitimation and van Dijk's SCA maps cognitive processing, Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational perspective provides an essential macro-sociological framework for this triangulation. Fairclough's model forces the analyst to look beyond textual mechanics to evaluate how discourse simultaneously reflects and reproduces broader social power structures. Trump's victory speech does not merely report an electoral win; it represents a major challenge to established institutional networks.

From Fairclough's perspective, Trump's speech functions as a strategic intervention in the modern **order of discourse**. By embedding highly informal, colloquial language, celebrity culture narratives, and explicit anti-institutional critiques into an official presidential address, the text challenges traditional standards of state communication. This structural mixing of public presidential authority and private conversational performance serves to normalize populist rhetoric, integrating it directly into the machinery of executive governance. The discourse reflects an ongoing socio-political shift: the centralization of state power within a personalized, highly visible leader who derives authority from direct, unmediated communication with "the movement."

Limitations and Deliberate Scope

As a rigorous piece of critical discourse scholarship, this study acknowledges several definitive limitations:

- **Single-Text Focus:** This analysis evaluates a single, contextualized discourse event: the 2024 victory speech. It does not claim full generalizability across Trump's wider campaign rhetoric or future legislative communications.
- **Exclusion of Non-Verbal Modalities:** The scope of this study is primarily restricted to textual grammar, cognitive heuristics, and historical topoi. A comprehensive multimodal analysis incorporating prosody, kinesics, and gestural semiosis was not conducted.
- **Socio-Political Synchronicity:** The study evaluates the speech within its immediate political context. It does not account for the long-term historical reception or the eventual policy outcomes of the administration.

Implications

The theoretical and empirical findings of this multi-methodological study offer valuable insights across several fields:

- **Critical Discourse Studies:** By demonstrating the successful integration of DHA, SCA, and SFL, this study provides a clear methodological framework for analyzing highly complex political texts without falling into impressionistic bias.
- **Political Science and Populism Studies:** The analysis illustrates how modern populism can move beyond outsider protest rhetoric to establish a stable framework for executive governance.
- **Political Communication:** The study exposes the structural mechanics of "common sense" heuristics, showing how they can effectively shut down alternative political viewpoints and redefine the boundaries of public political speech.

Conclusion (Addresses RQ4)

Donald J. Trump's 2024 victory speech represents a significant shift in contemporary political communication. By combining Wodak's DHA, van Dijk's SCA, and Halliday's SFL, this study has shown how the text systematically transforms a standard election result into an absolute moral, populist, and divinely sanctioned mandate for national overhaul.

Through nomination and predication, the discourse constructs a broad national movement while setting rigid, exclusionary boundaries around legality and loyalty. By relying on key topoi—such as crisis, a democratic mandate, common sense, and divine purpose—the text frames its upcoming political agenda as both inevitable and unquestionable.

At the grammatical level, SFL analysis revealed how high-agency Material processes, strategic pronoun shifts, and absolute epistemic modality work together to guide the audience through a clear narrative of national restoration. Ultimately, the speech achieves its primary objective by weaving these diverse linguistic and cognitive elements into a

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single, cohesive text. It demonstrates that the power of modern populist discourse relies on a highly coordinated relationship between micro-grammatical choices, cognitive mental models, and macro-political historical contexts.

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