

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Military Power Manifestation in Donald Trump's Post-operation Speeches

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This study examines the linguistic representation and manifestation of military power in two post-operation speeches delivered by the U.S. President Donald Trump after the U.S. took action against Iran and Venezuela. Instead of looking at how ideas or policies are used to gain power, the study looks at how power is used at the micro-linguistic level as an unquestionable and unavoidable fact. Utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the analysis examines lexical selection, transitivity patterns, modality, pronominal reference, and quantification. The results show that Trump's speech builds up U.S. military power by using high-certainty modal expressions, suppressing violence by agents, using pronouns to make things more collective, and using words to show that technology is better. Military power is not debated or defended; rather, it is linguistically presented as already achieved, morally justified, and beyond dispute. The research enhances political discourse analysis by transitioning the analytical emphasis from dominance as ideology to power as discursive performance, illustrating how language serves as a strategic tool in the normalization of military force within modern presidential rhetoric.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Power, Ideology, Military Discourse, Trump

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1. Introduction

Discourse has been defined by different critics in various ways. For Potter & Wetherell (1987), discourse is defined as "all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds" (p.7). Henriques, et al., (1984, p.105) define it "any regulated system of statements". As per Marin, "Discourse analysis involves two preliminary steps, turning our objects into texts and locating those texts in discourses, in which material is interpreted and thus, put into a linguistic form.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a problem-oriented interdisciplinary field, "provides a set of tools for analysing texts and spoken language. Such tools have been shown to be highly useful to scholars working across a range of academic fields" (Machin & Mayr, 2025, p.8).

Central to CDA, power is viewed as relationship between dominance and ideology. Although these approaches are still important, a lot of current research focuses on how political actors struggle for power or explain why they use force. There has been insufficient focus on discourses that



depict power as an established reality where authority is assumed rather than defended, and where military dominance is linguistically characterized as inevitable, unquestionable, and technically superior. This analytical deficiency is particularly evident in presidential addresses following military operations, where the purpose of discourse transitions from persuasion to performance (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998).

The study adopts a qualitative approach which depends on Donald Trump's comments after the strikes which are very clear examples of this trend. Trump's way of talking about politics is different from the usual diplomatic way because it relies on certainty, repetition, quantification, and clear claims of agency. Instead of basing military action on international law or a consensus among many countries, his speeches focus on technological capability, operational success, and national exceptionalism. Prior academic inquiries have analyzed Trump's rhetoric concerning populism, nationalism, and ideological division (Wodak, 2015; Hart, 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Power and Political Discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis

Power has been an essential concept in Critical Discourse Analysis since its inception as a research paradigm. It is chiefly defined as a structural relationship inherent in institutions, social hierarchies, and ideological domination (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1993). From this perspective, discourse serves as a place where inequality is kept going by giving some people more access to communicative resources and the naturalization of ideology. Political discourse, specifically, has been regarded as a distinguished domain wherein power dynamics are expressed, preserved, and challenged van Dijk's (1998) Socio-Cognitive approach emphasizes the importance of collective mental models and ideological frameworks in influencing the production and interpretation of political discourse.

Similarly, Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model underscores the interaction among textual features, discursive practices, and overarching social structures, allowing analysts to connect linguistic choices to institutional power. These frameworks have facilitated the examinations of parliamentary debates, policy documents, and media portrayals of political authority. However, power is mainly seen as a dominance that needs to be explained. People often think of power as something that speakers have to justify through moral reasoning, persuasion, or argumentation.

2.2 Military Discourse and the Language of Justification

The discourse surrounding military action has garnered substantial academic investigation, especially regarding the "War on Terror" and the geopolitical landscape following 9/11. Scholars have analyzed the legitimization of military interventions via appeals to security, humanitarianism, and moral obligation (Chilton, 2004; Reyes, 2011). Authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis are some of the most well-known ways to make something legitimate (van Leeuwen, 2007).

In this body of literature, presidential speeches that announce or justify military action have been examined as persuasive texts intended to obtain public approval. For example, research on George W. Bush's rhetoric shows how he used moral binaries, religious metaphors, and fear appeals to make the case for military action (Jackson, 2005; Hodges, 2011).

However, speeches which are made after using force are called "post-operation speeches". The main function of such speeches is not to justify some actions, but to shape interpretation, and establish authority. Despite this diffidence, such kinds of speeches haven't been examined in a systematic way as much as other speeches. They are frequently considered as extensions of legitimizing discourse rather than as discrete genres defined by performative demonstrations of power (Wodak, 2015).

2.3 Trump's Political Discourse: Style, Populism, and Power

Donald Trump's political discourse has attracted significant academic examination, especially concerning its populist orientation, norm-defying style, and adversarial framing. Researchers have examined his rhetoric via the frameworks of right-wing populism and affective polarization. Trump's language has been linked to repetition, intensification, simplification, and clear evaluative language (Savoy, 2018).

Trump's portrayal of power in national settings has been studied in many studies to shed light on his exaggeration and personalization of authority. Others have looked at how his rhetoric goes against the rules of institutions and changes the way presidents talk to each other by making it seem like a show of personal strength instead of institutional continuity (Hart, 2020).

Nonetheless, investigations specifically focusing on Trump's military rhetoric are still scarce, especially concerning micro-linguistic analysis. When military rhetoric is addressed, it is frequently integrated into more extensive examinations of nationalism or security discourse, rather than being analyzed as an independent locus of power dynamics. Furthermore, current research predominantly emphasizes ideological positioning rather than the ways in which grammatical and lexical selections manifest military power as certainty, inevitability, and technological superiority (Kreis, 2017).

2.4 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

In Fairclough's three-dimensional model, there is a relationship between texts, interactions, and contexts. However, according to this model, the stages should be followed. The first stage is called description. The stage is concerned with the formal properties of the text. The second stage is referred to as interpretation, which is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction with seeing the text as a product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation.

The last stage is explanation. This stage is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context – with the social determinants of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects (Fairclough, 2015).

According to Fairclough (2015, p. 4), “any instance of discourse is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice”. In order to better understand the relationship between language, society, power and ideology, Fairclough 1 has developed a model which can help in describing, interpreting and explaining this relationship. This model consists of three dimensions and can be summarized as follows:

The first dimension is text. It focuses on the linguistic features of a spoken or written text. These features include the use of specific lexical items, rhetorical devices and metaphors. All of these concrete textual features should be described and systematically analyzed before moving on to the second dimension. The second dimension is called ‘discursive practice’. It involves the production of text and how that text is comprehended and interpreted by the audience. Attention here is also given to shared knowledge and intertextuality, both of which can help place a text in its social context. Shared knowledge refers to the common knowledge that is shared between the speaker/writer and the audience whereas intertextuality refers to the process of drawing on other texts. The third dimension is called ‘social practice’. This dimension is concerned with the hierarchical social structures that exist in society and in the construction of social identities. This includes an analysis of the social relationship that exists between the speaker/writer and the audience (Fairclough 2015)

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data of the study are two speeches delivered by the American president Trump after the operations on Venezuela (Trump's address after Maduro was taken prisoner) and Iran (Trump's address after the strike on Iranian nuclear sites).

These speeches are derived from the official website of the White House.

3.2 Analytical Categories:

1. Material Process: Actions that agents do.
2. Modality – High Certainty Modals and adverbs that show something is certain (like "will" or "completely")
3. Lexical Intensification: Adjectives and adverbs that stress power, like "extraordinary" and "stunning."
4. Pronominalization: Pronouns that bring people together or set them apart from their enemies, like "we," "our," and "they."
5. Quantification: Numbers or exaggerations that show size or power, like "97%" or "hundreds of thousands."

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Analysis of Trump’s Speech on Iran

4.1.1 Context of the Speech

On June 21, 2025, President Donald Trump spoke to the country from the White House after U.S. airstrikes hit three important Iranian nuclear enrichment sites: Fordow, Natanz, and Esfahan. Trump called the military action a clear success in this speech and warned that there would be more operations if Iran did not seek peace.

The speech is short but full of rhetoric not focuses on the US military strength, national strength and moral framing of the US and Iran. It shows that power is not just a policy fact but also a speech act that puts the United States in a unique position to be able to do the right thing

4.1.2 Word Choices and Meaning Fields

One important part of the speech is how it uses stronger words to make the United States actions seem not only successful but overwhelmingly so:

-“ Massive Precision strikes” combine size “massive” with skill “precision” to create a semantic field of both power and technologically mystery

-The two intensifiers “completely” and “totally” work together to make the destruction seems complete rather than partial or unclear.

-“Spectacular military success” means that “spectacular” is an evaluative word that makes the achievement seem even bigger.

4.1.3 Agency and Transitivity

Transitivity analysis looks at how actions are expressed grammatically in clauses. It shows a pattern of projection for the United States and weak one for Iran. Special attention is paid to studying how agency is spread out because it shows how power or responsibility are talked about. Material processes are the most important parts of the speech:

-“The US military carried out massive precision strikes...”, “the US military” is the front with active agency.

-The passive voice is used here “have been obliterated” but the context makes it clear that the US is to blame.

-The speech keeps the US power as both active and passive by switching between active “carried out..... strikes” and passive constructions with heavy intensification.

4.1.4 Certainty and Modality

Modality is the way that Trump talks about military outcomes as if they are certain and required. This strong belief makes the speakers sound like they know what they are talking about and sure about what they are saying.

- “Must” means that Iran has to make peace. This means that the future is not open but is instead set in stone by the US will.

-“If they don't future attacks will be much worse” the result clause uses high certainty

“Will be” to show that escalation is given.

-These modal constructions lessen the chance of something happening and make it seem more likely to happen which is common why to show power in rhetoric.

4.1.5 Pronounalization and Group Identity

Pronouns show that people are part of a group and work together which strengthens the U.S. unity and global leadership.

When people say “we” and “our” in the context of shared success like “our great military” they connect national identity with military success. The speech uses the inclusive pronoun “we” to set the opponent apart from Iran. “Iran must now make peace” which makes the U.S. more powerful.

This pattern of pronouns is in line with what CDA has found, that powerful people often use inclusive pronouns to make the role seem universal and push opposing agency to the edges

4.1.6 Rhetorical Structure Threat and Moral Justification

-The speech also uses rhetoric in a planned way to mix more condemnation with an implied threat; calling Iran “a bully” is a moral way to justify the US action because it suggests that Iran is doing something wrong.

-The phrase “death to America death to Israel” refers to past your Iranians alleged violence and makes them a moral enemy against whom military action is shown to be defensive.

- Putting moral condemnation next to technical military success makes the US action more legitimate in ways that go beyond strategic analysis; it taps into shared moral ideas of self-defense

4.1.7 Measurement and technological superiority

Another common strategy is to use numbers numbers:

- By naming “three key nuclear facilities” you show how big the action is.

- “Massive precision strikes” is an example of implicit numerical emphasis that shows overwhelming capability without giving exact numbers but making the size clear.

4.2. Analysis of Trump’s speech on Venezuela

4.2.1 Context of the speech

Trump’s speech after the capture of Venezuelan president Nicolas Mudoro makes it sound like the US military action was an amazing and exact success. The speech which was given to both the national on international audience frames the operation as overwhelming, morally right, and strategically perfect. It also emphasizes the US power and capability. Trump also uses exaggerated language, numbers and moral framing to make Power seem absolute and unavoidable.

4.2.2 Word choices and meaning Fields

In this speech Trump’s word choices make him sound more powerful and skilled in the military. Words like “extraordinary” and “spectacular” draw attention to how big and different something is. For example, “extraordinary military operation” and “spectacular assault”. “Overwhelming American military power” “overwhelming” makes a meaning of power and inevitability. “Breathtaking, speed, power, precision, and competence” are repeated intensifiers to show how something is better in many ways. The Valenzuela speech has more exaggerated repetition than the Iran speech which makes US military power more immediate and complete.

4.2.3 Agency and Transitivity

- Material processes take over the speech making U.S forces the most important players on downplaying the role of venezuela

- Active agent clauses “the United States armed forces carried out on extraordinary military operation”.

- Passive or incapacitated clauses for opponents “All the Venezuelan military capacities were rendered ineffective” “they were utterly overwhelmed”.

This pattern of language follows CDA rules; power is shown through a generative positioning which makes the US the main actor and shows opponents as weak or subordinate.

4.2.4 Modality and Certainty

Trump uses a lot of models with high certainty and evaluative adverbs:

-“we were ready to do a second wave if we needed to” Makes US action seems planned and controlled, which makes it seem like it was going to happen.

-“Not a single American service member was killed” shows how strong the military is and how well it can do its job”

- “This was one of the most impressive useful and Powerful displays of America military might” Evaluative adjectives help to clear up any confusion and makes success seem even bigger.

In general, modality strengthens the idea that one has complete control over military outcomes.

4.2.5 Pronominalization and Group Identity

Trump's speech builds a sense of national identity “we” and “our” are both used to include everyone: “our military” “we knocked out 97% of the drugs” This makes Americans feel like they are part of the military success.

“They” and ‘Opponents’: “they were completely overwhelmed”, “Maduro stayed in power” This operates enemies and shows how incompetent they are.

This binary framework (Us versus them) underscores national superiority and moral legitimacy characteristics of power discourse.

4.2.6 Framing the Enemy and Moral Justification

The speech paints Maduro and his government as morally corrupt and dangerous which is why the US military should act:

-“Maduro the illegitimate dictator, was the head of the huge criminal network”

-“to scare American communities, they sent savage and murderous gangs”.

This mix of framing threats and moral condemnation creates a story in which US power is both needed on right, linking military actions with justice.

5. Discussion of Results

Trump’s speech on Iran builds power in these important linguistic ways:

1. Lexical intensification makes military success much more than just a neutral description.
2. Transitivity puts the US in charge of action and gives the power to do so without question.
3. Modality expresses certainty and inevitability, diminishing perceived contingency.
4. Pronominalization fosters a shared intensification with the success of the US military
5. Qualification on technological framing posters positions on superiority.

These linguistics strategies represent power not as an abstract concept but as a discursive performance on existence manifested through language rather than simply articulated.

Trump speech about Venezuela shows how powerful the US is stronger through Language by:

1. Lexical intensification to enhance military success.
2. Material processes that show US power while making opponents weak.
3. A high-certainty modality that sees outcomes unavoidable
4. Pronominal strategies that create a shared sense of identity for the whole country and key enemies apart.
5. Quantification on exaggerated metrics to show complete control.

These strategies work together to make the speech a performance of power, showing that the United States is morally, technologically better, and strategically powerful.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates how Donald Trump linguistically performs and embodies power in two important speeches; the first speech is presented after the American airstrikes on the Iranian nuclear sites and the second one follows the apprehension of the Venezuelan president, Nicolas Maduro. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's three-dimensional model to examine the lexical selection, transitivity patterns, modality, pronominal reference, and quantification. The results showed that, Trump uses a wide range of language techniques in his speeches, to show that the US military is unbeatable and almost the best in the world.

Rational transitivity and a generative structures held equivalent importance. The U.S military was the main character in both speeches, and the people who spoke against it were shown to be weak, incompetent and morally wrong. For instance, in the speech on Iran, the US military is called on all-powerful force with phrases like "completely" and "totally" obliterated. In Venezuela speech Maduro and his forces are called "completely overwhelmed" or "ineffective". By telling the story this way, the enemy seems less powerful which makes the show of strength stronger and more intense. Modality on levels of certainty can also help to make authority stronger. Trump uses a phrases with a lot of certainty like "must now make peace" and "we were ready to do a second wave" to control on guess what will happen next. These words make it sound like the US had a plan and couldn't help but do what it did. This choice of words makes chance or contingency less likely and makes authority an unquestionable fact.

Strategies for using pronouns were important for making the group feel like a group. Using pronouns like "we" or "our" that include everyone, makes the audience feel like they are part of the national action and connects the display of power to both citizens and military. On the other hand, using interpersonal references to opponents like "Iran" or "modero" and exclusive pronoun like "they" makes the other person less human and makes the gap between US and them bigger. This binary opposition supports the idea that one side is

morally and strategically better, while also keeping national pride on unity strong. There were also a lot of wrong amounts and measurements especially in the speech on Venezuela. The percentages of drug seizures, the fact that no one died, and the descriptions of the size of the operation. For example, "70 percent of the drug" and "not a single service member was killed"

Show that technology is better and the military is more effective than ever before. The speech about the nuclear facilities of Iran begins with "completely destroyed" gives the impression that the operation was a complete success and makes people think of the US military as unstoppable force. Another important part was getting up ethical and rhetorical frameworks.

Trump speeches praised the military and attacked his opponents' morals at the same time. He said that Iran was the "bully of the Middle East" and Maduro was the "Kingpin of huge criminal network." These strategies validate the application of force to confirm moral legitimacy to military operations. Threats often come with claims for moral authority which leads to a conversation that combines deterrence and legitimacy at the same time.

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