

## **The Dynamics Of Language And Identity In Donald Trump's Victory Speech: A Discourse Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines how Donald Trump constructs political identity and legitimizes ideological power through language in his 2016 victory speech by applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). While previous studies have largely focused on campaign discourse, this research highlights the victory speech as a transitional discourse between persuasion and presidential legitimacy. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, analyzing the speech through textual, discursive, and social dimensions. The findings indicate that Trump strategically uses inclusive pronouns, repetition, metaphor, modality, and simple syntax to construct collective identity, reinforce nationalist ideology, and legitimize authority. The discourse reflects populist tendencies, particularly through the construction of "the people" and a narrative of national restoration. The study concludes that political discourse functions as a strategic tool for shaping identity, ideology, and power relations.

**Keywords : critical discourse analysis; political identity; Donald Trump; political speech; language and power**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Language is not a neutral medium; it is closely intertwined with power relations and ideological formations. In political settings, discourse serves as a strategic instrument through which social realities are constructed, public opinion is shaped, and authority is legitimized. Within contemporary democratic societies, political speeches extend beyond simple communication. They function performatively, influencing identity formation, mobilizing ideologies, and either reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives (Fairclough, 1995). In this context,

Donald J. Trump's 2016 victory speech offers a meaningful case for critical discourse analysis, as it represents a key moment in American politics and reflects the broader global emergence of populism.

Trump's rise to power marked a clear shift from conventional political rhetoric. His style contrasts with traditional presidential discourse, as it emphasizes simplicity, directness, and strong appeal to what is often framed as the "ordinary people." According to Montgomery (2020), Trump's language departs from elite political norms by employing accessible vocabulary, personal expressions, and emotionally driven

statements. These characteristics are not merely stylistic variations; rather, they signal deeper ideological transformations and a redefinition of political identity.

The 2016 victory speech can be understood as a discursive moment in which Trump constructs both his political persona and a broader sense of national identity. Through the consistent use of inclusive pronouns such as “we” and “our,” he frames his electoral success as a shared achievement, thereby promoting unity in the aftermath of a highly polarized election. In addition, the repetition of key expressions, such as “we will make America great again,” reinforces a sense of determination and inevitability, presenting his leadership as both necessary and restorative (Lakoff, 2017).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly as developed by Fairclough (1992, 1995), provides an appropriate framework for examining how discourse produces and reproduces power relations. Fairclough’s three-dimensional model—covering textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—allows for a comprehensive investigation of language from micro-level linguistic choices to broader socio-political implications. This approach is especially relevant for analyzing Trump’s speech, which operates simultaneously at linguistic, political, and ideological levels.

Previous research has explored Trump’s discourse from multiple perspectives, including populist rhetoric (Wodak, 2015), emotional appeal (Rash & Rydgren, 2020), and media representation (Zienkowski, 2018). However, most of these studies focus on campaign discourse rather than victory speeches. As such, the transitional phase between electoral persuasion and the establishment of political legitimacy remains underexplored. This study seeks to address that gap. The study by Virlistyanti and Simatupang (2025) found that in the context of diplomatic meetings

between prominent political figures such as Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, language style is strategic and adaptive, chosen to manage audience perception, build relationships, and strengthen each leader’s diplomatic role. This indicates that the choice of language style by political figures is not merely a rhetorical variation, but forms part of a communication strategy aimed at achieving specific political objectives.

Furthermore, Trump’s speech reflects key features of right-wing populist discourse, including the construction of in-groups and out-groups, the use of nationalist narratives, and references to a glorified past that must be restored (Koller, 2019). By invoking “the forgotten men and women,” Trump positions himself as a representative of marginalized groups while simultaneously challenging the political establishment. This strategy highlights how populist identity is constructed through a combination of emotional appeal, symbolic positioning, and strategic ambiguity.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Trump’s communication style also departs from established norms of presidential speech. While previous leaders often relied on formal and carefully structured rhetoric, Trump’s style tends to be more spontaneous and less conventional, often described as “post-eloquence” (Lim, 2008). This shift reflects broader changes in media environments and audience expectations, particularly in the digital age, where clarity, immediacy, and emotional impact are highly valued.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine how Donald Trump constructs political identity and legitimizes ideological power through language in his 2016 victory speech using Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Specifically, this research focuses on linguistic features such as pronoun usage, repetition, metaphor, and syntactic simplicity, and explores how these features

relate to broader discursive and social practices.

By concentrating on a single yet symbolically significant speech, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on political discourse, identity construction, and the role of language in shaping ideology. It also reinforces the relevance of CDA as a methodological approach for uncovering underlying power dynamics embedded in political language.

## **B. METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach focuses on interpreting meaning and understanding how language constructs power, identity, and ideology in political discourse.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, the study examines linguistic features such as pronouns, repetition, metaphor, modality, and syntax. At the discursive level, it explores how the speech is produced and interpreted. At the social level, it connects the discourse to broader socio-political contexts.

The data consist of Donald Trump's 2016 victory speech, which was transcribed and analyzed through several steps: data familiarization, coding of linguistic features, categorization based on CDA dimensions, and interpretation of findings.

To ensure validity, this study applies theoretical triangulation, repeated reading, and consistency checking. The analysis aims to reveal underlying meanings and power relations within the discourse.

### **Research Object**

The object of this research is the victory speech delivered by Donald J. Trump on November 9, 2016, after winning the U.S. Presidential Election. The speech was delivered in New York City and was widely

broadcast and disseminated through various media platforms. The primary source of data is the official video recording from YouTube, supported by a manually transcribed text that captures verbal expressions, pauses, emphasis, and rhetorical markers relevant to discourse analysis.

The research focuses on how Trump constructs identity and power through language. Particular attention is given to pronoun usage, repetition, metaphors, syntactic structure, and intertextual references all of which are essential to revealing the ideological and discursive strategies used in the speech. The object of this research focuses on hate speech in youtube comments in response to Will Smith's Oscar acceptance speech 2022. The thesis explores the types of speech act and hate speech in youtube comments. Furthermore, the kind of speech act and hate speech function in accordance with the theoretical framework advance by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969).

### **Research Step**

The process of this research follows several stages, as outlined below:

#### **1. Data Collection**

The speech was accessed from YouTube (<https://youtu.be/WI9fbbQaTo>)

and transcribed by the researcher. The transcription includes not only the verbal text but also notes on prosodic and rhetorical elements, such as repetition, emphasis, and discourse markers. These aspects are essential for CDA, as they influence how meaning and power are conveyed in political language.

#### **2. Textual Analysis (Description)**

The first stage of analysis involves identifying and categorizing linguistic features such as:

- a. Pronouns (e.g., "we," "our," "they")
- b. Modality and Evaluation (e.g., certainty, obligation)

- c. Lexical Choices and Repetition (e.g., key phrases like “make America great again”)
  - d. Syntactic Simplicity and Sentence Structure
  - e. Metaphors and Nationalist Language  
These features are analyzed to understand how identity, solidarity, and authority are linguistically constructed.
3. Discursive Practice Analysis (Interpretation)  
In this stage, the researcher interprets how the speech relates to other political discourses, such as campaign slogans, historical references, and populist narratives. Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are explored to show how the text draws upon and transforms previous discourse genres. The role of media in the circulation and reception of the speech is also considered.
  4. Social Practice Analysis (Explanation)  
The third stage places the speech within its broader sociopolitical context. The researcher examines how the discourse relates to issues such as:
    - a. The rise of populism and nationalism
    - b. Anti-elitism and public distrust in government institutions
    - c. The reshaping of American identity and values post-2016 election  
This stage explains how Trump’s discourse functions as a reflection of and contribution to the ideological struggles within U.S. society at the time.
  5. Data Interpretation and Conclusion  
After conducting all three levels of analysis, the researcher synthesizes the findings to draw conclusions about how language in the speech constructs identity and conveys ideological power

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Data 1

*“We will make America proud again.”*

This utterance is categorized as textual analysis because the interpretation is primarily based on the internal linguistic features of the sentence, particularly pronoun usage, modality, and lexical choice. The pronoun “we” functions as an inclusive strategy that positions the speaker together with the audience, constructing a shared national identity. This inclusion is significant because it minimizes the hierarchical distance between the political leader and the citizens, allowing the speaker to present himself as part of the same collective group rather than as a distant authority. Since this meaning is directly realized through grammatical structure, the analysis is appropriately situated at the textual level.

The modal auxiliary “will” indicates certainty and strong commitment, which is an important aspect of modality in discourse. It suggests that the proposed action is definite and planned. The verb “make” reflects a material process that emphasizes deliberate transformation. Meanwhile, the phrase “proud again” introduces a temporal and ideological dimension, implying a return to a previously valued state. The word “again” carries the assumption that such pride existed in the past but has been lost. All of these meanings are embedded within the linguistic construction of the sentence, which justifies its classification as textual analysis.

### Data 2

*“We are going to make America strong again.  
We are going to make America proud again.”*

This data is categorized as textual analysis because it focuses on repetition and syntactic parallelism as key linguistic features. The repeated clause “We are going to” creates a

rhythmic pattern that strengthens emphasis and reinforces the speaker's commitment to future actions. This repetition is important because it enhances clarity and memorability, making the message more persuasive.

The use of evaluative adjectives such as "strong" and "proud" contributes to the construction of a positive national identity. These lexical choices are not neutral; they carry emotional and ideological significance. The repetition of "again" introduces a temporal element that suggests restoration. Since the analysis centers on how meaning is constructed through linguistic structure and vocabulary, the data is categorized as textual analysis.

### Data 3

*"The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer."*

This utterance is categorized as textual analysis because it highlights metaphor, repetition, and modality within the sentence. The term "forgotten" functions metaphorically to represent social neglect and marginalization. This metaphor is realized through lexical choice and does not depend on external context for interpretation.

The repetition of the word "forgotten" intensifies emphasis and strengthens the emotional appeal of the statement. The modal "will" expresses certainty, while the phrase "no longer" indicates a clear shift from past neglect to future change. These meanings are directly encoded in the linguistic structure, which justifies its classification as textual analysis.

### Data 4

*"It's going to be a beautiful thing."*

This sentence is categorized as textual analysis because the focus is on its grammatical simplicity and lexical ambiguity. The structure is short and straightforward, which enhances accessibility and allows the message to be easily understood by a broad

audience.

The adjective "beautiful" conveys a strong positive evaluation but remains vague and open to interpretation. This ambiguity allows different audiences to attach their own meanings to the statement. Since the analysis is based on internal linguistic features, the data is appropriately categorized as textual analysis.

### Data 5

*"We are going to fix our inner cities."*

This utterance is categorized as textual analysis because it focuses on pronoun usage, modality, and lexical choice. The pronoun "we" constructs collective agency, while "are going to" indicates planned future action.

The verb "fix" represents a material process that is simple and direct, suggesting practical solutions. The phrase "inner cities" is treated as a lexical unit within the sentence. Since the interpretation is derived from these linguistic elements, the data is classified as textual analysis.

### Data 6

*"We will finally take care of our veterans."*

This data is categorized as textual analysis because it examines modality and lexical emphasis. The modal "will" indicates certainty, while the adverb "finally" implies that the action has been delayed or neglected in the past.

The phrase "take care of" conveys responsibility, and "our veterans" constructs a specific referent group. These meanings are embedded in the linguistic structure, which justifies its classification as textual analysis.

### Data 7

*"We will deal fairly with everyone, with everyone."*

This utterance is categorized as textual

analysis because it highlights repetition and evaluative language. The repetition of “with everyone” reinforces inclusivity and ensures that the idea of fairness is strongly emphasized.

The adverb “fairly” expresses a value judgment regarding how actions will be carried out. Since these meanings are directly encoded in the sentence, the analysis belongs to the textual level.

### **Discursive Practice (Interpretation)**

#### **Data 8**

*“Ours was not a campaign, but a great movement.”*

This utterance is categorized as discursive practice because the analysis focuses on how meaning is constructed in relation to broader political discourse. The contrast between “campaign” and “movement” functions as a redefinition strategy that shifts the interpretation of political activity.

A “campaign” is typically understood as a formal and temporary process, while a “movement” suggests a larger, more meaningful collective effort. This shift is significant because it allows the speaker to frame his political success as part of a broader transformation rather than a routine electoral event. Since the meaning emerges from its relation to wider discourse, the data is categorized as discursive practice.

#### **Data 9**

*“Our campaign was about a great movement.”*

This statement is categorized as discursive practice because it reinforces a narrative constructed within the speech. By repeatedly associating the campaign with a “movement,” the speaker strengthens the interpretation of political activity as collective change.

This repetition operates at the discursive level, ensuring consistency in meaning throughout the speech. The analysis focuses

on how the statement contributes to a broader narrative, which justifies its classification as discursive practice.

#### **Data 10**

*“The American people have spoken. Their voices were heard.”*

This utterance is categorized as discursive practice because it constructs political legitimacy through the representation of collective voice. The phrase “the American people” functions not merely as a referential expression but as a symbolic source of authority within democratic discourse. By placing “the people” as the subject, the speaker attributes the outcome of the election to a collective will rather than individual or institutional actors. This reflects a discursive strategy that aligns with populist ideology, where authority is derived from the people.

The use of the passive construction “were heard” further reinforces this meaning by shifting focus away from who acknowledges the voices and instead emphasizing the fact that they have been recognized. This creates an impression of a natural and legitimate democratic process. The reason this is emphasized lies in its role in shaping interpretation: the statement positions the election result as an undeniable expression of public will. Since the analysis focuses on how meaning is constructed within political discourse and how it contributes to legitimacy, it is appropriately categorized as discursive practice.

#### **Data 11**

*“I’ve just received a call from Secretary Clinton.”*

This statement is categorized as discursive practice because it reflects established norms within political communication, particularly those related to democratic transition. On the

surface, it appears as a simple declarative sentence, but its significance lies in its function within institutional discourse. The acknowledgment of a call from a political opponent signals acceptance of election results and adherence to democratic conventions.

The reference to “Secretary Clinton” maintains a formal tone and recognizes her institutional status, which contributes to the legitimacy of the transition process. This is emphasized because such statements are part of a broader communicative practice that reinforces stability and continuity in democratic systems. The meaning is therefore not limited to linguistic structure but extends to its role within political discourse, which justifies its classification as discursive practice.

#### **Data 12**

*“This political stuff is nasty and it is tough.”*

This utterance is categorized as discursive practice because it reflects a stylistic and rhetorical shift in political communication. The use of informal language such as “stuff,” “nasty,” and “tough” contrasts with the formal and structured style typically associated with political speeches. This choice is significant because it reshapes how political discourse is presented and understood.

The reason this is emphasized is that such language contributes to the construction of a particular political identity, one that appears direct, relatable, and distinct from elite norms. This aligns with populist discourse, where simplicity and emotional expression are used to establish connection with the audience. The analysis focuses on how this stylistic choice functions within broader communication practices rather than on linguistic form alone, which is why it is categorized as discursive practice.

#### **Data 13**

*“It is time for us to come together as one*

*united people.”*

This statement is categorized as discursive practice because it reflects a shift in communicative purpose within the speech. After a competitive and often divisive election, the discourse transitions toward unity and reconciliation. The phrase “come together” functions as a call for collective action, while “one united people” constructs a shared national identity.

This is emphasized because it demonstrates how political discourse adapts to context. During campaigns, language often highlights differences, but in victory speeches, it shifts toward inclusivity. The meaning of this statement is shaped by its position within the broader discourse of political transition. Therefore, the analysis is situated at the discursive level.

#### **Social Practice (Explanation)**

#### **Data 14**

*“Every single American will have the opportunity to realize his or her fullest potential.”*

This data is categorized as social practice because the analysis connects the statement to broader ideological values within society. The emphasis on “every single American” reflects the principle of inclusivity and equal opportunity, which is closely associated with the concept of the American Dream. This ideology promotes the belief that all individuals have the chance to succeed through effort and determination.

The reason this is emphasized is that such statements do not only describe reality but also reinforce societal beliefs and expectations. At the same time, they may overlook structural inequalities that affect access to opportunities. This demonstrates how discourse both reflects and shapes social reality. Since the analysis goes beyond linguistic features and examines its connection to social ideology, it is categorized

as social practice.

#### **Data 15**

*“We are going to fix our inner cities.”*

This utterance is categorized as social practice because it relates directly to real-world social issues, particularly those associated with urban environments such as poverty, inequality, and infrastructure challenges. While the sentence itself is simple, its implications extend to broader societal conditions.

The phrase “inner cities” carries strong socio-political connotations, often referring to marginalized communities. The promise to “fix” these areas positions leadership as responsible for addressing systemic problems. This is emphasized because it connects discourse to actual social realities and policy expectations. Therefore, it is categorized as social practice.

#### **Data 16**

*“It is time for us to come together as one united people.”*

This statement is categorized as social practice because it addresses broader social conditions, particularly political polarization and division within society. The emphasis on unity reflects an attempt to respond to these conditions and promote social cohesion.

The reason this is highlighted is that the statement functions not only as rhetoric but also as a response to real societal tensions following the election. It aims to reshape relationships between different groups and encourage collective identity. Since the analysis focuses on its impact within society, it is categorized as social practice.

#### **Data 17**

*“We are going to make America strong*

*again. We are going to make America proud again.”*

This data is categorized as social practice because it reflects a broader ideological narrative related to national identity and restoration. The repetition of the statement reinforces a collective vision of the nation, while the word “again” suggests a return to a perceived better past.

This is emphasized because such narratives are closely linked to societal beliefs about decline and renewal. They evoke collective memory and influence how people perceive national identity. The discourse does not only describe a future goal but also shapes how society understands its past and aspirations. Since the analysis connects the statement to cultural and ideological frameworks, it is appropriately categorized as social practice.

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**Tabel 1 : Linguistic Features in Trump’s Victory Speech and Their Functions**

<b>Linguistic Feature</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Function</b>
Inclusive pronouns	“We will begin the urgent task...”	Constructs collective identity and solidarity
Repetition	“We will rebuild our nation... we will...”	Emphasizes determination and reinforces authority
Metaphors	“The forgotten men and women of our country”	Evokes empathy and shared historical narrative
Antithesis	“Ours was not a campaign, but a movement.”	Creates distinction and ideological contrast
Simple syntax	“It’s going to be a beautiful thing.”	Projects approachability and populist appeal

The analysis reveals that Donald Trump’s 2016 victory speech is characterized by several dominant linguistic features that contribute to the construction of identity and power. One of the most prominent elements is the use of inclusive pronouns such as *we* and *our*, which function to establish a sense of collective unity. Through this strategy, the speaker aligns himself with the audience, presenting the political outcome as a shared achievement and reinforcing a collective responsibility for future action. This pattern reflects a common feature of political discourse aimed at strengthening solidarity between leader and citizens (Fairclough, 2003).

Repetition also emerges as a key rhetorical device throughout the speech. Recurring structures and statements emphasizing future action contribute to rhythmic delivery and reinforce the speaker’s commitment. This repetition not only enhances memorability but also conveys consistency and confidence, which are essential in shaping a persuasive leadership image. In addition, metaphorical expressions are used to evoke emotional engagement, particularly those related to neglect, recovery, and national renewal. Such expressions highlight social concerns while

simultaneously promoting a narrative of transformation and hope.

The findings further indicate the use of contrastive constructions to distinguish the speaker from conventional political actors. By presenting political activity as something broader and more transformative, the discourse positions the speaker as a representative of change rather than continuity. Alongside this, the overall simplicity of sentence structure contributes to accessibility, allowing the message to reach a wide audience. The use of direct and conversational language strengthens the perceived closeness between the speaker and listeners, reinforcing a populist communication style.

At the level of discursive practice, the speech demonstrates continuity between campaign messaging and post-election rhetoric. Key themes and slogans remain consistent, indicating that the discourse is not limited to electoral purposes but extends into the construction of governance narratives. The integration of widely recognized national values such as unity, freedom, and prosperity further strengthens the ideological appeal, as these concepts resonate with broader cultural and historical contexts.

From the perspective of social

practice, the speech reflects the socio-political conditions of the time, including polarization, public dissatisfaction, and distrust toward established institutions. The discourse responds to these conditions by emphasizing collective identity and positioning the speaker as closely connected to the public. This construction reinforces a broader ideological framework in which political authority is associated with the representation of “the people.”

Overall, the results show that linguistic features, discursive strategies, and social context are closely interconnected. The speech not only communicates a political victory but also constructs a particular vision of leadership, identity, and power that aligns with the characteristics of contemporary populist discourse.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study investigated how identity and power are constructed in Donald Trump’s 2016 victory speech through Fairclough’s three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The findings demonstrate that the speech systematically constructs a collective identity by positioning the speaker in alignment with the audience, thereby reducing hierarchical distance and fostering a sense of shared purpose. This indicates that political identity in the speech is not fixed, but actively produced through strategic language use that emphasizes unity and common experience.

In terms of power, the analysis reveals that authority is discursively constructed through expressions of certainty, leadership positioning, and alignment with public interests. Rather than relying solely on institutional legitimacy, power is framed as emerging from collective will, allowing the speaker to present himself as both representative and embodiment of the people. This reflects a broader populist tendency in

which leadership is legitimized through perceived closeness to the public.

Furthermore, the study confirms that discourse operates across textual, discursive, and social dimensions simultaneously. The speech not only reflects existing socio-political conditions but also contributes to shaping them by reinforcing particular ideological perspectives. This highlights the role of political language as an active force in constructing social reality, rather than merely describing it.

Overall, this research underscores the importance of Critical Discourse Analysis in revealing how language functions as a mechanism for constructing identity and legitimizing power. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary political communication, particularly in the context of populist discourse, where language plays a central role in influencing public perception and political meaning.

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