| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Role of Transitivity in Constructing Discursive Relations in Pronominal Networks Within Crisis Discourse

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| **ABSTRACT**

Guided by the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's model of transitivity, the study investigates how leaders' use of language represents their ideologies and positions regarding various entities during the crisis at both macro and microlevels of discourse. This research proposes a discursive approach to analyzing the pragmatic meaning of pronominal-verb-process networks and how these networks contribute to constructing the ideologies of the leader and relations with various entities. This work focuses on the COVID-19 address delivered by former President Donald Trump. The analysis of the address revealed that Trump exploited pronouns in verb-process networks to express ideologies, relationships, and oppositions. He utilized pronoun–verb collocations to construct and reconstruct discursive relations with the American people, his administration, Europeans, and Chinese entities and actively used pronouns to evoke nationalism, resulting in polarizing language. The analysis also revealed that leaders may simultaneously face challenges of power that lead them to use dichotomous language against the people to enhance their political power in mandating adherence to prevention guidelines.

1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders used their speeches as the initial step to inform the public about the imminent danger of the pandemic if precautions and drastic safety measures were not taken. To this end, leaders strategically constructed their language to persuade the public to cooperate with the political organization during the pandemic. In line with Van Dijk's view (2008, p. 178), the current study displays how politicians represent their ideologies in terms of their conceptualization of self-image and the "self-image of the group as well as relations to other groups." In these representations, politicians construct various relations to express ideologies of nationalism, racism, and imperialism through networks of pronouns and verb processes. However, I argue that due to the discriminatory power of nationalism (Brubaker, 2012), leaders' emphasis on flagging nationalism to evoke people's solidarity during the pandemic may have resulted in the political polarization of various parties.

2. Discourse of Crisis

A crisis can be defined as "a disruptive event," a "spatiotemporal" situation affecting a society for a specific period (De Rycker & Don 2013, p. 5). It is a dynamic event comprising a sequence of stages, including "the eruption, emergence, and development toward an end" (De Rycker & Don 2013, p. 16). A crisis always encompasses "a decisive change" and is often described in terms of potential irreversibility due to its disruptive consequences (Chalozin-Dovrat 2013, p. 68).

A crisis has been widely studied as a social phenomenon. It is seen as a lived experience, a socially constructed phenomenon worked out by individuals in interactions with other members of the society (De Rycker & Don, 2013). In line with

the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, language and crisis as a social experience can be argued to have a reciprocal effect. That is, a crisis influences and is influenced by the spoken and written discourses about it (De Rycker & Don 2013, p. 5). The disruptive consequences of a crisis justify it as "an area of critical scrutiny" (Sanadarn and De Rycher, 2013). Due to the life-threatening consequences a crisis poses to any political organization, world leaders respond immediately by speaking to their people, communicating information about the crisis, and shaping the public's perception of it. Political discourse during crises plays a key role in "influencing the people's perception of the crises and its management by authors" (Sanadarn and De Rycher 2013, p.188).

Crises expose politicians to the risk of crisis management failure. Sandaran and De Rycker (2013, p.112) concluded that politicians may exploit crises as a means of control to position the people "in a way that would advantage their agenda." Additionally, crises may prompt an identity crisis among politicians. Politicians often emphasize national identities (Alqahtani, 2017), even in natural crises where no visible enemy is present. This emphasis on national identity typically results in polarizing discourse. Polarization between nationalities and other groups can lead to "an increase in members' expressions of loyalty and commitment to the group" (De Rycker & Don 2013, p. 21). De Rycker and Don (2013, p. 22) argue that powerful "crisis leaders" have more influence in shaping the "coordinated crisis response through their powerful discourses and lexical choices."

Similarly, within the realm of crisis discourse, one notable aspect is the utilization of war language. Musoff (2022, p. 315) contended that politicians and media employ war scenarios resembling "literal war declarations in terms of lexical choices and pragmatic framing" to justify self-defense and enhance public awareness. Furthermore, he argued that Western media bolstered war declarations through "meta-representations of multimodal associations to evoke emotions and evaluative responses from readers" (Musolff 2022, p. 316). The present study offers evidence that Western leaders harness war emotions as a strategy to foster cooperation, even in nonwar contexts.

3. Discourse of Crisis and Linguistic Choices

Language serves as a medium for the discursive construction of ideologies and representations of "self" and the "other." Extensive research on the crisis discourse has employed various approaches to analyzing discourse at the macrolevel, including the structure of discourse themes, topics, and discursive patterns (Vilar-Lluch, 2022), as well as representations of identity and interpersonal communication.

In crisis discourse, such as during pandemics, the construction of discursive relations is strategic. Leaders leverage linguistic networks to designate distance from various social actors involved in the crisis, whether as the addressee or targeted audience, including governments, adversaries, and allies. The designation of these relations contributes to expressing ideologies and policies at the macrolevel of discourse, as will be demonstrated in Section 4. These networks are constructed from sequences of pronouns, verb processes, and address forms and terms of reference. They serve to construct and articulate discursive topics and ideologies, as depicted in Figure 1.
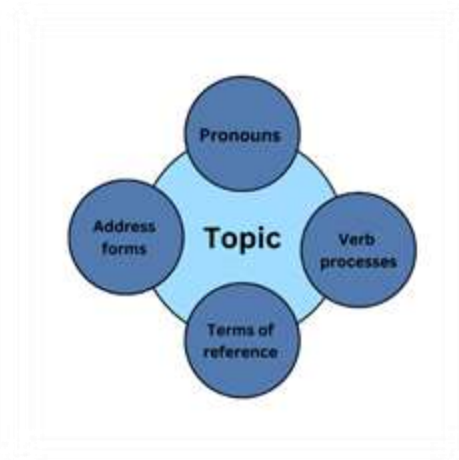

Figure 1: Discursive Networks to Construct Ideologies and Identities

The significance of Halliday and Matthiessen's verb processes (transitivity) (2014) lies in their ability to identify social actors involved in the action—how these actors are designated as participants, interconnected with other actors in the discourse, and how they contribute to the action. As Fairclough (2008) affirmed, transitivity choices represent human agency, indicating the contribution of social actors to the contextual situation in discourse. These representations of agency in verb processes within a clause are manifested through networks that extend across the discourse. The current work specifically focuses on an agency that is represented through pronouns, as pronouns play a salient role in expressing political identities (Alqahtani, 2017; Bramley, 2001)

Pronouns operate within pronominal and contextual networks, rather than in isolation (Alqahtani, 2017). To conduct an accurate, critical analysis, considering the distribution of other pronouns in the preceding, concurrent, and subsequent utterances or discourse uttered at the moment of speaking is pivotal for understanding the speaker's message. Four factors contribute to understanding the pragmatic meaning of pronominal sequences in political discourse: pronominal choices, collocating verb processes, and the coexistence of address forms and terms of reference.

While the pronoun *we* has received interest in political discourse analysis, the majority of research has focused on the inclusion–exclusion role of pronominals, particularly We–They dichotomies as a strategy of polarization (Fetzer, 2014) or the nationalistic role of the pronoun (Billig, 1995). Using *we* in political discourse constitutes a national we-group identity that serves, as De Cillia et al. (1999, p. 157) argued, "as a basis for appealing directly or indirectly to national solidarity and union". Furthermore, Bramley (2001, p. 98) corroborated that in this affiliative *we*, individuals are "drawn into an issue, either by sharing responsibility for it or benefiting from it".

Given that ideologies can encompass nationalism, racism, religious bias, sexism, imperialism, and more, discourse serves as a reproduction of these ideologies (Van Dijk, 2009; Wodak, 2007). Thus, the construction of discursive relations can be considered a manifestation of the speaker's ideologies. In the analysis of ideologies, there is invariably an implication of a connection to a group (Alqahtani, 2017; Fairclough, 1989). For instance, in the ideology of nationalism, the speaker expresses this ideology by positioning themselves as a member of the collective with positive representations of *us* (the collective) and negative representations of *them* (van Dijk, 1998). In discourses of racism and sexism, the relation is exclusive and polarizing. These ideologies and their representations are constructed by linguistic and nonlinguistic discursive networks (van Dijk, 2008). In this fashion, the strategic implementation of these elements in discourse enables politicians to establish alliances and oppositions (Bramley, 2001), express agency, binary relationships, stances from various topics, and national and cultural attitudes.

3.1 Transitivity and Political Discourse

Since Halliday's introduction of his theory Function Systemic Grammar (FSG) (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 004), the theory has contributed significantly to discourse studies. The unique feature of the theory is that it can be extended to apply to various interdisciplanary fields, depending on our understanding of how human language works (Bloor & Bloor, 2004).

Halliday (1985) divides the system of transitivity into six processes: material (referred to simylatiopislr as action verbs) , mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential. Halliday classifies Material, Mental and Relational processes as major processes and the others as minor. The following account is an outline of transitivity structures as introduced by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Bloor and Bloor (2004).

Material processes express experiences of the external world, whether physical or abstract happenings such as *come*, *eat*, *kill*, *begin*. There are two participant roles in material clauses—the Actor and the Goal. Other participant roles involved in this process are: Scope, Recipient, Client and Attribute.

Mental processes are clauses of sense, that is, thinking, feeling, or seeing, realized through verbs such as feel, think, know, smell, see, want, like, hate, please, and fear. In these clauses, the speaker is always the subject. The other main element in a clause of mental process is the Phenomenon, the thing that is felt, thought, wanted or perceived.

Relational processes, on the other hand, express statuses of being, possessing, or becoming. They serve to characterize and to identify and are subdivided into three types: Intensive (processes of being), which establish a relationship of sameness between two entities; Possessive (processes of having), which indicate that one entity owns another; and Circumstantial processes, which define the entity in terms of location, time, and manner.

Minor processses

Verbal processes can be seen as a combination of material and mental processes. They include different modes of saying, such as asking, , stating, and commanding, and some semiotic processes that may not involve verbalization such as showing and indicating. The speaker is the sayer and the thing being said is verbiage..Existential processes, on the other hand, represent something that exists or happens as in the case of using *be* and *have* verbs and other verbs such as go, come, occur, exist, etc. Behavioral processes may also be seen as a combination of material and mental processes. They express physiological and psychological behavior, such as *sighing,* smiling, breathing, snoring, coughing, etc. Participant is labelled *Behaver*.

The theory gained wide popularity in the field of discourse and text anlaysis.   It has been widely implemented in investigating various political issues. Lean and Don (2013, p. 448), for example, investigated the choices of transitivity and lexis in crisis discourse within two Malaysian newspapers during the 2005 and 2008 terrorist crises in London and Mumbai. They found out that the two newspapers utilized discourse in a manner similar to Western newspapers, aligning with the Western agenda in the representational categories of the people involved, "in terms of two mutually exclusive groups: the terrorists and the nonterrorists" (p. 457) (using lexis used by Western media and politicians, such as *civilized* world and *barbaric* or *free people* and *terrorists*). Consistent with several studies, polarization was also evident in pronominal dichotomy, with *they* referring to Muslim terrorists and *we* referring to *foreigners*, *policemen*, *commandos*, etc.

Li (2010) argues that media exploits transitivity to construct specific representations of different social actors in crises. She investigated transitivity in the discourse of two popular newspapers: New York times and China Daily, on the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy. She focused on analyzing the ideational and textual functions of language by investigating the use of transitivity patterns and lexical cohesion in the headlines of the news texts appearing in the two newspapers. She concluded that the two newspapers exploited verb-processes and lexes to empower their ideologies. For exmaple, in China Daily, attention given to the Chinese participants is enhanced by the excessive use of Material and Verbal processes attributed to China nation. Moreover, the three headlines in which U.S./NATO participants appear in the subject positions, the American actors are negated, and the clauses are passivized. The analysis of lexical choices and cohesion also demonstrated that both The New York Times and China Daily "consistently drew on certain metaphorical themes to construct their respective ideologies in reporting the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy." (p. 3457).

3.2 Nationalism "in Crisis"

Nationalism is an overarching ideology encompassing culture, religion, and ethnicity (Brubaker, 2012). Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism is based on the assumption that politicians use simple things in their speeches to foreground their national identities, such as holding national flags or using linguistic tools like pronouns. Proctor and Su (2011) demonstrated how politicians exploit their nationalistic tools to gain votes through campaign discourse, rather than solely to flag nationalism. As such, Billig assumed a link between the use of *we* and the construction of a national identity. Alqahtani (2017) used the national we to refer to the use of the first-person pronoun to evoke nationalistic emotions (the same term will be used in this study). In line with Wodak's (2017), Alqahtani (2017) findings suggested that politicians' construction of discursive national identities is fluid; that is, national identities can be constructed and easily deconstructed when politicians are confronted with power challenges.

Crises bring out a sense of national solidarity (De Rycher & Don, 2013). Therefore, many politicians exploit language to evoke nationalistic emotions in crisis discourse as a strategy to foster cooperation. The crisis itself appears to reflect an identity crisis within discourse.

A body of research has investigated the role of language in evoking nationalism in crisis discourse. Sandaran and De Rycher (2013, p. 198-210) examined the American presidential address concerning what the authors define as the crisis of September 11th. They discovered that George Bush did not use the typical pattern of voluntary community service legitimating discourse. Instead, he "invoked the power of his presidency" using discourses of war, authority, and nationalism. He also positioned the people as a nation-state to foster the ideology of the "superior American people." Moreover, Bush employed a discourse of authoritarianism "largely constructed by the use of two rhetorical pronominalization strategies": an authoritative rhetoric using the first-person singular pronouns and a directive rhetoric using the second-person pronouns. This establishes an I–You binary relation, where I am "(your president) who is talking to you, and I want you to do this". The current study involves an analysis of a speech of another Republican leader addressing the American people in another crisis.

In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis was classified as one of the worst human crises in modern history. Due to its urgency and life-threatening consequences, several studies have investigated the discursive context of the crisis, specifically the representations of the pandemic crisis in discourse. The majority of these studies have focused on the rhetorical aspects of the crisis, particularly the use of metaphors for war representations (e.g., Muelas-Gil, 2022; Vilar-Lluch, 2022; Pan & Chen, 2022; Yu,

2022; Neagu ,2022), polarizing minorities and other nationalities (see Khan 2022), and for legitimizing political actions (Papamanoli & Kanikalidou, 2022). The current study aims to present a discursive approach to the analysis of the linguistic tools that construct strategies and ideologies.

4 Methodology

The data comprise an address delivered by former President Donald Trump at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the analysis is threefold: to unravel the strategic exploitation of transitive structures to designate discursive relations in leaders' addresses during the COVID-19 crisis, to examine how these constructions reveal the leader's ideologies in terms of their positions and relations with the social groups involved, and how these representations of ideologies and identities are implemented strategically to evoke people's cooperation in crises.

A common feature of the CDA approaches to political discourse analysis is that they establish a link between text and context (Van Dijk, 2001). They particularly focus on how language users express power relations, ideological meanings, attitudes and identities through their discursive practices in social interactions (Van Dijk, 2001). The current study adopts Van Dijk's sociocognitive approach to CDA. Van Dijk argued that the real interface between society and discourse is sociocognitive because language users, as social actors mentally represent and connect the social practices during their social interactions with the mental processes that reflect their ideologies and attitudes (Van Dijk, 2015). In political discourse, ideologies, power, identities, inequality between social groups, and representations of the self and others are constructed at the macrolevel of discourse by tools employed at the microlevel of discourse. The macro and microlevels "form one unified whole" (Van Dijk 2001, p. 354). To analyze the discursive relations constructed in Trump's speech at the microlevel, the present study relies on the underlying assumption of transitivity that linguistic forms and choices convey social and ideological meanings (Li, 2010) (see Section 3).

At the macrolevel, topics and subtopics where the pronominal sequences occur are analyzed. A link between the topic and the type of pronominal representation is assumed and, therefore, will be investigated from this perspective. The macrolevel analysis will also probe how leaders construct discursive relations with various social groups in their speech, such as affiliation, polarization, and self and national augmentation, and how these relations contribute to expressing ideologies and political identities in crises.

The linguistic realizations of these strategies are analyzed at the microlevel through an in-depth critical analysis of the linguistic tools that leaders use to construct their identities and their relations with the audience and other social groups in the discourse. Politicians actively select collocations of pronouns and verb processes to construct their ideologies and policies. In line with Li's (2010) and Alqahtani's (2017), it can be assumed that if material verbs collocate more frequently with a specific pronoun of self-presentation, this may indicate that this pronominal perspective is foregrounded for specific purposes.

In conjunction with these networks of collocations, the present research foregrounds the role of address forms and terms of reference in expressing political goals and ideologies

5. Analysis and findings

5.1 Pronominal Networks in Trump's Discourse

As noted in Section 3, to understand how discursive relations are constructed in political discourse, we need to follow how lexical choices are combined at the microlevel level to construct themes and topics at the microlevel. This study focuses only on pronominal choices in networks that involve verb processes, address forms and reference terms.

Politicians actively exploit pronouns as salient strategies to construct political relations between the speaker and the various social groups that the politician addresses in his/her speech (Alqahtani, 2017; Bramley, 2001). Verb processes exist predominantly in pronominal networks. Trump uttered 1280 words in his 9-minute address. Table 1 exhibits the distribution of the personal pronouns that Trump uses to designate relationships in his COVID-19 speech.

Table 1 Distribution of Pronouns in Trump's COVID-19 Address

Perspective	Frequency		
Individual/Personal perspective (I//me/my)	16		
	45		
	With Government	With American people	Multiple
Collective perspective (we/us/our)			
	18	26	1
The addressee perspective (you/your)	10		
Third party (it/they/them/their)*	5		

* Only third-person pronoun used in the address that refers to real entities.

In line with the findings of several studies on political discourse, Table 1 supports the view that the first-person pronouns are the most frequently occurring pronouns in politicians' speech (80% of the pronominal use). These pronouns play a salient role in the presentation of the "self" and the "other" in pollical discourse (see Section 3). The first-person plural pronoun (FPPP) is popular in political discourse due to its versatility and wide range of referentiality (Alqahtani, 2017). The FPPP in Trump's address serves two basic functions: affiliation with the government and with the American people. The following section discusses the importance of these frequencies.

In his address, Trump strategically constructed discursive relations with various social and political entities to foster cooperation during the pandemic, including his administration and government, the American people, and the non-American social groups. These relations are realized through networks of pronouns, verb processes, and address and reference forms. These sequences serve to express the (sub)topics in the address at the macrolevel. However, the main challenge in analyzing Trump's address was the complexity of the topics and subtopics and the reiteration of some topics. Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of pronouns according to the topics and subtopics in Trump's address.

Table 1 exhibits how the topic influences Trump's self-presentation and designation of relations with various entities. Trump exploits pronominal networks to construct various relations with national and non-national entities to convey ideologies of wartime, alignments, oppositions, and American superiority. These constructions are discursively implemented to induce the people's cooperation during the crisis.

Table 1 further displays that the first-person singular pronoun occurs frequently in contexts of decision-making and expressing individual authority over USA political entities such as the Congress and Treasury Department. This singular perspective almost disappears in topics of giving instructions and guidelines of protection to the people. In such contexts, the second-person person perspective is predominant. Conversely, the collective perspective occurs predominantly when requesting unification from the people or creating opposition against China when stating procedures and precautions.

Table 2: Distribution of pronouns according to topic in Trump's COVID-19 address

Topic	Pronoun									
	FPPP		FPSP		SPP		TPP*			
	We/us	Our	I/me	My	You	Your	They/them	Their	It	It
Greeting and introducing the problem	–	1 (Nation)	1	1	1	–	–	–	–	–
Government's preparations to face the virus	5 (Gov.)	2 (Gov.)	1	–	1 (generic)	–	–	–	–	–
Early procedures of protection	2 (Gov.)	1 (Nation/Americans)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1 (Virus)

Successes threatened by European and Chinese noncompliance	1 (Multiple)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Actions being taken to protect the American people	–	1 (Nation/America)	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	
a. Travel suspension	6 (Gov.)	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–
b. Extra payment for medical treatments	1 (Gov.)	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
c. Signing a bill for vaccines	1 (Gov.)	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Assurance of low threat on Americans and guidelines for the elderly	1 (Gov.)	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–
Health instructions and guidelines for Americans	1 (Gov.) 1 (Nation)	1 (Gov.)	–	1	3	3	1	–	–	–
Finical support for ill workers	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Praising the American economy and affirming success	2 (GOV.) 2 (Nation)	12 (Nation/ America) 1 (GOV.)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Announcing extra actions to be taken to protect the economy and affected parties	–	–	5	–	–	–	1	–	–	–
Promises to defend America against the threats and	3 (Gov.) 9 (Nation/America)	2(Nation/America)	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

request for national unification and cooperation									
Taking leave	–	–	–	2	–	–	–	–	–

Pronouns are listed as they appear in text; he/she pronouns were not used in Trump's speech

Trump identifies with the people in contexts where identification enhances his image as a populist leader or when he requests help from the audience. In contexts where identification enhances his political identity, he identifies with the government and refers to the people in the third person, using terms like *Americans* or *American people.* Table 2 shows that Trump identifies with his government *more* frequently than with the American people in most topics. This is justified by the context and purpose of the speech. In COVID-19 virus, leaders focus on topics that address the government's prevention procedures, which makes the government the main agent in most structures. In this way, Trump may tend to construct a powerful and authoritative leader-subject relationship with the public more frequently than a collective national identity in a citizen-citizen relationship. Contrarily, the third-person pronoun is rarely used. The common function of "they" in political discourse is to distance opponents (Alqahtani, 2017; Bramley, 2001; Fetzer, 2014; Pavlidou, 2014). However, notably, in Trump's address, "they" is used to refer only to American social groups.

5.2 Transitivity in Trump's Speech

These pronominal sequences exist in verb processes that contribute to realizing Trump's ideologies and strategies in his address to persuade the people to cooperate. Table 3 shows how pronoun–verb collocations can contribute to constructing Trump's ideologies.

Table 3: Type of verb processes with participants I, We, You, They, and Third-Person entities when used as the subject of the clause

Participant	Material verbs	Mental	Behavioral	Existential	Relational	Verbal
I	Consult/take (3)/meet/sign to help/take action (emergency)/actions/instruct (2) (administration)/protect/put the well-being of America first	Decide/want/hesitate (Rahmasari 2018)	–	–	Be (confident)	Speak/ask (2)/announce/call on
We (governmental)	Marshal/defeat/reduce/instituted/2 (travel) warning/suspend/monitor/cut (red tape)/move/issued/put into place made lifesaving move/take action with Europe/not delay/reduce threat/defeat the virus/impede transmission	Respond/reevaluate/advise	Continue	Be in contact	Get approval	Declared/emergency Discuss
We (the nation)	Overcome/put (politics) aside/stop (partisanship)/unify/act/emerge (stronger)/reduce (infection)/heal (the	–	See	Be at critical time Be vigilant We be together	Have A great economy The best economy Has a role	–

	sick)/care for/help (fellow citizens)					
You	Follow/wash hands/clean cover/stay (home)	–	Sneeze cough	Be (sick) Feel	–	–
They	–	Consider	–	be (the best)	Get (the virus)	–

Table 4 demonstrates pronoun–verb-process collocations in Trump's speech. He uses pronoun *I* (as the doer or actor) with action verbs (material) expressing direct benefits to the people as in deferring taxes, providing treatments, and defending the Americans against the virus. Conversely, *we* collocates with a wider range of process types due to the high frequency of the pronoun in political discourse in general and its broader referentiality (Alqahtani, 2017; Bramley, 2001; Fetzer, 2014; Mühlhäusler, 2014). Affiliating with the government occurs predominantly with material actions taken against the virus and other countries and in controversial decisions such as travel bans and issuing guidance for school closures. This may support the view that politicians actively exploit the *governmental we* to evade taking responsibilities for controversial actions (Alqahtani, 2017; Bramley, 2001). Contrarily, affiliating with the nation collocates with verbs of requesting unification and cooperation. The second-person perspective is used predominantly with imperative action verbs expressing instructions for taking precautions.

The distribution of participants in the verb processes in Trump's speech appears to follow a pattern. American and non-American entities predominantly function as the goal or receiver of the action whether the action is physical or verbal performed by the actor *I* or *we*. They rarely occur as the actor of the verb. In these networks, Trump positions himself as the performer, either individually (I) or collectively (we), presenting himself as the dominant power. Most of the clauses express a relation between Trump (the subject), either in the individual or collective perspective, and the recipients of his actions. Only 21 clauses did not demonstrate a relation between the speaker and the other parties. This supports Halliday and Matthiessen's argument that "language users choose from the grammatical options to realize language meanings," which constructs the users' ideologies at the macrolevel of discourse.

Trump expresses relations with American entities in three patterns. When the goal of the verb is an American entity, the verb process indicates benefits for this entity, such as *protect*, *provide*, *support*, *heal*, and *care for*. These networks exist in three patterns: actor (Trump)-verb-goal (America, citizens).

Table 4: Pattern 1: Trump as the actor

Actor	Action (material)	Goal	Circumstances
We	will heal/ care for/ Help	the sick/ those in need/ our fellow citizens	– – –
I	will always put	the well-being of America	First

Only in one pattern of pronominal networking is the action performed by the speaker (Trump) on two goals (Table 5). In such sequences, Trump positions himself as the benefactor and positions the nation as the beneficiary in the circumstances.

Table 5: Pattern 2: One actor, two goals

Actor	Action1	Goal 1	Beneficiary (indirect goal)
We	will reduce	the threat	to our citizens

In this type of pronominal network, the discursive relation is established between the leader, Trump, who identifies himself with the governmental collective through *we*, on the one hand, and *our citizens*, on the other hand. The people are positioned as the beneficiaries of the action that will be performed by all the governmental sectors. This is one of the two instances where Trump refers to the Americans as *our citizens* in his address instead of the terms *Americans* and *American people*. The use of the FPPP in the possessive form aims to strengthen the bond between the speaker and the citizens who are the direct addressee in this speech, which, arguably, may sound more nationalistic than referring to the audience as a third party (Alqahtani, 2017; Billig 1995; Bramley 2001).

In the third pattern of pronominal networks, Trump represents himself as the actor of two verb processes where the first action is justified by the second. Table 6 demonstrates this pattern of networks.

Table 6: Pattern 3: Multiple verb processes and one actor

Actor	Action$_1$	Goal$_1$	Action$_2$	Goal$_2$	Action$_3$	Goal$_3$
I	have decided to take	several strong but necessary actions	to protect	the health and well-being of all Americans	–	–
We	are marshaling	the full power of the federal government and the private sector	to protect	the American people	–	–
I	signed	a bill	to help	government agencies. D.C. and other	to fight	the virus

In this pattern of Actor-Verb$_1$-Goal$_1$-Verb$_2$-Goal$_2$, Trump positions himself as the direct benefactor and the people as the beneficiary of his decisions (Table 6). In this pattern of pronominal networks, the verb processes are either material or verbal. However, notably, the second verb process in these networks is only material verbs (e.g., *protect* and *help*). These patterns reinforce the speaker's power of persuasion as they intensify the effects of the actions.

Nonetheless, a prominent pattern in these clusters involves a third party that mediates between Trump (the speaker) and American collectives. This third party functions as the goal of the first action and as the actor of the second verb process, in which an action is performed for the benefit of the American people.

Table 7: Pattern four: Actor and a mediating party

Actor$_1$ pronoun/benefactor	Verb$_1$	Goal$_1$ (Actor$_2$)	Verb$_2$	Goal$_2$	Verb$_3$	Goal$_3$	Circumstances/beneficiary
I	will be instructing	the Treasury Department	to defer	tax payment	–	–	for certain individuals and businesses negatively impacted
I	am calling on	Congress	to provide	Americans	–	–	with immediate payroll tax relief
I	am instructing	the Small Business Administration	to exercise	available authority	to provide	capital and liquidity	to firms affected by the coronavirus

Notably, whenever there is a mediating party between Trump and the people, Trump uses the individual perspective, *I*, followed by the verbal verb processes *instruct*, *call on*, and *announce*. Conversely, the mediating actors perform the material verbs *defer*, *provide*, *protect* their goal, and the people. In these networks, Trump predominantly emphasizes the individual perspective to index the identity of an independent leader who exploits his power and authority to serve the American people. As such, the constructions of these pronominal networks contribute to establishing trust relations with the people. These choices express the leader's patriotism to defend the country and the nation against internal and external challenges.

Interestingly, when American entities are employed in the subject position, they occur basically in relational verb processes. These processes express the American superiority shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Relational processes identifying American entities

Participant	Relational verb	Identification
Our team	Is	the best
Our federal health experts/they	Are	the best

| We | Have | the most talented doctors, scientists, and researchers |

When reference is made to American participants in relational processes, they are always ascribed a positive attribute whether they are used as the identified participant or as the possessed. Superlative attributes as *the best* and *the most talented* aim to enhance American power and superiority. This discursive behavior appears to represent Trump's ideology of bolstering the American ego. Such relational processes play a salient role in constructing nationalistic relations, which, in turn, enhances public cooperation.

Contrarily, non-national (non-American) entities are semantically positioned within the circumstances of the process in which they function as the target on which the second verb is performed. Unlike in discursive relations with national entities where Trump uses the individual perspective, he predominantly uses the collective perspective in positioning himself in relations with non-national entities, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Non-American entities as goals or actors

Pronoun	Verb	Type of process	Goal	Circumstances
We	Re-evaluate	Mental	The restrictions and warnings	As their situation improves
We (actor)	Institute	Material	Sweeping travel restrictions	In China
We (American government) (actor)	Monitor	Behavioral	The situation	In China and South Korea
We (actor)	Defeat	Material	This virus	–
We (American government) (actor)	Made	Material	A lifesaving move	In China
We (American government) (actor)	Suspend	Material	All travels	From Europe
We (Americans) (behavior)	See	Behavioral	Fewer cases of the virus	In the USA than in Europe
We	Declared	Verbal	A public health emergency	In other countries as the virus spreads its horrible infection
	Issued	Material	The highest level of travel warning	–
Each of us	Has	Relational	A role	In defeating this virus
European union (actor)	Failed to take	Material	The same precautions	To restrict travels from China

Table 9 demonstrates how Trump constructs relations with various non-American social groups. Notably, he predominantly represents himself in these networks in the collective perspective *we* to index his political identity by affiliating with his administration. Through this affiliation, Trump emphasizes the power of the American collective as opposed to the Chinese or European collectives. Trump does not use the first-person singular pronoun and a mediating party such as *my administration* or *Congress* in a similar way to his relations with American entities. In these pronominal networks, the governmental *we* collocates most frequently with material verbs expressing powerful actions performed by the American government. China in most clauses,

is depicted as the target of the action done by the American actor as in "instituted travel restrictions on," "made lifesaving move on," and "monitoring the situation in." These pronominal networks represent Trump's ideology in bolstering American power and manifesting powerful control over the situation in China. These strategies seek to reassure the public about Trump's representation of the "other," non-American, which appears to be heavily influenced by his political agenda. When a non-American entity is used in the subject position as the actor of the verb, the process expresses a negative event, as in "European Union failed to take the same precautions and restrict travels from China." American superiority is implied by the use of "the same." The phrase "the same" may be interpreted as "Europeans failed to do like Americans and restrict travels." By contrast, American social groups are depicted in a positive attribute. This may show how positioning participants in verb processes expresses the speaker's ideologies and defines the discursive relations.

5.3 *Transitivity in Constructing Discursive Relations with Social Groups*

At the discursive, macrolevel, these networks construct the relations expressing Trump's ideologies throughout discourse. American social actors whether collectives or individuals are represented in these discursive relations as powerful entities, victims of conspiracy, or beneficiaries of governmental services. Conversely, non-American social actors are depicted as the goal of American powerful decisions or the source of the crisis (see Table 11).

In his COVID-19 crisis discourse, Trump effectively constructs relations to express different themes and ideologies to persuade the nation to cooperate during the pandemic. He introduces the people to the crisis in the opening statement by constructing a network of address forms, pronominal and verb-process collocations, along with reference terms.

(1) My fellow Americans, I want to speak with you about our nation's unprecedented
response to the coronavirus outbreak that started in China and is now spreading throughout the world. We have been in frequent contact with our allies, and we are marshaling the full power of the federal government and the private sector to protect the American people. This is the most aggressive and comprehensive effort to confront a foreign virus in modern history. I am confident that by counting and continuing to take these tough measures, we will significantly reduce the threat to our citizens, and we will ultimately and expeditiously defeat this virus.

In (1), Trump initiates his discourse by constructing a leader–people, one-to-one relation. In the opening statement, Trump constructs a network of relations in which he refers to the American people as *fellows* to show intimacy and lay the ground for successful communication. He does not use the people as the subject or agent of the action in any sentence in the opening statement. He only uses them as the recipient/the goal of his action ("speak with *you*" or threat to *our citizens*). Therefore, the people are only given the role of a listener or audience. Trump focuses on his individual self and his government as the main actors that play the major role in the crisis. He realizes that by using material verbs exclusively when identifying with his government, underscoring the role of his administration to overcome the crisis as in *marshaling the full power*, *reduce the threat*. *defeat the virus*. He also belittles the role of the virus by using it as the goal of the American power in *to confront a foreign virus/defeat virus*. This shows how relations can be decoded from our transitive-structure choices.

In (1), Trump changes discursive positions when he shifts the topic from introducing the crisis to the topic of stating the actions that he is taking to overcome the crisis. He realizes this relation shift with the people by affiliating himself with his administration while referring to the people as a third party, *the American people*, shifting the nation's role from the direct addressee to the "other," that is, a listener engaged in the conversation. In this way, he draws boundaries between his "self" as a leader and the "other" to strategically create a powerful image. This aligns with De Rycker and Don's (2013, p. 38) argument that in similar "self" representations, leaders "background the political agency of people and construct them as at risk of damage, injury, danger, or destruction (and hence, in need of a savior or protector (see Section 2). Trump creates oppositions against China and Europe in polarizing language. Similar to his speeches during the pandemic, in this address, Trump insists on using the word "foreign" when describing the virus in a WE-Virus dichotomy, using the lexis "our citizens."

The boundaries between the leader and the nation in distancing the people while identifying with the government in the opening sentences, is reconstructed into positioning people as the direct addressee when the topic changes to health instructions:

(2). For all Americans, it is essential that everyone take extra precautions and practice good hygiene. **Each of *us* has a role to play in defeating this virus. Wash *your* hands, clean often-used surfaces, cover *your* face and mouth if *you* sneeze or cough, and most of all, if *you* are sick or not feeling well, stay home**.

These utterances indicate how politicians use transitive structures to attain political goals.   In (2), Trump initiates the pronominal network by identifying with the audience in "each of *us* has a role to play in defeating this virus." When he includes himself in the audience collective, he uses a relational verb (has) and the possessed (a role). However, when he explains what this

role is, he apparently excludes himself from the action, shifting to the addressee perspective by using successive material (action) verbs related to the prevention procedures. These processes collocate with the pronoun *you* (imperative mood) such as *wash your face*, *cover*, *stay* home. He also uses behavioral verbs with pronoun *you* (e.g., sneeze, cough). This shows that by using pronoun *you* with material verbs that realize the actions of following the rules, Trump avoids including himself in the group who receives instructions and presents himself as the leader who gives instructions in a leader-subject relation to enhance his powerful image. The reconstruction of this relationship with the American people as followers who should abide by the instructions aligns with De Rycker and Don's view (2013, p. 38) that in times of crisis, political actors reposition people as followers rather than citizens, employing this discursive strategy "to personalize their role to display strong symbolic leadership".

Subsequently, Trump reconstructs the relation with the nation, changing their position from the direct addressee who receives instructions to the partner in decision and destiny. These boundaries between Trump as a leader and his people are reconstructed through pronominal-verb collocations in topics of requesting unification and cooperation to establish nationalistic relations through sequences of national affiliations.

(3). *We* are at a critical time in the fight against *the virus*. *We* made a lifesaving move with early action on **China**. Now **we** must take the same action with **Europe**. We will not delay. *I* will **never hesitate to take** any necessary steps to protect the lives, health, and safety of the American people. I will always **put the well-being of America** first. If *we* are vigilant—and *we* can reduce the chance of infection, which *we* **will**—*we* will significantly impede the transmission of the virus. **The virus** will not have a chance against *us*. *We* **are** all in this together. *We* must **put** politics aside, **stop** the partisanship, and **unify** together as one nation and one family. As history has proven time and time again, *Americans* always rise to the challenge and overcome adversity. *Our* future remains brighter than anyone can imagine. God bless you! God bless *America*!

In (3), when identifying with the people, Trump makes transitive structure choices that are essentially different from the ones in (1) or (2). In (3), Trump emphasizes the salient role of the nation in the crisis by using material (action) verbs with the collective perspective (e.g., reduce, put aside, stop, unify). These choices of material verbs with the *national we* are similar to the verb processes Trump uses with the individual perspective (e.g., I take step, put America first) or when affiliating with the government (e.g., made, take, delay). More notably, Trump affiliates with the people in this context more frequently than he affiliates with the government and therefore, uses more material verbs with the *national we*.

The enemy personified in the virus is used with the relational verb (have a chance against us), which may be considered a verb-process weaker than the material verb. Trump did not use the verb 'defeat' as in for example, *the virus will not defeat us*, similar to his previous choice when he said "we will ultimately and expeditiously defeat this virus". In the latter, Trump maximizes his power and will by positioning himself and administration as the actor "we" with the material verb "defeat" and the virus as the goal.

Trump's reconstruction of national ideology is strategically employed when requesting the nation to abandon partisanship. The importance of winning the nation's cooperation may have been the reason behind the emphasis on material verbs when identifying with the people. Politicians exploit address forms and reference terms to designate relations with different entities.

Trump maximizes affiliation with the nation using pronoun "we" with material verb-processes when requesting the people to abandon partisanship. Unlike his choices in (2), Trump in (3) expresses intimacy with the people by constructing familial relations with the people. His highly cooperative and nationalistic language in this context implies Trump's concern about partisan unification to overcome the crisis.

6. Conclusion

The discussion above displays how politicians actively construct networks of pronouns and verb processes to designate relations with various social actors in discourse. In discourse of crises, these relations strategically enable politicians to express their ideologies and identities and realize their agenda powerfully. Self- and other-representations are essentially encoded in these language choices at the macro and microlevels of discourse. In crises, these discourses fulfill political agendas as their purpose is to shape the public's opinion and ensure support in crises. Self-representations in these addresses are likely to be reinforced by collocations of the first-person pronouns with material verb processes that indicate powerful actions. When facing power challenges, politicians may resort to distancing themselves from their people to maintain powerful image. In the following guidelines, Trump chose pronominals that distinguish his role as a commander from the people's role as followers of the instructions. The addressee pronoun cooccurred with material verbs, which indicates the emphasis on people's

The analysis also showed that politicians exploit transitive structures to designate nationalistic relations with the people and opposition against non-American social groups in different styles. In these pronominals, Trump uses relational verb processes to

bolster the American ego and undermine non-American social entities. In expressing patriotic emotions, Trump utilizes transitive structures in which he positions the people as the goal of his actions that benefit Americans in different patterns.

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