
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Critical Discourse Analysis and Donald Trump's Speech at the Davos Convention

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| ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the ideological dimension of Trump's discourse in the speech that he presented at the World Economic Forum on the 21st of January, 2026. Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA will be used in this research not only to deconstruct language choices, but to uncover hidden ideologies that might be embedded and legitimized in the discourse. These assumptions can go unnoticed by a reader, but identified by a critical analyst who is aware of the strategies employed in speeches. This research utilized Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework where the examination goes from textual analysis, discursive practice, to sociocultural context. Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics was also incorporated at the textual level alongside Van Dijk's ideological square. Combining these methods helped yield a more layered and comprehensive analytical results. By analyzing the pronouns, modality, transitivity processes, and genre types used in the speech, it was observed that several normalized presuppositions and hegemonic power relations are reproduced in the discourse. Recontextualizing the meanings and ideas present in the speech by media outlets assisted in re-enacting these legitimized sociocultural practices. The results showed that not only America was portrayed as the economy lead of all nations, but also other countries were framed as dependent on the success of the American nation. Trump, as well as the media, reproduced a deeper division within the American society between ingroups versus outgroups and Republicans versus Democrats.

| KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Analysis, ideologies, hegemonic power relations, discursive practices. sociocultural practices

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1. Introduction

How are social constructs and power relations created? How are discrimination and unequal social relations produced and reinforced? Why are assumptions perceived as taken for granted pieces of information? How are ideologies seen as intrinsic in our minds? All these questions might appear arbitrary and have no link in common. However, there is one shared element in the answers to the aforementioned questions, which is language. Because of the language we use and reiterate after others, we do not only create 'common knowledge', but we also contribute to the sharing of ideologies and presumptions common in our social group, which in turn, can lead to creating certain sociocultural relations and re-enacting particular power constructs without our deliberate awareness. Because language gives names to people and categories, then it is actively setting the limits and relations of unequal and less powerful social groups (Fowler, 1991). Fowler believes that anything that is articulated about the world comes from a certain ideology – and not from a blank and objective slate of mind (1991). With the use of language, institutions and social communities create specific meanings and values associated to them. These structured modes of communication that give meaning to organizations are referred to as discourses (Fowler, 1991). Discourse, encoded in language, reflects and intervenes in the creation of social practices (Fowler, 1991). Representing events in the world comprises the core of transitivity which is one of Halliday's linguistic markers in the ideational function (Fowler, 1991). Since transitivity allows speakers to make choices of how to organize the words in a sentence, or in other words, how to represent a particular situation, then these choices, made by the discourse, are ideologically charged (Fowler, 1991). The importance of discourse comes from the

engagement between language and context (Fowler, 1991). Thus, analyzing discourse entails identifying the circumstances of the situation and connecting them to the structure of the text (Fowler, 1991).

Interactions using language can be seen as implementation or discussions about status and power relations (Fowler and Kress, 1979). All acts of communication carry interpersonal connections that are mediated by discourse (Fowler, 1977). Linguistic analysis is a significant tool to uncover and analyze ideologies that encode relationships of control (Fowler and Kress, 1979). It can be said that language performs specific functions which are dependent on linguistic forms that are chosen based on a system (Fowler and Kress, 1979). Fowler and Kress claim that language does not have to be seen as an instrument that conspires to hide and distort social structures, and that authors might not be intentionally covering up their objectives (1979). Yet, since these two conditions occur, it can be suspected that people are not aware of the intentions they encrypt in language (Fowler and Kress, 1979). This is a very important assertion because the analyst should not generalize and 'take for granted' that everything – including language, and everyone – including speakers or orators, have embedded and discrete objectives with bad intentions. Additionally, it is pertinent to note that critical analysis should be practical for other analysts (Fowler and Kress, 1979). In other words, the analysis should pave the way for a clear technique or framework to be used by other analysts when conducting similar studies or the integrity of the author's original study will be questioned (Fowler and Kress, 1979). Comparing a microscope to discourse analysis was Chilton's way of describing the functions of the linguistic methodology (2004). Chilton argues that discourse analysis concentrates on various objectives at different levels, all at the judgement of the analyst (2004).

Nonetheless, Weiss and Wodak reflect on the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis and refer to it as an academic success wherein simply using the term CDA implies that there is a substantial body of analysis (2003). Before Fairclough published his book on critical discourse analysis, he used to refer to the study as part of critical language studies (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). CDA was perceived as an instrument used to condemn social order (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). That is the reason for it being called critical as it is entrenched in a critique of social constructs (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Ultimately, CDA established the importance of studying both, language and society, where analyzing discourse on its own has been deemed insufficient (Weiss and Wodak, 2003).

Although CDA aims to unveil and identify the embedded sociocultural relations in discourse, it also focuses on exclusions (van Leeuwen, 2008). It attempts to analyze the aspects that have been intentionally eliminated from the discourse. These omissions can be easily disregarded and passed over by the analyst as they do not "appear" as part of the discursive practice, especially that some do not leave any trace in social representations (van Leeuwen, 2008). Thus, including them in the study is as crucial as analyzing the elements that are already present, and this is where CDA stands out amongst other linguistic bodies of analysis.

2. Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis, according to Van Dijk, is a broad spectrum of analysis that goes beyond deconstructing language (1995). It differs from other types of discourse analysis that merely describe features of language rather than focus on how these features came to be and what their goals are (Machin and Mayr, 2012). By critical, one does not mean that using this type of discourse study leads to criticizing the language, but it gives way to uncovering the hidden ideologies that are embedded unnoticeably in the language (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Ideologies attempt to maintain and create social powers (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). In fact, CDA is problem-oriented where linguists make use of it to solve issues existing in traditional or contemporary societies (van Dijk, 1995). The linguist takes on a critical stance when applying CDA in their research (van Dijk, 1995). The work under CDA is a compilation of several disciplines, including, but not limited to, society, politics, and culture (van Dijk, 1993a). Implementing this discourse study implies the analysis of different levels of language such as the lexical, syntactic, semantic, semiotic and pragmatic. Also, CDA aims to uncover power relations that are either regenerated or resisted by social groups (van Dijk, 1995). It also focuses on the ideologies that are hidden in language and that help in creating social inequalities (van Dijk, 1995).

Moreover, discourse and power might, at first, seem two distinct aspects. However, taking a closer and deeper look at how they are produced and consumed, we can ultimately conclude that these two notions are closely intertwined and deeply connected. Social power and discourse have a complex relationship (van Dijk, 2008). One of the ways they are connected is via the suppression of freedom, exerted by social power, on discourse, wherein control on what or how to write in society is ubiquitous (van Dijk, 2008). Not everyone can come out and say whatever is on their mind due to the controlling power that exists in society. As political leaders, one might say that they have more liberty or power than others to speak about matters more openly without being restrained to do so. At the same time, these leaders watch every word they say because of the multifaceted interests they have, with the main aim of capturing citizens' support and businessmen's wealth and power. Although power, in this case, might not be necessarily used on discourse as other instances, but the latter can be used to reproduce and wield a specific social power construct. This is where Donald Trump, the 45th and the 47th President of the United States, stands out. Trump is known by many to speak with more openness than others, whether in private or public meetings. He can stand in front

of thousands of Americans and speak what others dare not to without any restraints or public etiquette. People, whether Americans or non-Americans, have seen Trump publicly insult or offend a person for his actions publicly without any constraints while disregarding the formality of his post as the president of the United States. Nonetheless, this does not mean that he uses language spontaneously without a hidden agenda. The attempt to seem unprompted does not rule out the fact that the speaker might have hidden intentions. Although his language might take on the appearance of improvisation, analyzing his language reveals many hidden intentions with deliberate effects. Through his language, Trump reproduces power within the American society and the world.

Van Dijk also discusses the role that discourse plays in mind control (1995). He elaborates on how powerful figures in society not only control the discourse but also influence the minds of people (1995). Despite the liberty that recipients might have in rejecting what is communicated to them, ultimately escaping the influence trajectory, there are many boundaries (1995). Some recipients might not have other sources of data, which means they can be easily controlled by those that they only have access to (1995). Also, people might not have sufficient information about detecting lies and manipulation and potentially fall in the victim trap of the ideologically-powered discourse (1995).

Fairclough argues that in discourse there are assumptions which might be perceived by some as ideological (2003). Taken for granted information are assumptions, but they might not be objective in nature. These presuppositions might be subjective which can ultimately lead to bias results in language that go unnoticed by the recipient. Thus, it is very important to analyze even the utterances that seem presumed or those that have a shared understanding across all community members. In addition to that, the term "IDF" or ideological discursive formations was first coined by Fairclough in 1995. These formations are embedded in the discourse and can make ideologies seem natural and go unquestioned (Fairclough, 1995a). As a result, ideologies will start to be perceived as common sense which suggests that it would be more difficult to fight against (Rogers, 2011). Therefore, to pin these utterances as unnatural, one must apply Critical Discourse Analysis. Knowing that social constructs are determined by discourse and vice versa, one should have a critical mind when trying to reveal the truth behind the ideological language (Fairclough, 1995a). Fairclough also continues to emphasize the power dynamic and intricate relationship between discourse and social practice by claiming that linguistic and social phenomena are dependent on each other (1989). On the one hand, language is determined by social practice. Fairclough explains that although certain individuals in society might want to emphasize their individuality, but when they speak, they do so according to social constructs and norms (Fairclough, 1989). There are certain influences in society that obliges the person to abide by certain rules and regulations. This makes the linguistic aspect of an individual dependent on the social facet of his life. Also, the discourse uttered by individuals have social effects, meaning they speak in a certain way to retain or demolish a particular social standing with another individual (Fairclough, 1989). For example, family members tend to speak in an informal way to highlight how close they are together, while business co-workers exchange formal discourse to maintain distance and professionalism between them. To alter or maintain these relationships, one would have to change the form and nature of the discourse. On the other hand, social practice is a linguistic phenomenon (Fairclough, 1989). This means that language, spoken in the context of society, does not only reflect social practices, but plays a part in it (Fairclough, 1989). For instance, in politics, many people argue about the meanings of certain political words which means that politics can even exist in an argument over language (Fairclough, 1989).

Furthermore, several studies have been conducted on some of Trump's speeches using Fairclough's three-dimensional model. To start with, one of Trump's campaign speeches in 2024 had been analyzed by Atmawijaya (2024). The results revealed that, through the use of various rhetorical devices such as metaphors, hyperbole, and repetition, Trump promotes a collective identity in the language he uses, portraying himself as the only one capable of saving America from all the issues that are negatively affecting the country (Atmawijaya, 2024). Through discursive practices, Trump establishes a dividing line between the elites and the working-class people, which enables him to establish a closer relationship with his supporters by fortifying populist ideals (Atmawijaya, 2024). As for the sociocultural dimension, Trump's rhetoric demonstrates the polarization of republicans versus democrats that exists in the American society and emphasizes his lack of trust in institutions and media who aim to, according to Trump, tarnish his image (Atmawijaya, 2024).

Moving on, applying Fairclough's CDA framework to the 2024 U.S. presidential debate included the study of lexical choices, metaphors, pronouns, and ideological framing, all under the category of textual analysis (Ashraf et al., 2024). It also considered institutional practices, audience reception, and intertextuality, as part of the discursive practices, and power relations, hegemony, social change, and social identity, as part of the social practice where the emphasis relies heavily on media construction of public opinion (Ashraf et al., 2024). Based on these analytical levels, it was illustrated that the nationalist theme was at the core of Trump's discourse (Ashraf et al., 2024). The speech focused on themes like nationalism and unilateralism, gaining the support of those who are against globalization, whereas the debate as a whole revealed the harsh divide between the right and left wing (Ashraf et al., 2024). The media aggravates the sociocultural construct of the societal division by reinforcing the political

ideologies of either one of the two sides, but Trump does not hold back on attacking various media outlets for their inaccurate portrayals of him and his narratives (Ashraf et al., 2024).

Through the lens of Fairclough's framework, Donald Trump's speech at the House Republican Conference in 2025 was examined (Kakar et al., 2025). Using rhetorical devices like metaphor, hyperbole and repetition, and crisis narratives, Trump was able to establish an emotional connection with the audience and delegitimize the media (Kakar et al., 2025). By speaking to a specific group of people – mainly the working-class, Trump reinforces the dichotomy of 'us versus them' while representing ideologies of populism and anti-elitism (Kakar et al., 2025). The study also shows how the media amplifies and constructs public opinion to its own favor and preference (Kakar et al., 2025). Another analyst explored how the use of Trump's word choices carved him as a populist leader who uses understandable and uncomplicated language to explain about complex matters, ensuring that the American people easily comprehend his ideas (Khan, 2025).

Trump's inaugural addresses, in both years of 2025 and 2017, were closely examined using Fairclough's CDA framework. To start with, Trump's speech in 2025 demonstrated how Trump's main ideological stance is that of a populist and conservative (Majeed, 2025). His use of pronouns, modal verbs, parallelism, and repetition reveals his opposition towards immigration and contemporary gender norms, where he frames himself as the sole hero of the preservation of American values and economic stability (Majeed, 2025). Moreover, the speech delivered on the 20th of January, 2017, reveals how Trump focuses on and prioritizes the future of America from the analysis of his word choices (Hassan, 2018). Through the language used, Trump was able to build a close relationship with his supporters and drive them to take action, instilling in them the feeling of responsibility and patriotism (Hassan, 2018).

Another study tackled one speech given by Trump during the pandemic crisis of Coronavirus (Awawdeh, 2021). The focus was on the deconstruction of the lexical choice – mainly words related to belonging and beliefs, grammatical patterns, modal verbs, and comparative and superlative forms of words (Awawdeh, 2021). As a result, two main themes were relevant in his language which are national unity and American power (Awawdeh, 2021). It also revealed the egocentric nature of the speaker with an emphasis on the ideological squaring of van Dijk and the heavy use of comparative and superlative forms that were utilized to glorify the Americans and the country's achievements (Awawdeh, 2021).

Additionally, one study was conducted on four of Trump's speeches as a businessman, before being elected as a president, and four others while being in office (Gil-Bonilla, 2020). There was one aspect in the research that is worth noting which is that after the analysis of his language and the focus on the pronouns used and the structures of sentences – transitivity, it was revealed that Trump showed empathy towards immigrants and focused on how they were affected by certain conditions (Gil-Bonilla, 2020). Conversely, and during his time as president, he portrays immigrants as outgroups who all seem as criminals (Gil-Bonilla, 2020). Therefore, Gil's study shows how discourse is heavily dependent on the context and the circumstances in which it took place (2020). As a businessman, Trump's interest lies in conducting successful businesses with all people, regardless of their nationality or citizenship. But as a president, he views America as being tainted by immigrants which makes the latter, according to him, a problem that needs to be eliminated and resolved.

However, Trump's speech delivered at the Davos convention in 2026 is yet to be analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which this research aims to complete.

3. Methodology

The research method of this study is qualitative with descriptive analysis as I will apply Critical Discourse Analysis on Trump's speech that was delivered at the Davos convention in Switzerland on the 21st of January, 2026. It was held during the annual World Economic Forum in front of hundreds of political leaders and prominent businessmen from different parts of the world. I will apply Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, which includes studying the text – the written transcript of the speech, discourse practice – interpretation, production, and consumption of the language used, and social practice – the larger context of the discourse. Halliday's SFL – Systemic Functional Linguistics will also be embedded in the framework alongside Fairclough's (Halliday, 2004). The main objective behind Halliday's concept was to create a functional and applicable study of linguistics where theory can be applied to solve problems in communities (2004). Moreover, van Dijk's ideological squaring will also be implemented at the textual level. Van Dijk asserts that there are four core parts of ideological communicative events, which are emphasis on positive information related to 'us' and negative ones related to 'them', and de-emphasis of negative information about 'us' and positive ones related to 'them' (1998).

It is important to note that Fairclough distinguishes the term 'text' from 'discourse' by claiming that the text is just part of the discourse that includes the processes of production and interpretation where text is an integral part of it (Fairclough, 1989). According to Fairclough, analyzing a text would not be complete without interpreting the discursive practices in which the text is

embedded (1995a). Textual analysis and the interpretation of audience perception should complement each other for a critical study. Fairclough gave the example of analyzing the language of a TV program. He stressed on the analyst's importance of studying not only the textual part of the program, but also the process in which the program was produced and circumstances of how the audience received it (1995a). Examining the context in which the language was produced is essential to interpreting the ideologies embedded in discourse (van Dijk, 1993b). Nonetheless, one issue with selecting a language or grammatical theory to conduct the textual analysis might be not knowing from which one to choose considering the extensive pool of linguistic theories out there (1995a). For this reason, Fairclough points out to Halliday's systemic linguistics which he claims as having several strengths in the field of CDA (1995a). He describes it as structural theory that focuses on the social functions of the text (1995a).

Furthermore, the analysis of this study will go through three phases, from textual, discursive, to sociocultural. The first level of analysis is descriptive in nature where the properties of the text are identified and explained. For the lexical part, **pronouns** will be analyzed, focusing on the 'us versus them' dichotomy. Moving on to the grammatical part of the sentence, the features of **modality** and **transitivity** will be interpreted (Halliday, 2004). Modality involves the degree of certainty of statements, while transitivity includes passives and nominalization (Halliday, 2004). According to Halliday, the speaker makes a choice by intentionally organizing the compartments of a sentence which ultimately serves a specific purpose (2004). Also, presenting positive information about ingroups and negative information about outgroups will be tackled. This is known as positive self-representation and negative other-representation or in other terms, **ideological squaring** (van Dijk, 1998). When the information presented has a negative reflection on outgroups, then the analyst can detect ideological squaring (van Dijk, 1998). Therefore, the speaker might lean into using euphemisms when describing the actions of the ingroups in order to de-emphasize their flaws (van Dijk, 1998).

The second level of analysis revolves around text production and consumption. (Fairclough, 1989). For this analytical stage, the focus is on how the text is produced and how it is interpreted by the people. Through discursive practices, language users act as both, discursive products and makers in the reproduction of discourse (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). The discursive practice shapes the social world as we know it, including the designing of social identities and relations (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). It is through these practices that the social and cultural change occur where the media helps shape new natures of politics (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Eventually, these practices lead to what is known as 'ideological effects' where unequal power relations are created and reproduced (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). To analyze these in a specific text, one must pay close attention to how the author of the text already used an existing **genre** to create his own, and how the recipient applied the same genre to the text to receive and interpret it (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). There are three main types of oratory, as per Aristotle, which are **political or deliberative, forensic or judicial, and epideictic or ceremonial** (Crowley & Hawhee, 2004). The latter genre, epideictic, occurs when the rhetorician praises or blames people or events (Crowley & Hawhee, 2004). In the forensic type, the orator focuses on past events, like in court trials, to either accuse or defend something or someone to prove their guilt or innocence (Corbett & Connors, 1999). While for the deliberative type, the speaker focuses on persuading other to do or not to do something (Corbett & Connors, 1999). Moreover, a discursive practice can be perceived as an aspect of hegemonic conflict that leads to a change in the order of discourse of which the practice is part (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). For Jorgensen and Phillips, analyzing discursive practices means examining the production conditions of the text and how readers are receiving the text (2002). One aspect that can be tackled at the consumption end is the **interdiscursivity** of a text (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). A discourse can be promotional, conversational, corporate, personal quality, management, educational, or academic (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). A noticeable signal of societal change is the presence of various discourses in one text (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002).

The third dimension focuses on the social context of the discourse (Fairclough, 1989). It aims to reveal **embedded ideologies, power relations, and hegemony**. The latter term, according to Gramsci, cannot be distinguished from the term 'dictatorship' (1999). This shows how hegemony tends to exert power over less powerful groups without their consent and with deliberate use of control. Such type of control can be embedded in the discourse which attempts to maintain, if not reproduce, that power. **Recontextualization** will also be analyzed by considering how several headlines published by media outlets frame reality by highlighting certain elements of the speech from their own perspective. Fairclough argues that communicative and social practices can be recontextualized based on their specific objectives (1995b). He emphasizes that the analyst should question how recontextualizations are different from the representations of the actual events (1995b). Recontextualization leads to transformation of social practices according to the purpose of the text (1995b). It can involve including or removing elements from the text depending on the weight they are given, which Fairclough calls 'selective recontextualization' represented by the media (1995b). Consequently, it is argued that political discourse is mainly mediatized (1995b). Media channels and outlets have taken over political discourse with its interpretation and implications. Thus, when recipients rely on media reports, they are actually referring to a recontextualized social practice, and not the actual event and its objective parameters. This newly transformed event can be misrepresented and eventually misleading, resulting in a new power and social dynamics that is

desired by the media. The process of reproducing ideologies is not limited only to everyday issues, but it also extends to a socio-cognitive scope (van Dijk, 1993b). Understanding these processes is essential to helping the analyst gain insight into the mechanisms of different forms of discriminations or power inequalities (van Dijk, 1993b).

4. Results and Findings

Trump's speech will be evaluated based on three analytical levels, textual, discursive, and sociocultural. The combination of these dimensions yields a more reliable and well-supported body of findings.

4.1 First Dimension - Textual

At the first level of analysis, the text is deconstructed and examined based on four different categories which are, pronouns, modality, transitivity, and ideological square.

4.1.1 Pronouns

The pronouns used in the speech will be identified against the topics and actions with which they are associated in order to deduce the objectives behind their use. To start with, the pronoun "I", specifically, was used in around 224 statements. Most of them were used to describe the events that Trump dealt with and what he thought about them, and in some others, he showed what he personally and singlehandedly did to make America great again. Some of the instances include: "I've cut – actually, till this point – 129 regulations for every one new regulation approved", "I slashed our monthly trade deficit by a staggering 77%", "I've stopped the nation-wrecking energy policies that drive up prices", "I came up with the idea", "I settles eight other wars" "I settled it in one day", "I rebuilt the military in my first term", "I did a lot, lot of big things", and "No president was able to get it. I got it". Using the pronoun "I", and in these specified instances, Trump was able to portray himself as a strong leader who was solely able to accomplish great achievements for America, without anyone's help or interference. The actions of improving trade deficit, eliminating harmful energy policies, settling wars and building the militaries were associated with the subject "I" which emphasizes and glorifies the victories of one person only – Donald Trump.

However, what has been strikingly noticeable is the use of "we", in approximately 189 occurrences, to identify what Trump and his administration achieved during the tenure of his presidency. A substantial amount of the pronoun "we" was implemented to describe major, measurable and specific accomplishments that America was able to achieve or has still been doing so during Trump's tenure. Such examples include, "we are the hottest country", "we have achieved this economic miracle", "we have removed over 270,000 bureaucrats from the federal payrolls", "we passed the largest tax cuts in American history", "We also provided 100% expensing", "we've radically reduced our ballooning trade deficit", "we have steel plants being built all over the country", "we picked up 50 million barrels from Venezuela alone", "we got it down to around those numbers", "we're leading the world in AI by a lot", "we fought for Denmark, we won, we won it big", "we have acquired many other territories throughout our history", "We give so much", "We fixed it with the strongest border anywhere in the world", "we defeated the Germans", "We're bringing back battleships", "We are going to build a dome like no other", "we did a lot", "We make the greatest weapons in the world, but now we're going to make them faster", "we have the best equipment", "we have a favored nations policy that every president wanted, "we have a capacity to do it at much greater levels", and "we have the lowest crime numbers that we've ever had in the history of the country". In 22 statements, Trump proudly demonstrates the power of his administration – the Republicans – and the success that it was able to achieve, with him leading it. Also, since the speech was given in an economic convention and the audience consisted of world leaders and businessmen that are mainly non-Americans, it can be noted that the pronoun "we" might have been used extensively to highlight the strength and wealth of America as opposed to the other countries of whose nationals are attending.

Attempting to create a dividing line between Trump, his administration and supporters, and other outgroups, the pronoun "they" has been used in 195 utterances. Some of which include, "the damage that they caused", "every time they come in with a new regulation, we do at least 10", "they went bad with their policies", "they didn't have a chance of getting it", "they spent less than 1% of that amount", "they went in reverse", "they stuck back where they started", "they don't appreciate what we do", "they weren't paying their bills", "they should be grateful to US", "they want us to help them with Ukraine", "they stayed the same", "they blew it", "Without the United States, they wouldn't be making anything", "they raise interest rates", "they allowed people to come into our country from jails, from gangs, drug dealers, murderers", and "they don't appreciate it". At first and towards the end of his speech, "they" was used to refer to Biden and the Democrat administration, claiming that they drowned the country with many damages that they had created, and allowed for the influx immigration to take place which led to high crime rates in America. Then, since it was a speech given to leaders from different parts of the world, he condemned the actions of many countries, including but not limited to, Denmark, Switzerland, and most redundantly, NATO. Trump attempted to belittle Denmark when he declared that they were unable to defeat the enemy, and argued that if it weren't for the U.S., they would not have gained any profit with their watch exports. As for the NATO, Trump repeatedly claimed that they were ungrateful to America and that they weren't doing what they were supposed to before they had asked for the assistance of the U.S. regarding

the wars in Europe. To sum up, it is clear that the pronoun “I” was used to accentuate Trump’s accomplishments independently, “we” was extensively used to praise the Republican administration for all their great deeds to American country and its people, and the employment of “they” emphasized how the Democrats have ruined America and the other countries are powerless without America’s help.

4.1.2 Modality

The modal verbs used in the speech are summarized in the table below along with specific examples from the speech.

Modal Verb	Number of occurrences	Associated action
Might (possibility)	3	-“He might be in the audience right now.” -“Emmanuel, you’re going to have to lift the price of that bill to \$20, maybe \$30. Think of that, that means it’s a doubling ... Might be a tripling, might be a quadrupling.”
Must (obligation)	1	“issues like energy, trade, immigration and economic growth must be central concerns to anyone who wants to see a one strong and united West.”
Can (ability)	27	-“We can be much higher than that” -“And perhaps how you, too, and the places where you come from, can do much better following what we’re doing.” -“And we can argue about it, but there’s no argument” -“if you can believe it” -“we can have it now at good prices” -“Let’s see what you can do” -“You can build your own electric-generating plants” -“Is there anything you can do?” -“It’s the United States alone that can protect this giant mass of land” -“nobody can dispute it” -“nobody can believe” -“But now what I’m asking for is a piece of ice, cold and poorly located that can play a vital role in world peace and world protection?” -“My chauffeur can do a better job than that” -“You can say ‘yes’ and we will be very appreciative” -“or you can say ‘no’ and we will remember” -“You can buy this stuff for nothing” -“ can you imagine, a 90% reduction sounds much worse” -“They can take depreciation” -“I can crush the hell out of the market.” -“We can drop interest rates to a level” -“growth can fight inflation, proper growth.” -“now you can walk with your wife, your kids, right through the middle of the city” -“we can do that all over” -“ Can you believe that Somalia” -“ Can you believe they actually buy small” -“And it can have some very good purpose” -“ you can do things that nobody else can even think about.”
May (permission)	2	-“they may have to go to 20 or 30, no more than that.” -“but you may make me do that”

From the modal verbs used, it is pertinent to note that the substantial inclusion of the pronoun “can” stresses on the capability aspects of the events described, where Trump, as a result, seems to focus on potential rather than on possibility, obligation or permission. This reveals that the core message behind his speech is to underscore the capabilities of both, the American force and the potential success that other countries might gain as long as they follow America’s lead.

4.1.3 Transitivity

Transitivity, including active/ passive processes and nominalizations, can reveal the speaker's embedded intentions and ideologies by the representation and foregrounding of certain people and events, and the de-emphasizing of others. Hence, it is essential to identify these elements and question their placement in the text. In Trump's speech, some of the passive constructions include, "economy is booming", "growth is exploding", "productivity is surging", "investment is soaring", "incomes are rising", "inflation has been defeated", "America was plagued by the nightmare of stagflation", "more than \$19 billion in fraud was stolen", "fourth quarter growth is projected to be 5.4% far greater than anybody ... had predicted", "the border was open", "inflation was raging", and "more than 100 major power plants were violently shut down by incompetent people". At the beginning, Trump started his speech by amplifying the achievements and greatness of American success by placing them in the subject position instead of their object placements, such as "economy" "growth" "productivity" and "investment". Even when it came to "inflation", the doer of the action was removed to eliminate the agent's responsibility because the focus at the start of his speech was not about blaming the Democrats as much as it was about pinpointing American milestones. When talking about the nightmare of stagflation, America was placed at the beginning of the sentence to turn the audience's focus on how America was involuntarily dragged into rock bottom, ultimately raising empathy towards it. In a similar context, and to draw sympathy towards America and demonstrate how it was poorly lead, when referring to the billions of dollars stolen in fraudulent practices, the amount of money was mentioned at the start of the sentence, illustrating the great wealth of the country that was able to heal after having a considerable sum of money taken from it. While disparaging Biden's administration, Trump ensured that all the negative consequences of Biden's leadership was placed in the subject position to punctuate his underperformance as an American president.

As for nominalizations, some agents and receivers of sentences have been obscured while processes have been placed at the forefront. Some examples include "acquisition of Greenland", "explosion of prosperity", "mass invasion of our borders", "unchecked mass migration", "largest wave of mass migration", and "the largest single-year reduction in government employment". One topic that Trump elaborates on during the conference is Greenland. He presents significant justification to why the U.S. has the right and obligation to acquire Greenland. However, placing America as the agent for directly obtaining Greenland might depict the former as a colonizing country. This explains why Trump preferred to have nominalized the process of acquiring Greenland, covering up the actor responsible for this unlawful and unprecedented acquisition. Also, instead of detailing what prosperity means in real numbers and accurate data, and while it seems sufficient to just declare that there is an "explosion" of it, it actually generalizes the concept to avoid questioning of its particulars. Additionally, Trump concentrates one of the major problems that U.S. has been facing which is the issue of immigrants. Instead of portraying the action of immigration as a movement, he displays it as a hostile scheme targeting the U.S. as a whole. For the decrease in employment, concealing the agent seems politically appropriate rather than having to blame the administration itself.

4.1.4 Ideological Square

Van Dijk's ideological squaring is apparent in Trump's speech in several examples indicated in the table below.

Positive Self-Representation	Negative Other-Representation
"after 12 months back in the White House, our economy is booming. Growth is exploding, productivity is surging, investment is soaring, incomes are rising"	"Under the Biden administration, America was plagued by the nightmare of stagflation, meaning low growth and high inflation, a recipe for misery, failure and decline."
"Now we are the hottest country, anywhere in the world"	"under the radical left Democrats, we were a dead country"
"In one year, our agenda has produced a transformation like America's not seen in over 100 years."	"This was the path that 'sleepy Joe' Biden administration and many other Western governments very foolishly followed ... The result was record budget and trade deficits and a growing sovereign deficit driven by the largest wave of mass migration in human history."
"We fixed it with the strongest border anywhere in the world."	"the border was open, the inflation was raging, everything was bad with the United States when I came into office."
"But now grocery prices, energy prices, air fares, mortgage rates, rent and car payments are all coming down, and they're coming down fast."	"Biden and his allies destroyed our economy and gave us perhaps the worst inflation in American history."
"we've done a hell of a job in 12 months"	"he has to be rated as the worst president we've ever had by far."
"real incomes are up in the United States by \$2,000,	"After declining \$3,000 under Biden ... because interest

"\$3,000 and even \$5,000 and more."	rates went up so high."
"In 2025 for the first time in 50 years, the United States had reverse migration."	"Biden admitted more than 8 million new migrants"
"Within three months, it's like, it's like a really great place, and a safe place, and a beautiful place."	"It was a very dangerous place to walk ... It was one of the most unsafe"

While positive self-representation praises the ingroup's achievements, the negative other-representation ensures the tainting of the outgroup's reputation, producing negative assumptions and perceptions towards them in the recipients' minds. The stark contrast between the positive and negative statements depicts an image for the audience of Trump and his administration helping their country flourish after it was drowned by Biden's 'wrongful' policies.

4.2 Second Dimension – Discursive Practice

For the second analytical level, the genre of the speech will be examined as per Aristotle's classifications of political, ceremonial and judicial texts, demonstrating the objectives behind the speech's interdiscursivity.

4.2.1 Genre

Since Trump's speech is directed to world leaders and businessmen at an economy meeting, then his main purpose lies in informing others about the great economy trends behind America's world leading power and persuading them to invest or secure better trading opportunities. This is evident in the commencement of the speech where Trump explains that he will outline America's miracle system of wealth and his intentions of elevating the living conditions of the Americans. He carries on to discuss how he and his administration were able to cut taxes, lower federal spending, raise tariffs on foreign countries, increase domestic steel production, boost exports and construct factories. A lot of the information presented was backed up by quantitative data and statistical figures which clearly mirrors the type of convention in which the speech is being held. While speaking about the booming American economy, Trump highlights the devastating nature of America under the leadership of what he calls "sleepy Joe" (World Economic Forum, 2026, p.2). This presents a deviation from the political genre of the speech to a judicial one. Trump borrows a lot of the past events in American history to compare them to present ones, associating the past ones to president Joe Biden and linking them to the decline of the American economy. He accuses Biden of being guilty of damaging the United States in various aspects, whether in terms of economy, safety, or stability. While doing so, he refers to Biden as "sleepy Joe", implying another change in his genre and deviating from the use of economy jargon which is appropriate to the context of the speech (World Economic Forum, 2026, p.2). Employing words like "sleepy" and "stupid" to describe Biden and Jeremy Powell, Trump displays the use of informal and unprofessional language that reveals more about the speaker's character than those he is characterizing. Conversely, as Trump praises himself and his administration, his speech intersects with the ceremonial genre that focuses on celebrating achievements.

Nonetheless, after speaking about the American financial and social aspects, Greenland's topic arises and Trump asserts that he did not want to initially discuss it, but fully endorses the moment and presents the topic to the audience. He makes use of the moment to convince the attendees of the righteousness of the U.S. and its obligation to take control of Greenland. This is part of the political genre as the main objective is to persuade others to do something, and in this case, to convince world leaders that America has the right and responsibility to obtain Greenland. However, with this topic at hand, Trump takes the liberty of discussing how Denmark is not suited to defend Greenland when it is incapable of protecting its own land. This leads to Trump dedicating a big part of his speech not only to condemn Denmark for their incompetence, but also to criticize Europe as a whole, France, Switzerland, China, and NATO for not following Trump's advice and leadership. Condemning other countries about several aspects regarding their economy shifts Trump's rhetoric to the ceremonial type where a substantial amount of time was dedicated to expressing disapproval of other countries' actions. He wraps up his speech by congratulating world leaders that are successful, in his opinion, which retains the ceremonial genre, but in its positive celebratory nature.

4.2.2 Interdiscursivity

It is clear that Trump's speech is a mix of the three types of Aristotle's genre classifications. For the context of the discourse, the World Economic Forum, the audience expect to receive a political or deliberative nature of speech where the spokesperson focuses on informing people of the country's economic situation and perhaps persuade them to stimulate investment and expand bilateral trade. People can also expect a ceremonial speech where country leaders celebrate their financial gains. Therefore, the speech started with a mix of genres, implementing both, political and ceremonial types. Nevertheless, by accusing former American administration of being guilty for demolishing the country's reputation, then the talk become judicial or forensic. Drawing on past events to prove that someone is guilty of an action was the core of Trump's attack on Biden administration. The audience, listening to the speech, had to shift their focus from political and ceremonial to the judicial genre, which can result in cognitive and emotional effects. As for the cognitive aspect, recipients of the speech, after listening to all of

the American accomplishments and engaging in the rejoicing of such triumphs, will be more prone to take for granted the assumptions or reasons given behind the shaping of events. Hence, the audience would just assume that this is what happened to the country and that's why it declined in the years that passed, without applying much questioning to the matter, especially after being invited to celebrate with Trump all his victories. The assumed reasons for the past American decline are fortified in nature with the absence or exclusion of any positive other-representation or negative self-representation. Thus, the perception to the course of actions is narrowed down to the 'good guy' versus 'the bad' where it is made clear by Trump which side is pertained to which party. Upon listening to the diverted topic of Biden and his administration, the audience would start feeling more empathetic towards the helpless and victimized agent – America, which activates the emotional repercussions of the divergence of speech genre. Evoking sympathy towards the country, would, in turn, lead to a feeling of outrage where the recipients, involuntarily and passively engage in accusing and condemning the opponent positioned as guilty, without having to assess the matter based on its merits. Ultimately, it can be argued that the insinuations become naturalized especially because after the ceremonial genre of the speech wherein the audience is drawn into a shared sense of identity which makes the ideologies embedded in the discourse less doubted or questioned.

4.3 Third Dimension – Sociocultural Practice

Trump's speech will be evaluated against the sociopolitical context, revealing the ideological propositions embedded in the speech and the reconstructed hegemonic power relations. The media's role of recontextualizing Trump's discourse will also be investigated.

4.3.1 Ideologies, Power Relations, and Hegemony

Since the speech was delivered at an economy convention where the audience assume that the speaker has sufficient expertise and knowledge about the country's financial aspect, then the recipients would tend to regard the spokesperson's statements as objective and factual rather than as opinions. This ultimately leads to legitimizing and reinforcing some aspects present in the speech such as existing social practices, hegemonic power relations, and ideological presuppositions.

As for the social practices, using the pronoun "I", Trump emphasized in his speech his individual capabilities of saving America and helping it reach new milestones. This solitary work naturalizes the idea that authority can reside in one single individual rather than in an institution as a whole. Personalizing the power of institution is a taken for granted assumption that should be questioned to identify its reasons and real motives behind it. Also, by having Trump draw a stark line between the elites and the rest of the American people legitimizes populist resentment and yields hatred towards all established powers, regardless of their actual involvement in sabotaging the working-class conditions. An important detail that has been left out in Trump's populist discourse is that Trump, himself, belongs to the elites. However, due to his heavy criticism of the elite groups, his audience focuses more on what Trump can do for them and less on to which group he belongs. Additionally, portraying immigrants in America as the enemies to the country and its people drives the Americans to regard them as a threat to their nation's safety and economy. While perpetrating discrimination against foreigners, Trump – as the president of the U.S., is in turn, an immigrant. He mentioned in his speech that his mother is purely Scottish and his father is a native German. Hence, the assumptions associated with the immigrant people are not just 'common sense', but are dependent on existing unjust social relations. Moreover, depicting the media as subjective and the electoral process as manipulated delegitimizes their nature and authority, leading to the undermining of institutions designed to limit executive power and prevent it from becoming tyrannical.

Also, Trump's speech has several embedded presuppositions that might not be not easily detected by the recipients. Framing the image of good versus evil in which the latter refers to Biden and the former to Trump, is not based on reality. This is based on Trump's beliefs that can be personal and subjective. The distinction between the two political parties should be accompanied by positive and negative actions done by both sides. However, one side is associated to only helping the country flourish while the other to solely destructing it. This star contrast between the two should invite questions about the credibility of this so-called 'perfect image'. On top of that, Trump elaborated on the topic of Greenland, asserting that America deserves it legitimately. He discussed how the U.S. has the right to acquire it while normalizing modern-day colonization. The topic brought up NATO that was described by Trump as incompetent – which is another embedded assumption. He declared that they have been failing to meet the required standards and expectations, and America has been scarifying a lot for them. As a result, they should hand over Greenland. Here, while Trump is asserting that the end justifies the means, he is legitimizing the methods taken to control another country, reinforcing the geopolitical ideology of 'America comes first'. Furthermore, claiming that eight wars have been solved by him, Trump creates an image of himself as the hero of not only America but the world as whole. Listening to the speech without applying any discursive analytical methods can lead the recipient to believe that this is common knowledge without inquiring more about the facts behind what has been uttered. It reinforces the ideology of Trump being a savior, while in reality, this idea is subjective and can be susceptible to further interrogation. Last but not least, perceiving America as having a powerful economy is based on the ideology presented in Trump's speech where he calls it "miracle economy" (World Economic

Forum, 2026, p.2). Phrasing it in such a way does not invite a lot of questions. Instead, listeners would assume that America's economy is 'known' as such and contesting it might signal an incompetence or lack of knowledge on behalf of the critic.

In addition to that, presenting immigrants as threats to the Americans reproduces hegemonic power relations where the people consent to these unequal and discriminatory relations. Instead of uncovering the structural reasons for the suffering of the working class, pinpointing the problem to the immigrants makes it easier for the political speaker to put the blame on foreigners rather than on the economic system. Also, the notions of 'America comes first' and 'America is the most powerful country in the world' are all, in fact, retrieved from speeches created by American politicians or presidents. When these ideas become normalized by the people, then everyone starts believing them to the extent that they would be considered common sense. It makes the power relations existing between countries not only recreated but also accepted.

4.3.2 Recontextualization

Trump's speech at Davos sparked a lot of media controversy. A significant aspect of the sociocultural practice is the framing of discourse that either supports the ideologies that have already been present or challenges the social power constructs to reproduce new social frameworks. This brings the attention to the concept of recontextualization. From the media headlines, one can infer the perception of the news outlet towards Trump, thereby judging whether the information presented will be reinforced or reproduced to suit a particular purpose. One of the headlines reads as follows, "From French drug pricing to 'loser' windmills: A rundown of who Trump criticized at Davos" (Meredith, 2026). This was CNBC's report which shows how they view Trump as a critical spokesperson who focused his speech on condemning multiple countries, leaders, and their actions. At first glance, the reader of this news segment would assume that Trump's speech was all about criticizing France and windmills. Narrowing the reader's focus to the topics mentioned in the headline can significantly downgrade their view towards Trump as a political leader who seems ill-mannered and very skeptical. However, his speech focused on several other topics which readers of the CNBC report might be oblivious of. This is mainly due to the fact that listeners and readers might not have the time to listen to Trump's whole speech or read the full transcript, which leads them to heavily rely on the news issued by media outlets. Thus, this serves as a mere example of how social power is constructed through language where discourse can create social practices for specific objectives.

Additionally, another headline written by CNN was "Five takeaways from Trump's antagonistic speech in Davos" (Cancryn and Liptak, 2026). At first glance, readers would presume how hateful and hostile Trump's speech was during the conference and might view him as a villain figure where antagonism is at the core of the language he used. CNN used one word in the headline that can change people's perception towards Trump and the nature of his performance in the Swiss meeting. This sole word, "antagonistic", can create a reality for the people, specifically for those who did not read or listen to the speech prior to reading this headline, that might be unrealistic. Thus, creating a world and transforming existing social constructs can be achieved by the media, as they can establish a segment about leaders or their actions and have people believe it through carefully curated words, regardless of its truthfulness. A fragile task is what reality becomes, where distorting it can be easily achieved in the crafting of language.

Another striking headline made by the ABC News was "Trump opens Davos remarks, saying he's brought 'phenomenal' US news" (Ibssa and Stoddard, 2026). Reading the title at first can lead one to assume that the article tends to praise Trump and depict him as a promising American figure bringing great U.S. updates. However, this time, it is not a word that changes the reader's perception towards the targeted person of interest. In this particular instance, the power lies in the punctuation marks engulfing the word 'phenomenal', which can be interpreted in an ironic way – meaning the opposite or different of what the word actually means. Taking another look at it, readers can have different inferences about Trump's portrayal. Some might assume that, due to the single quotation marks around the word 'phenomenal', Trump's news is not actually that phenomenal or great. In the opening of the speech, Trump does mention that he came to the meeting bringing "phenomenal" news which shows that, for the report to mark the word with quotes, the media might be holding some speculations about whether the news is actually phenomenal or has been exaggerated as such (World Economic Forum, 2026, p.1). Nevertheless, the media's speculations of the truthfulness of the word uttered by Trump leads the readers to raise the same concern and think twice of Trump's news bearing.

Alternatively, "In Davos, President Trump Outlines Bold Vision for American Prosperity, Transatlantic Strength", written by the official White House website, portrays Trump as the brave leader who simply 'states' the courageous vision for the success of Americans (2026). This title is loaded with subjective words, from the adjective "bold" linked to the "vision", to the noun associated with the American context which is "prosperity" (White House, 2026). At face value, the reader is faced with the portrayal of a president who is a valiant leader, stating to the world the leading vision behind American wealth and success. Establishing a reality centered around a leader who is both, brave and fearless, gives the American people a sense of pride, knowing that this politician is the one in charge of their country. Despite that, the actual reality might be far away from the one

being crafted by the White House report. Thus, the media, through discourse, is capable of associating social power with people of their choice and changing the power dynamics at play.

Another report published about the Davos speech, but appeared, more or less, objective, was that of the BBC. The title was "Fact-checking Trump's Davos speech" (Edgington, et al., 2026). This report draws readers who are interested in checking the factual events that occurred at the Davos conference. People who are keen on discovering what happened and was uttered in the meeting might find the article worth reading. This does not eliminate the fact that the content of the article might be subjective, but the headline does not show any reality misrepresentation or attempt to form specific perceptions towards Trump and his performance in favor of the news outlet.

4.4 Conclusion

This study has examined Trump's lexical and rhetorical choices employed in his speech at the high-profile economy convention in Davos, Switzerland. While the speech's purpose was to inform the audience of the country's economy and ultimately promote trade deals and strategic partnerships, it demonstrated the embedded and hidden ideologies, power relations, and social structures in the oration's discourse. Norman Fairclough's CDA three-categorical framework was implemented as the base of the study to uncover the naturalized propositions at the core of the speech.

To start with, on the textual level, the analytical aspects were comprised of pronouns, modality, and transitivity. Regarding the pronouns, it was revealed that the pronouns "I", "we", and "they" were used in 224, 189, and 195 utterances respectively. Since the speech was presented by one speaker, then the use of "I" would be relatively dominant in the text. However, many statements using the former pronoun describe how Trump had saved America, depicting him as the sole hero of the country. For the pronoun "we", he elaborates on the accomplishments of his Republican administration where it is sharply contrasted with the devastating actions carried out by the outgroup – the Democrats. This is the reason for the employment of "they" in approximately the same amount of "we", where Biden administration, immigrants, NATO alliance, Switzerland, China, France, and Denmark were, in most cases if not all, condemned. Also, the modal verb that was utilized the most is "can" – focusing on the ability facet of the Americans and the outgroups. On the one hand, Trump emphasized the ability of the Americans to commit actions that are different from their normal course if it required them to do so, highlighting their power and potential threats to any possible targets. On the other hand, Trump discussed how other countries can follow in the footsteps of America and become much stronger than they currently are, normalizing the worldwide division that lies between the United States – the 'big power' – and all the other countries in the world. For transitivity processes, many agents were obscured and sentences passivized, where the focus was centralized on the actions rather than on the doers. From the syntactic analysis, it was observed that van Dijk's ideological square was heavily implemented in Trump's discourse. The actions placed at the forefront of sentence structures were either the achievements completed during Trump's tenure, or the defeats that had to be tolerated during the Democrats' time, victimizing America at the hands of the outgroup. It was clear that all the positive triumphs in America were associated to the ingroup – Republicans – and the defeats were linked to the outgroup – Democrats. Regarding sentence structures, nominalizing some processes does only remove the responsibility of the agent, but also does not invite a lot of questions when generalizing an idea and conceptualizing it.

For the discursive practice, the genre of the speech was categorized as per Aristotle's classifications. However, it did not seem to fit under one category as it bypassed all three genre types. Trump started with a political speech where he was informing the recipients about America's financial market, perhaps to eventually glorify the country and attract more trade relations and agreements. It transitioned to ceremonial when the American accomplishments were amplified and celebrated. However, upon attacking previous governments of leading America to its demise, Trump switched to judicial discourse where he accused Biden and his administration if being guilty of ruining America's multifaceted aspects, from economy, politics, to security. This interdiscursivity of Trump's oration yields both cognitive and emotional effects in the audience. The latter would assume that the reasons stated for America's previous decline are merely common sense, generating an emotional connection to America where it would be perceived as victimized and deserves all the sympathy it can get.

The aforementioned textual and discursive analysis give rise to reproducing ideologies embedded in society, and regenerating hegemonic power relations existing between nations, political and social parties. Some of the ideologies that were normalized and re-enacted in Trump's discourse were personalizing the power of institution, populism, and 'us versus them' rhetoric. Presenting the outgroups as threats to the nation legitimizes unequal power relations between Americans and foreigners where the latter are condemned as the reason for affecting the working-class conditions. While Trump attempts to frame his story based on 'good versus evil' narrative where each side connects to one political party – whether left or right wing, a deeper division is dug in society to separate community members even further. In similar context, depicting America as the most powerful of all nations not only situates it as the leader of the world, but also gives it unprecedented privilege remaining at its disposal and sole discretion. Nonetheless, some media outlets had their own interpretation of the speech, recontextualizing it

based on their perspectives. Some reports focused on who Trump criticized, while others regarded his oration as hostile. When people rely on media to extract information about a certain event, they might be indirectly influenced by the media reports whose writings are subjective and dependent on the view of the author of that particular article. This legitimizes the media's ideological propositions and facilitates their implementation within the members of that society.

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