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## SHAPING PERCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU'S SPEECH AT THE 2024 UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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**Abstract:** This study critically analyses the speech of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the United Nations General Assembly 2024 by incorporating Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, with the focus on the first dimension - The textual analysis. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are employed in the research process to unveil linguistic strategies applied by Netanyahu, his underlying ideology, and how it shapes the audience's perceptions. Two powerful tools applied by the Israeli leader are: (i) Lexical devices, including the use of repetition and metaphors, and (ii) Grammatical features, including the we - you pronoun and active and passive voice. The investigation of the above-mentioned strategies demonstrates the success of the speaker in: first, reinforcing Israel's determination in self-protection; second, accusing rival forces of committing genocidal actions in Israel and the ignorant attitude of the international community towards the issue; and third, provoking sense of compassion and responsibility of the international audience to jointly mitigate common issue.

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, ideology, shaping perceptions, repetition and metaphors, active and passive voice

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# **ĐỊNH HƯỚNG NHẬN THỨC VỀ XUNG ĐỘT: PHÂN TÍCH DIỄN NGÔN PHÊ PHÁN BÀI PHÁT BIỂU CỦA THỦ TƯỚNG ISRAEL BENJAMIN NETANYAHU TẠI CUỘC HỌP ĐẠI HỘI ĐỒNG LIÊN HỢP QUỐC NĂM 2024**

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**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này phân tích bài phát biểu của Thủ tướng Israel Benjamin Netanyahu tại Đại hội đồng Liên Hợp Quốc năm 2024 dưới góc độ phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán, áp dụng mô hình phân tích diễn ngôn ba chiều của Fairclough. Trọng tâm nghiên cứu đặt vào chiều thứ nhất - Phân tích văn bản. Phương pháp định lượng và định tính được sử dụng trong quá trình nghiên cứu nhằm làm sáng tỏ các chiến lược ngôn ngữ của Thủ tướng Netanyahu, tư tưởng của ông và cách ông định hướng nhận thức của người nghe. Hai công cụ ngôn ngữ chủ yếu được nhà lãnh đạo Israel sử dụng bao gồm: (i) Các công cụ về từ vựng: phép lặp và phép ẩn dụ; (ii) Các đặc điểm ngữ pháp: việc sử dụng đại từ we - you và câu chủ động, bị động. Việc phân tích các công cụ ngôn ngữ trên cho thấy người nói đã thành công trong việc thực hiện ba mục đích chính: Thứ nhất, củng cố quyết tâm của Israel trong công cuộc phòng thủ bảo vệ đất nước; thứ hai, cáo buộc các lực lượng đối lập đã gây ra tội ác diệt chủng tại Israel cũng như lên án thái độ thờ ơ của cộng đồng quốc tế trước vấn đề này; thứ ba, khơi dậy lòng trắc ẩn và trách nhiệm của người nghe nhằm chung tay giải quyết vấn đề.

**Từ khóa:** phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán, hệ tư tưởng, định hướng nhận thức, phép lặp và ẩn dụ, câu chủ động và bị động

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Rationale of the Study**

Language is not only a medium for communication but also as an active element in social practices (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Exceeding the “giving and getting information” function (Gee, 1999, p. 1), language is deeply tied to how we act in society, make decisions, and uphold societal norms. However, “Language is not powerful on its own, it gains power by the use powerful people make of it” (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 10). This explains the frequent incorporation of language by influential figures in adopting ideologies and shaping the target audience’s perceptions. Powerful individuals tend to exert influence on other people based on the correlation between language and ideology: “Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour, and the form of social behaviour where we rely most on ‘common-sense’ assumptions.” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 2).

Ideology is viewed as a set of beliefs and values that are usually embedded and perpetuated through language to justify the power relations (Fairclough, 2001). Through the process of naturalization, ideology becomes “common-sense” (Ibid., p. 64) and is subsequently taken for granted by the public. In other words, the public internalizes ideological messages as reflections of reality rather than recognizing them as deliberately constructed narratives. This is precisely how those in power maintain social control in modern society, not through coercion

or physical violence, but through consent, as “it is less costly and less risky to rule if possible by consent” (Ibid., p. 28). Hence, ideology can be regarded as a key mechanism of rule by consent, while language, being the favored vehicle of ideology, facilitates the naturalization of dominant ideas and, in turn, secures public consent. This explains Fairclough’s (2001) emphasis on the importance of identifying ideological assumptions embedded in linguistic forms in order to understand how discourse shapes the perception and interpretation of its recipients.

One prominent context in which ideology is articulated and reinforced through language is in political discourse, particularly in speeches by state leaders addressing deeply polarized conflicts. Among them, speeches related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict are those that receive special attention. Since the unexpected assault by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent declaration of war by Israel, the conflict has shown no signs of de-escalation. The humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip has emerged as the most pressing issue, eliciting widespread concern from the international community. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)<sup>1</sup>, as of the beginning of May 2025, the death toll in Gaza has reached more than 52,000 individuals. Approximately 20,000 of these fatalities were Hamas militants, with the remaining majority being non-combatant civilians. Nearly 1.9 million Gazans, constituting about 90% of the territory’s population, have been displaced and are experiencing acute or catastrophic levels of food insecurity<sup>2</sup>. In September 2024, when the General Debate of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly was held, more than 41,000 fatalities were reported in the Gaza Strip conflict.

The theme of the Debate *Leaving no one behind: acting together for the advancement of peace, sustainable development and human dignity for present and future generations* highlights the urgent need for cessation of the conflict and restoration of peace in the region. On the third day of the Debate (26th September, 2024), Palestine’s President Mahmoud Abbas delivered his speech as an accusation towards Israel’s military operations for committing a genocidal crime in the Gaza Strip. On the following day (27th September, 2024), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed his speech, reinforcing Israel’s consistent stance on the ongoing conflict and defending his nation against accusations by the Palestinian leader and international community after Israel’s military operation. As a politician, Netanyahu engages in political discourse shaped by strategic language choices that are intended to attract attention, deliver his messages, and provoke the audience’s response. These linguistic strategies, deeply tied to his ideologies and policy agendas, become an area of interest for linguists and political language researchers.

Netanyahu’s speech has been chosen for analysis through the lens of CDA, particularly using Fairclough’s CDA three-dimensional model to sufficiently shed light on linguistic strategies used in delivering ideologies and shaping the audience’s perception. Given the unprecedented scale of the conflict, this study possesses strong contemporary relevance by delving into the underlying ideologies and intentions of the parties involved. Through a critical examination of political discourse, it reveals how language is skillfully and strategically employed to shape the audience’s perceptions of the conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-7-may-2025>

<sup>2</sup> [ICP’s report on the Gazan acute food insecurity situation](#)

## **1.2. Context of Palestine–Israel Conflict**

### **1.2.1. History of the Conflict**

The history of the Israel-Palestine conflict is rooted in a century-long struggle over land, identity, and statehood. Increased Jewish immigration to Palestine between the 1920s and 1940s, fueled by European persecution and the Holocaust, heightened tensions with the existing Arab population. In 1947, the UN proposed partitioning Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states<sup>3</sup>, a plan rejected by Arab nations who argued it favored the smaller Jewish population. Following Britain's withdrawal in 1948, Jewish leaders declared Israel's independence<sup>4</sup>, triggering the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which Israel won, expanding its territory and leading to the displacement of around 750,000 Palestinians (usually known as the Nakba). The later 1967 Six-Day War resulted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, further complicating the conflict. While Israel later signed a peace treaty with Egypt and withdrew from Sinai<sup>5</sup>, the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, particularly the West Bank and Jerusalem, remains a major point of contention, with Palestinians seeking an independent state and Israel citing security concerns and historical claims. The Gaza Strip, under Hamas's control since 2007, has been a site of repeated conflicts and a blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt. Recent events, including the October 7th, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel and Israel's subsequent military offensive in Gaza, have contributed to a devastating humanitarian crisis.

### **1.2.2. The 7 October Massacre**

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a large-scale surprise attack on southern Israel, including an assault on the Supernova music festival near the Gaza border. Events surrounding this attack form a critical backdrop for Netanyahu's speech, becoming a symbol of the brutality and deeply shocking Israeli society. In response, Israel declared a state of war and launched a massive military campaign in Gaza<sup>6</sup>, framing the war as a mission to redeem the nation, rescue hostages, and ensure long-term security. However, as the war escalated, international criticism intensified due to the high number of civilian casualties in Gaza and widespread destruction, raising concerns about humanitarian law. By the time of the 2024 United Nations General Assembly, Israel faced growing diplomatic pressure. Many nations and UN bodies called for an immediate ceasefire and accountability for the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Discourse Analysis (DA) & Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

#### **2.1.1. Discourse Analysis (DA)**

The term "discourse analysis" has been applied to a broad spectrum of meanings and encompasses a variety of analytical activities. According to Brown and Yule (1983), discourse analysis refers to a set of practices situated at the crossroads of various disciplines, including sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, philosophical linguistics, and computational linguistics. In other words, Discourse Analysis has become an interdisciplinary method for both written and

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<sup>3</sup> [UN General Assembly Resolution 181 \(II\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Declaration of Israel's Independence 1948](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Israel–Egypt Peace Treaty](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Netanyahu's declaration "We are at war"](#)

spoken forms of language, embracing a wide range of social sciences (Brown & Yule, 1983). Researchers within these various disciplines typically focus on distinct dimensions of discourse. This point of view is widely recognized by other scientists, as stated by Burr (1995) “the term is an ‘umbrella which covers a wide variety of actual research practices with quite different aims and theoretical backgrounds. All take language as their focus of interest.” (p. 163).

Since the early 1990s, many discourse analysts have used discourse analysis more critically to examine issues relating to power, inequality, and ideology (Baker & Ellece, 2011). Henceforth, there is also a change in the qualitative form of analysis. Traditionally, discourse analysis requires “close-reading” of a small amount of text, such as a detailed transcription of a conversation or a magazine article. However, in more recent years, discourse analysts have begun to use quantitative or corpus-assisted methods on much larger sets of data (Baker & Ellece, 2011). This change is also reflected in the procedure of data obtaining and the analysis process of this paper.

It is also crucial to note that objectivity in discourse analysis is an impossibility, as its central tenets include viewing research as a co-production between the researchers and those who are being researched (Burr, 1995).

### **2.1.2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach to the analysis of discourse which views “language as social practice” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 14), and is interested in the ways that ideologies and power relations are expressed through language. As noted by Habermas (1973), Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary tool that exposes inequality and injustice. Ideology and power are mediated through the application of written texts in both daily and professional lives. CDA illuminates the problems generated by this relationship.

What distinguishes CDA from other forms of linguistic analysis is that, apart from dealing with words on a page, it also emphasizes the examination of social context, for example, discovering how and why the words came to be written or spoken and what other texts they are referencing (Baker & Ellece, 2011). Furthermore, according to Kress (1990), the “overtly political agenda” is what sets CDA apart from other discourse analysis. He argues that although CDA shares the common aim of discourse analysis in providing “a better understanding of socio-cultural aspects of texts,” its priority to provide a “critical dimension” to text analysis makes it become different (p. 84). In this sense, CDA tries to “denaturalize” language, that is, to show that the way people speak, write, or think is not just common sense, but often reflects hidden ideologies or power structures. (Ibid., p. 85). This assertion is consistent with Thompson’s (2003) viewpoint, according to which a critical approach to discourse analysis aims to connect the text (at the micro level) with the underlying societal power structures (at the macro level) through the discursive practices that the text is based on. To put it briefly, a text should be critically examined in order to identify dominance and power dynamics.

## **2.2. Political Discourse & Ideology**

### **2.2.1. Political Discourse**

Political discourse can be described as “a complex form of human activity” (Chilton & Schäffner, as cited in Schäffner, 2004, p. 117) that stems from the understanding that language is essential to the practice of politics (Schäffner, 2004). According to van Dijk (1997), the easiest way to identify political discourse is by its “actors or authors, viz., politicians” (p. 12). Indeed, the majority of political discourse research focuses on the language and communication

of professional politicians and political leaders, including presidents, prime ministers, and members of governmental bodies, parliaments, or political parties at local, national, and international levels. In this context, politicians are defined as individuals who are paid for their political roles and who attain their positions through election, appointment, or self-designation as key actors within the political system (Van Dijk, 1997). However, it is also noted by van Dijk that besides politicians, various recipients in political communication events should also be included in the domain of politics, such as the general public, the people, citizens, the “masses”, and other social groups or categories. In other words, situating politics and its discourse within the public sphere reveals a broader range of participants involved in political communication.

A discourse is determined as “political” only when it satisfies the two key criteria (Schäffner, 1996). First, it must serve a functional role by emerging within the sphere of politics and being shaped by particular historical and cultural contexts. Second, it must engage with themes and issues that are relevant to political life. Essentially, political discourse functions as a strategic tool used by politicians to accomplish specific objectives, such as gaining support, advancing their ideologies, consolidating authority, and influencing public behavior. Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in disseminating the dominant ideology. Through political discourse, politicians can embed their ideas and beliefs in public consciousness, thereby persuading people to align with their viewpoints.

### **2.2.2. Ideology**

Generally speaking, ideology is the collection of thoughts, values, and objectives that an individual or organization has (Baker & Ellece, 2011). Drawing on Althusser (1971), Fairclough (1992) views ideologies as “constructions of reality [...] which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination” (p. 87). Ideologies are created, upheld, and contested partially through language. Stated differently, language serves as a medium for ideological influences. It helps to legitimize organized power relations. Language becomes ideological when power relations are not explicitly justified (Habermas, 1973).

However, ideology is not easily identified within the text. Fairclough (1992) asserts that ideologies cannot be “read off” of texts because “meanings are produced through interpretations of texts” (p. 88-89). Additionally, in political science, ideology is sometimes called “belief systems or social representations of some kind” (Augoustinos, Farr & Moscovici, Fraser & Gaskell, as cited in van Dijk, 2001, p. 12). As with grammars, socio-culturally shared information, group attitudes or standards, and values, this indicates that they are group beliefs rather than individual beliefs. Being the unique types of social cognition shared by social groups, ideologies serve as the foundation for group members’ social representations and behaviors, including their discourse, which also acts as a vehicle for the creation, dissemination, and contestation of ideologies (Van Dijk, 1997).

### **2.3. Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of CDA**

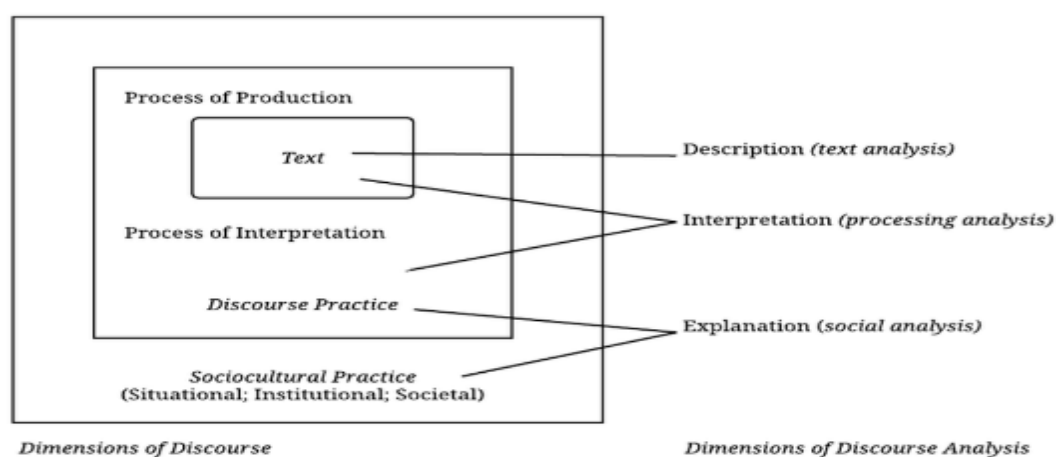
Following Halliday (1985) and Firth’s (1957) idea of the centrality of social context in text analysis, Fairclough views language “as a form of social practice” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 18). According to Fairclough (2001), the relationship between language and society is dialectical and internal rather than outward. “Language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic

phenomena” (p. 19). He then explains these mutual correlations between language and society by pointing out the socially determined nature of humans’ usage of language, and positioning language activity as a part of social processes and practices rather than a mere reflection. The terms “text” and “discourse” are also determined in Fairclough’s argument. Accordingly, “text” is the outcome of the text production process, whereas “discourse” refers to the entire social interaction process, of which a text is only one aspect. Together with the text, this process also consists of the production process, from which the text is a product, and the interpretation process, from which the text is a resource. In this sense, text analysis is only seen as a component of discourse analysis, which also encompasses the study of interpretative and creative processes. The “members’ resources” (MR), which are the knowledge, social values, beliefs, and assumptions of language producers, are also taken into account when analyzing discourse from a critical perspective (Fairclough, 2001).

Based on the above-mentioned arguments and inspired by the multilevel linguistic system of Halliday and Firth, Fairclough has proposed his well-known three-dimensional analytic framework as a conventional guideline for CDA research.

**Figure 1**

*The Three-dimensional Model (Fairclough, 2001, p. 21)*



### 2.3.1. Description

The first stage in the three-dimensional model is the “Description,” which has been developed out of Halliday’s systemic functional grammar. This stage encompasses the analysis of text and the correlation with critical linguistics. Fairclough refers to this dimension as “the stage which is concerned with formal properties of the text” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 21). At this point, the researcher’s task is to recognize and categorize the text’s formal elements using a descriptive framework. To provide a substantial guideline for discourse analysis, Fairclough (2001) has raised ten questions unveiling three aspects of texts, including vocabulary, grammar, and textual structure. However, not all of these characteristics are present in a text; hence, the focus of text analysis is determined by the discourse types and content of the text.

### 2.3.2. Interpretation

The second stage of the model is Interpretation, which “focuses on the relationship between text and interaction, seeing the text as both a product of the process of production and a resource in the process of interpretation” (Fairclough, 2001, p.21). According to Fairclough,

in this stage, analysis is far less definitive and cannot be viewed as applying a process to an “object”. The researcher has to analyze the cognitive processes of participants during the process of producing and interpreting texts. Situational context and Intertextual context are the two major concerns through which the interpretation of text is accomplished.

### 2.3.3. Explanation

The final dimension of Fairclough’s model is Explanation, which is concerned with “the relationship between the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 22). This stage aims to present a discourse as a social practice and also as a part of a social process. The process of how social structure shapes the discourse and how the discourse creates reproductive effects on those structures (sustaining or changing them) needs to be discovered. The two dimensions of Explanation include: processes of struggle and relations of power, depending on the emphasis of the discourse.

## 2.4. Review of Previous Studies

The success of Netanyahu in the political field is often attributed, by Israeli scholars and journalists, to his rhetorical skills and to his being a gifted orator (Neuman & Tabak 2003). This explains numerous research papers that have been conducted on finding linguistic strategies in Netanyahu’s speeches and how he significantly influences the audience’s perception.

One of the most notable studies is “A Critical Discourse Analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu’s Speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014”, implemented by Khaled (2020). This research focuses on investigating the influence of ideology on Netanyahu’s speech using the Discourse Historical Approach, adopted by Wodak and Theo Van Leeuwen’s systematic-functional model of representation of social actors. The analysis highlights how social actors are represented through mechanisms such as inclusion/exclusion, suppression, and role allocation, with Netanyahu portraying Israel as a victim and defender while framing Hamas as a violent and inhumane threat. Using various arguments, including humanitarianism, danger, and self-defense, Netanyahu legitimizes Israeli actions and shifts responsibility onto Hamas for civilian casualties.

In the paper “The interpersonal strand of Political Speech: Recruiting the Audience in PM Benjamin Netanyahu’s Speeches” by Livnat and Lewin (2016), a different approach is incorporated to examine the rhetorical strategies Netanyahu employs to engage and persuade his audience to shed light on the interpersonal aspects of his political discourse. The research analyzes ten of Netanyahu’s speeches between May 2011 and March 2015. The corpus selected covers a range of international audiences with different levels of support for Netanyahu’s policies. As a longitudinal research study, this study is also able to identify patterns and shifts in his rhetoric. Four main key findings of the study include: (1) *The strategic use of rhetoric*; (2) *Identity construction*; (3) *Delegitimization of Opponents*; (4) *Emotional and Persuasive Language*.

Netanyahu’s perception towards the Israel-Palestine conflict is pronounced in the research “Critical Discourse Analysis of Benyamin Netanyahu ICC Open Hearing Session and Radar JawaPos Statement on Israel-Palestine Conflict” by Arifiyah, Maella, and Zulaikha (2024). Incorporating Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, the research investigates Netanyahu’s speech on May 21, 2024, which is also the leader’s response to the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant against him. Findings of the research highlighted the strong moral division between Israel and Hamas by presenting Israel as a victim and Hamas as a terrorist organization. Netanyahu legitimizes Israel’s military actions by framing them as self-

defense while delegitimizing the ICC's legal actions. Historical analogies remain as an effective strategy employed by Netanyahu to strengthen his argument in this speech, with the use of emotionally charged language to evoke fear and justify Israel's actions.

While previous studies have yielded valuable findings regarding Netanyahu's use of language, the majority of the selected discourses are relatively dated, predominantly originating from 2016 or earlier. This temporal limitation affects the contemporaneity of the research, resulting in a lack of updated reflection on the evolving dynamics of the Israel–Palestine conflict. Furthermore, the primary focus of these studies has largely been confined to linguistic aspects, specifically, the rhetorical and discursive strategies employed by Netanyahu to realise his communicative intentions. However, issues concerning underlying ideology, as well as how discourse shapes audience interpretation and meaning-making, have not been sufficiently explored in these analyses.

### **3. Research Questions and Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

The primary aim of this research is to shed light on the incorporation of linguistic devices in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Speech delivered at the General Debate of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA for short from now on) to disseminate his messages and direct the way the international audience perceives them. To accomplish this aim, two research questions are raised as follows:

1. *What lexico-grammatical strategies are utilized by Prime Minister Netanyahu in his address?*
2. *How do these lexico-grammatical strategies shape the audience's perceptions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict?*

#### **3.2. Methodology**

The procedure of analysis can be divided into three main stages.

The first stage is the data acquisition, in which the full text of Netanyahu's speech has been accessed via [The Times of Israel](#). Consequently, the chosen text is uploaded onto the interface of AntConc version 4.3.1 for concordance analysis and key terms compilation. This step is where relevant lexical devices and grammatical structures are identified, categorized, and organized into tables of the database. In the second phase, the qualitative research method is applied in analyzing discourse together with Fairclough's approach to CDA as the major framework. The questions suggested in the first dimension of the three-dimensional model act as a cornerstone for the investigation of vocabulary, grammar structure, and textual structure of the text. The obtained data are linked to relevant theory to reveal linguistic strategies used by Netanyahu in expressing his ideologies and their effects on the audiences. In the final stage, the results derived from the previous steps are consolidated and synthesized into a coherent narrative, drawing meaningful insights into Netanyahu's language utilization in his UN speech.

#### **3.3. Textual Structure of Netanyahu's Speech**

Netanyahu's speech comprises 4,176 words, 268 sentences, and is structured into 29 paragraphs. These paragraphs are organized with a coherent structure that serves the speaker's various communicative purposes. The first four paragraphs emphasize the rationale and objectives of the speech, while also providing a brief overview of the ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip. Paragraphs 5 and 6 introduce the notion of a war on seven fronts, highlighting

Israel's efforts to defend itself against sustained attacks by Iran and affiliated terrorist organizations. From paragraphs 7 to 10, Netanyahu presents two opposing visions for the future of the world: a "bright future of blessing" or a "dark age of curse". Paragraphs 11-14 express a resolute commitment to eliminating the presence of Hamas in Gaza. Paragraphs 15-17 outline Netanyahu's determination to fully defeat Hezbollah. In paragraphs 18 and 19, he discusses Israel's efforts to restore peace in the region and globally. Paragraphs 20-23 focus on the "moral confusion" and discriminatory criticism Israel faces from the international community. From paragraphs 24 to 27, Netanyahu delivers a direct critique of the United Nations, accusing it of systemic bias and unfair treatment of Israel. The last two paragraphs conclude the speech with a reaffirmation of Israel's inevitable victory and the enduring spirit of the Israeli nation.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Lexical Devices

#### 4.1.1. Repetition

Netanyahu makes use of repetition as a powerful tool to enhance and imprint the concise message into the audience's perception. This is grounded in the comprehensive benefit of repetition, as repetitious expression provides "semantically less dense discourse" (Tannen, 2007, p. 59), allowing the hearer to receive less new information at roughly the rate the speaker is producing it. Moreover, by repeating the same messages multiple times, the speaker can easily persuade the listener to believe in what he said, thanks to "a character of familiarity" (Ibid., p. 62) provided to the talk by repetition, which then makes the discourse sound right.

Some of the highlighted repetitive phrases are extracted and analyzed as follows:

At the beginning of the speech, when mentioning the reason for his presence at the UNGA, he repeatedly uses structures "S + V-ed<sub>1</sub> + to do" and "to do + for":

*I decided to come here this year and set the record straight. I decided to come here to speak for my people, to speak for my country, to speak for the truth. And here's the truth [...]* (para. 1, sentence 3-5)

The deliberate repetition of the action's agency, "I decided to come here," demonstrates the activeness of the speaker, as addressing the UNGA is solely his responsibility to respond to the perceived misinformation his country is facing. The parallelism "to speak for" repeated 3 times underscores Netanyahu's priorities and values that he wants to preserve by delivering the speech. This triadic structure is a classic rhetorical device and an ideal number of times for repetition, making the message more memorable and resonant (Beard, 2000).

However, not all of Netanyahu's words and phrases are limited to the ideal 3 times of repetition; some words are excessively repeated to leverage the influence upon the audience. Let us have a look at the following excerpt:

Thousands of Iranian-backed Hamas terrorists from Gaza burst into Israel in pickup trucks and on motorcycles, and they committed unimaginable atrocities. They savagely murdered 1,200 people. They raped and mutilated women. They beheaded men. They burned babies alive. They burned entire families alive—babies, children, parents, grandparents, in scenes reminiscent of the Nazi Holocaust. (para. 3, sentence 3-8)

The personal pronoun "they" is repeated 6 times in every sentence, emphasizing the agency of the terror actions. Coupled with horrific imagery such as "burned babies alive", "raped and mutilated women", it amplifies the horror of the actions attributed to the terror group and appeal the audience to accept the necessity of a strong retaliatory stance.

Rhetorical questions are also repeated consecutively, as can be seen in this excerpt:

And now I have a question, and I pose that question to you: What choice will you make? Will your nation stand with Israel? Will you stand with democracy and peace? Or will you stand with Iran, a brutal dictatorship that subjugates its own people and exports terrorism across the globe? (para. 20, sentence 5-9)

This deliberate repetition of the “will + S” structure is utilized to create rhythm, add emphasis, and engage the audience in the speech. By asking the same question with slightly different variations, the speaker builds pressure on the international audience to respond affirmatively to the preferred side.

#### **4.1.2. Metaphors**

The use of metaphors in political context frequently caters for ideological purposes, because they “activate unconscious emotional associations and thereby contribute to myth creation” (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 28), that is, politicians use metaphors to tell the right story. To further explain this statement, Charteris-Black points out that the main function of metaphor usage in political rhetoric is “to frame our view of political issues by eliminating alternative points of view” (Ibid., p. 32). This statement explains the frequent use of metaphors by politicians to construct positive self-representation and negative presentation of their political opponents attacking their ideas. This benefit of metaphors is also taken advantage by Netanyahu in his speech, as he incorporates metaphorical expressions to reinforce the consistent stance of Israel on the current issue and efficiently constructs the identity of its opposing forces.

Discussing Israel’s defense, Netanyahu invokes the metaphor of “lambs led to the slaughter” (para. 6, sentence 8) to imply that his country is wrongly accused of genocide and reject any idea that Israel is passively awaiting its demise. The rejection of the metaphor vividly portrays Israel as an active defender.

In the sentence “Hezbollah turned vibrant towns in the north of Israel into ghost towns” (para. 15, sentence 8), Netanyahu uses the metaphor of “ghost towns” to describe towns in Israel that have been evacuated due to Hezbollah’s attacks. The image of lifeless places is vividly portrayed through this use of metaphors, illustrating the grave consequences of Hezbollah’s aggression.

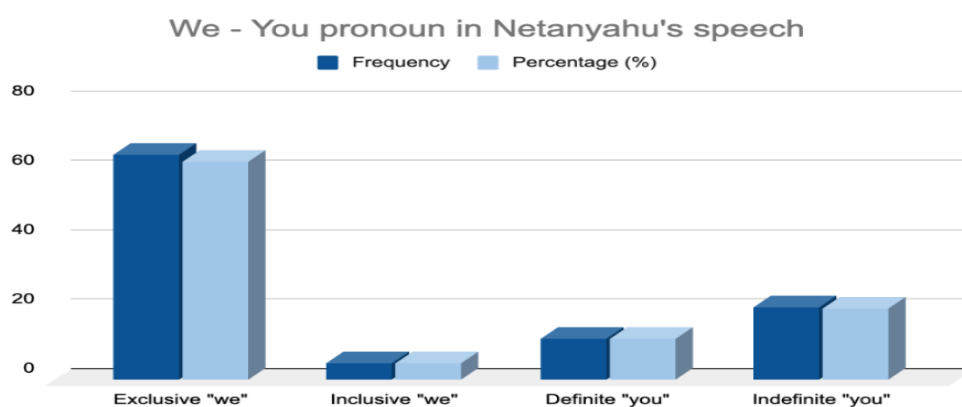
The metaphor “house of darkness” (para. 25, sentence 3) is also applied to discreetly showcase Israel’s frustration against the discriminatory nature of the UN’s function. The image conjures the idea of a corrupt, morally blind institution. This metaphor paints the UN as a place where the truth is hidden, particularly when it comes to Israel’s right to defend itself.

Netanyahu also urges his audience, especially those supporting resolutions to expel Israel or criticize its actions, to “check your fanaticism at the door” (para. 24, sentence 19&20). This metaphor, repeated twice in the same paragraph, implies that any ideological biases or extreme positions should be discarded in the pursuit of fair and reasonable discussions. It conveys that irrationality, or “fanaticism,” is an obstacle to constructive dialogue.

### **4.2. Grammatical Devices**

#### **4.2.1. We - You Pronoun**

In Netanyahu’s speech, “we” is the predominantly used pronoun compared to the occurrence of “you”, including both types of inclusive “we” and exclusive “we”.

**Figure 2***We - You Pronoun in Netanyahu's Speech to the 2024 UN General Assembly*

As defined by Fairclough (2001), “inclusive we” refers to the reader as well as writer, while exclusive “we” refers to the writer (or speaker) plus one or more others, but does not include the addressee(s).

The inclusive “we” appears less frequently than its contrasting group with only 5 times of occurrence, yet its effect of constructing solidarity and unity between the speaker and his large audience is still noticeable in the following example:

And I call on the Security Council to snap back UN Security Council sanctions against Iran because we must all do everything in our power to ensure that Iran never gets nuclear weapons. (para. 9, sentence 5)

For the sake of the peace and security of all your countries. For the sake of the peace and security of the entire world, we must not let that happen. (Ibid. sentence 10&11)

The pronoun “we” is used inclusively in mobilizing joint actions from the international community to downgrade the illegal power of Iran. It helps to create a relational significance between the speaker and the listeners. Furthermore, the low percentage of inclusive “we” also suggests that the speaker chooses to focus on leading rather than directly uniting with the audience.

In contrast, the exclusive “we” presents on the high level of frequency with 65 times of occurrence, accounting for about 63%. In this sense, “we” is exclusively used to refer to a collective that excludes those addressed, as can be seen in the following sentences:

We will not accept a terror army perched on our northern border, able to perpetrate another October 7th-style massacre. (para. 15, sentence 17)

Yes, we’re defending ourselves, but we’re also defending you against a common enemy that, through violence and terror, seeks to destroy our way of life. (para. 21, sentence 3)

We are ready to work with regional and other partners to support a local civilian administration in Gaza, committed to peaceful coexistence. (para. 13, sentence 9)

The exclusive “we” is used to indicate Israel’s actions and stance only, separating itself from other nations and their big audiences presented in the UNGA. The high percentage of exclusive “we” further suggests the speaker aims to project himself as part of an authoritative group responsible for decision-making and action.

Apart from the pronoun “we”, Netanyahu’s speech also leverages the use of the pronoun “you” to intensify its effect on the audience. “You” in common sense is known as the definite

pronoun; however, there are some cases in which “you” is regarded as the indefinite pronoun to generalize the subjects of the message:

Those of you who stand with these war criminals, those of you who stand with evil against good, with the curse against the blessing, those of you who do so should be ashamed of yourselves. (para. 27, sentence 6)

Thankfully, we achieved the release of his mother, Yocheved, but his father, Oded, is still languishing in the underground terrorist hell of Hamas. I again promise you, we will return your loved ones home. (para. 4, sentence 10&11)

The agent that the definite pronoun “you” refers to varies throughout the text, from individuals or nations that are tolerant of the massacre in Gaza (example 1) to an innocent Israeli victim in the attack (example 2). Overall, the use of “you” as a definite pronoun reflects an attempt to directly engage the audience, making the speech feel more personal and relevant.

Meanwhile, the use of “you” as an indefinite pronoun is preferred in this speech due to its frequent occurrence of 21 times (about 20%). The typical example of it is listed below:

And now I have a question, and I pose that question to you: What choice will you make? Will your nation stand with Israel? Will you stand with democracy and peace? Or will you stand with Iran, a brutal dictatorship that subjugates its own people and exports terrorism across the globe? (para. 20, sentence 5-8)

The pronoun “you” does not necessarily target any specific individuals or forces; instead, it refers to a general or more hypothetical person. The use of “you” in this case intends to claim the solidarity and unity between the audience, allowing the speaker to pass off his practices and perceptions to the mass listeners.

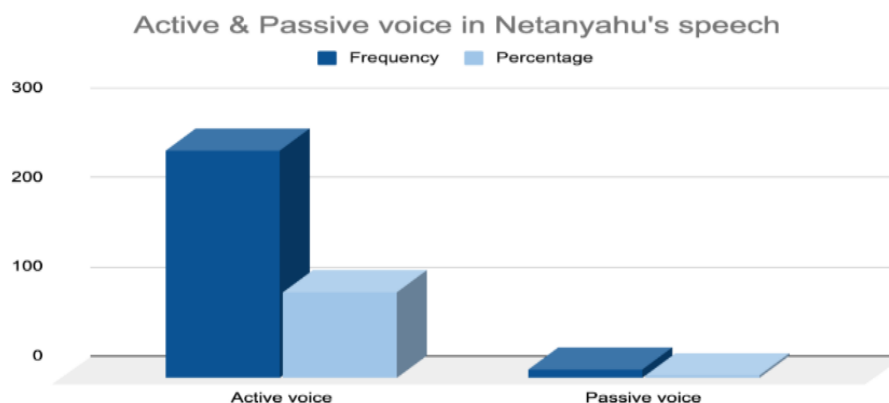
In general, the interplay between “we” and “you” pronouns reflects a dynamic where the speaker’s group takes responsibility (exclusive “we”), while the audience is engaged either hypothetically (indefinite “you”) or directly (definite “you”) to provoke thought, emotion, or action.

#### 4.2.2. Active & Passive Voice

In Netanyahu’s speech, the active voice is predominantly used, explicitly expressing ideas of the speaker on Israel’s stance on the conflict while reinforcing a strong statement of his country in self-defense. The application of active and passive voice is quantified in the following graph.

**Figure 3**

*Active & Passive Voice in Netanyahu’s Speech to the 2024 UN General Assembly*



Active voice in Netanyahu's speech occurs 255 times, accounting for approximately 96% of all sentences. The major agent of these active sentences is Israel, revolving around three main topics: (1) The legitimization of Israel's retaliation; (2) The sturdy determination of Israel's self-defense; and (3) Israel's efforts and achievements in making regional and international peace.

Regarding the first topic, some of the highlighted active sentences in the speech are represented as follows:

Yet we face savage enemies who seek our annihilation, and we must defend ourselves against them. (para. 1, sentence 9)

I have a message for the tyrants of Tehran: If you strike us, we will strike you. (para. 6, sentence 4)

We see this moral confusion when Israel is falsely accused of genocide when we defend ourselves against enemies who try to commit genocide against us. (para. 22, sentence 2)

By using active sentences in pronouncing the legitimacy of self-defense, Netanyahu emphasizes the unwavering determination of Israel that it will never compromise with the external threat. The sturdy statement expressed via the usage of active voice aligns with Fairclough's (2001) conclusion that a narrative of control and decisiveness is constructed by the political actors using active voice.

Netanyahu also showcases his national resistance while undergoing external threats via active sentences:

I want to assure you, we will not rest until the remaining hostages are brought home too [...] (para. 3, sentence 11)

I again promise you, we will return your loved ones home. We will not spare that effort until this holy mission is accomplished. (para. 4, sentence 11&12)

There is no place—there is no place in Iran—that the long arm of Israel cannot reach. (para. 6, sentence 6)

Far from being lambs led to the slaughter, Israel's soldiers have fought back with incredible courage and with heroic sacrifice. (para. 6, sentence 8)

Active voice in those cases makes the statement sturdier, putting stress on Israel's resilience and willingness to preserve its own interests.

In the third topic group, active voice continues to efficiently pronounce Israel's efforts and achievements in making regional and international peace. Some notable active sentences include:

We're building a partnership for peace with our Arab neighbors while fighting the forces of terror that threaten that peace. (para. 10, sentence 7)

We are ready to work with regional and other partners to support a local civilian administration in Gaza, committed to peaceful coexistence. (para. 13, sentence 9)

We seek to move forward to a bright age of prosperity and peace. (para. 20, sentence 2)

The active voice portrays Israel as a determined actor, not waiting for peace to be handed to them but actively pursuing it. By highlighting the actions of a series of agents, active sentences emphasize Israel's role in projecting power to maintain peace and stability.

Meanwhile, the occurrence of passive voice sentences in Netanyahu's speech is much less frequent, yet still indispensable in reflecting the ideological intention of the Israeli leader. Notable passive sentences are listed as follows:

Koby Samerano, whose son Jonathan was murdered, and his corpse was taken into the dungeons, into the terror tunnels of Gaza—a corpse held hostage. (para. 4, sentence 4)

And with us too is Yizhar Lifshitz from Kibbutz Nir Oz, a kibbutz that was wiped out by the terrorists. (Ibid. sentence 9)

The main subjects in these passive sentences are mostly innocent Israeli civilians who overcome horrific attacks by terrorist groups. This emphasizes the powerlessness of Israel's victims, along with the trauma that they have to suffer from. The use of passive voice with civilians as the main actor allows the speaker to disempower the actor, showing their inferior position within the context of conflict.

## 5. Discussions

### 5.1. Interpretation of Situational Context

The first question to unveil situational context, "What's going on?" is divided into three main aspects: *activity*, *topic*, and *purpose*. The activity type of Netanyahu's speech is regarded as an international diplomatic address to the global body. In Netanyahu's speech, the major topic is determined as Israel's security and moral justification in the war against terrorism. Via this speech, three main objectives were accomplished by the speaker are: (1) To elicit global condemnation against Israel, (2) To garner sympathy and support for Israel's security concerns, and (3) To legitimize actions of Israel as righteous defense of national security.

The question "Who's involved" intends to specify how positions of subjects are set up, which vary according to different situations (Fairclough, 2001). In this case, the role of speaker is assigned to Netanyahu. The representatives of different nations who are directly present in the UNGA hall are the immediate addressees of the speech. Besides them, there are members of the wider audience that the speech targets, comprising: (i) The Israeli public, (ii) Mass media organizations, (iii) Global leaders, (iv) International public.

The question "In what relations?" specifically revolves around the power relationship and social distance between communication's subjects. Under the formal setting of the UNGA, an asymmetrical power relation emerges between participants. The speaker's power is primarily one of influence rather than direct control, while the power of the addressees, UNGA members, is one of influence and control, because they can pass resolutions.

The question "What's the role of language?" stems from Fairclough's (2001) argument that language is instrumentally employed as a part of a broader institutional and bureaucratic objective. In his speech, Netanyahu uses language as a powerful tool to accomplish a wide range of political objectives. Formal and carefully crafted language is used to defend Israel's military actions, project a peaceful image, and address global criticism. The spoken format of the speech further enhances his message through tone, emphasis, and delivery.

### 5.2. Ideologies Embedded in Netanyahu's Speech

In his speech, Netanyahu skillfully integrates multiple ideological threads to construct a persuasive narrative that legitimizes Israel's actions, delegitimizes its adversaries, and appeals to both domestic and international audiences.

Central to his rhetoric is Zionism, an ideology affirming the Jewish people's right to self-determination in their historical homeland. By referencing the "Promised Land," Jerusalem as Israel's "eternal capital," and biblical figures such as King Solomon and Moses, Netanyahu invokes deep historical and religious narratives that reinforce Israel's legitimacy and cast its survival as a continuation of a centuries-long struggle.

Simultaneously, the speaker draws heavily on the anti-terrorism discourse, vividly

portraying Hamas and Hezbollah as savage threats to civilization, thereby justifying Israel's military operations as morally imperative and aligned with global efforts to combat terrorism. His speech is also shaped by an "Us vs. Them" binary that simplifies the region's complexities into a moral dichotomy: Israel and its Arab peace partners represent a "blessing", while Iran and its proxies embody a "curse". This framework not only mobilizes support but also reinforces Israel's identity as a righteous, embattled democracy.

"Peace through strength" is the ideology usually used by former US President Ronald Reagan. It posits that military strength and deterrence are essential for achieving and maintaining peace, that weakness invites aggression, while strength discourages it. The emphasis on military capability, technological innovation, and strategic alliances with Arab states under the banner of normalization further reflects this theory. Netanyahu argues that Israel must defeat Hamas and Hezbollah to achieve lasting peace and that it must deter Iran from developing nuclear weapons. This justifies Israel's military actions and its insistence on maintaining a strong military.

### ***5.3. Representation of the Conflict***

For Netanyahu, the war in the Gaza Strip is not a campaign of genocide aimed at oppressing the Palestinian people or invading Palestinian territory, as criticized by the international community. Instead, he frames it as a just war between Israel and terrorist forces, fought to protect innocent civilians in Gaza in particular, and humanity at large from the threat of terrorism. Throughout his speech, Netanyahu consistently shapes the image of the conflict by emphasizing its key characteristics: legitimate self-defense, the protection of the Israeli people, and the safeguarding of human civilization against the threats posed by terrorism and nuclear weapons. By reframing the nature of the war as a noble and humanitarian act of self-defense, the Israeli leader seeks to completely dismiss accusations of war crimes in Gaza, while simultaneously reshaping international perceptions of Israel.

The primary perpetrators responsible for the war in the Gaza Strip in Netanyahu's speech are identified as the terrorist organizations, including Hamas and Hezbollah, along with Iran, a state actor accused of providing financial and military support to these groups, and Iran's broader network of allies. Among them, Iran is portrayed as Israel's greatest adversary, accused of pursuing nuclear weapons development and backing armed groups to destabilize the region and threaten Israeli security. Notably, Palestine as a political entity is largely absent from Netanyahu's discussion of the Gaza conflict. This omission forms part of Netanyahu's broader strategy to reframe the war as a fight against terrorism, thereby deflecting international criticism of Israel's military operations and their underlying motivations.

When addressing the victims of the war, Netanyahu clearly identifies two primary groups: the Israeli people and the global community. Israel, as constructed in Netanyahu's narrative, is portrayed as an unwilling victim, dragged into a conflict with terrorist organizations, and left with no alternative but to act in defense of its legitimate national interests and the safety of its citizens. Netanyahu also emphasizes the long history of suffering endured by the Jewish people, who were massacred and forcibly displaced from the Holy Land throughout history. Against this backdrop of historical trauma, the value of national independence is portrayed as profoundly precious, making the fight to defend that independence both necessary and justified. In addition, Netanyahu emphasizes that terrorist forces and Iran pose not only a direct threat to Israel but also a broader danger to global peace, particularly for countries in the Middle East. In other words, he frames all people worldwide as potential victims of the enemies of Israel. By constructing the image of Israel as a peace-loving nation

forced into war, Netanyahu seeks to persuade the international community to view Israel as a defender of justice, acting not merely in self-interest but on behalf of global security, even in the face of what he portrays as unfair international criticism.

#### **5.4. The Position of the Speech**

At the *situational level*, Netanyahu's 2024 speech at the UN General Assembly functions not merely as a description of events but as a deliberate act of performance and persuasion. It is a strategic intervention aimed at shaping how the world understands the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and broader Middle Eastern tensions. By setting the terms of the debate, shaping public perception, and pressuring international actors to align with Israel's perspective, Netanyahu's speech acts as a forceful attempt to influence global responses and assert Israel's agency on the world stage.

At the *institutional level*, Netanyahu's speech is a strategic effort to navigate the UN as a powerful but politically complex system. While this organization may present itself as a neutral international body, it is shaped by its own rules, norms, and political dynamics. Netanyahu aims not only to defend Israel against frequent criticism but also to influence how the institution responds to key issues, particularly concerning Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At the *societal level*, Netanyahu's speech acts as a powerful intervention in the broader struggle over narratives and influence in the Middle East and beyond. His goal is to strengthen Israel's position not only within the region but also on the global stage. His contrasting framing of Israel and its rival forces is not only aimed at diplomats and political leaders but also at the global public, with the intention of shaping how people around the world understand and judge the conflict. In this way, the speech becomes part of a wider ideological struggle, an attempt to win the battle of ideas by promoting a worldview in which Israel is seen as a responsible, moral actor defending itself against terrorism and hostility.

### **6. Conclusion**

#### **6.1. Summary of Major Findings**

Regarding the first question posited to investigate lexico-grammatical devices employed by Netanyahu in his UN speech, four main devices are concerned: repetition, metaphor, we - you pronoun, and active & passive voice. While repetition fosters a sense of urgency and persuasiveness in Netanyahu's rationale, metaphors serve as a powerful linguistic device to frame complex political and moral issues in vivid, relatable imagery. Furthermore, the contrast between active and passive voice, as well as the frequency of "we" and "you" pronouns, intensifies the disparity in the speaker's portrayal of "self" and "other", positioning Israel as a morally dominant country.

In the second question, the ideologies and intentions of the speaker are discovered based on the physical cues of the text. Accordingly, Netanyahu aims to accomplish three main objectives via the speech: (1) Successfully refuting international criticism regarding the conflict in the Gaza Strip; (2) Mobilizing international support for Israel's military operations in Gaza; and (3) Advancing Israel's vision of establishing a peaceful and stable "New Middle East."

The study has so far revealed that Netanyahu effectively uses lexical elements alongside grammatical features. The analysis of these linguistic strategies highlights Israeli Prime Minister's success in achieving all three main objectives, hence shaping the target audience's perceptions of the on-going conflict in Gaza in favor of his country and nation.

## 6.2. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can expand beyond the analysis of a single political leader's speeches to include comparative studies across multiple leaders, political contexts, and countries. This will provide a broader understanding of how different political figures use language to construct power, influence international relations, and address their domestic audiences. Moreover, future studies will benefit from a multimodal approach to analyzing political speeches, including examining not only the linguistic content but also the delivery style, non-verbal cues (such as gestures, body language, facial expressions), and other visual elements used in speeches. Eventually, to ensure greater objectivity, future research may incorporate additional quantitative methods with the support of corpus-based tools. Hopefully, this will enrich the database and offer a more robust foundation for analysis.

## 6.3. Suggestions for Adopting Attitudes Towards Political Discourse

Henry and Tator (2002) emphasize that people should never read or hear others' words without being conscious of their underlying meaning. In the same vein, but putting it differently, Fiske (1994) states that human words are never neutral. Depending on their ideologies, political intentions, and beliefs, discourse is made to influence and shape the target audience's perceptions the way the speaker or writer desires. Clearly, leaders' and statesmen's discourse is strongly politicized, and it is important that readers recognize, comprehend, and judge the intended or implied messages of the discourse and take up their own stance towards the issues.

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## APPENDIX 1

### *Full Text of Benjamin Netanyahu's 2024 UN Speech*

*(Addressed on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024)*

A QR code has been generated to access APPENDIX 1 of this study  
Please scan to download the entire PDF version of the speech



## **APPENDIX 2**

### *Quantitative Data for the Textual Analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu's UN Speech*

A QR code has been generated to access APPENDIX 2 of this study

Please scan to access the database of the speech

