



RESEARCH ARTICLE

War, Words, and the Oval Office: A CDA of Strategic Language Use in High-Stakes Political Conflict

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ABSTRACT

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This study conducted political discourse analysis of exchange between U.S. President Donald Trump, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. Vice President JD Vance on Friday, 28 January; 2025 at Oval Office. The purpose was to highlight how discourse works to establish power relations, captured narrative of the war, diplomacy, and moral authority framing in the Ukrainian Russian war context. The study was grounded on Chilton's (1996) Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) of War with an emphasis on three main constituent: deictic framing, metaphors of war and peace, and security framing with moral evaluation. The data was collected from publically available addressed <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/read-full-transcript-of-heated-exchange-between-trump-zelenskyy-vance-at-oval-office/3496679> in the full transcript of the finalized version, which Anadolu Agency published on Friday, 28 January; 2025. Data analysis was analyzed on a multi-step approach through Chilton's framework. The results of the study showed that Trump and Vance employed deictic and metaphorical structures to give the additional force of American superiority, delegitimize Zelenskyy's moral appeals, and portray Ukraine as dependent country. Zelenskyy's discourse presented Ukrainian agency, resilience and moral legitimacy. This analysis displayed how the language was used to invent political measures, shape relations, and impact perceptions. This study contributes to the critical discourse analysis, and political communication analysis of how language implements processes of ideological negotiation, international diplomacy, and symbolic power.

INTRODUCTION

Language is not being only a means of communication in the international politics but a script to articulate ideology, an instrument to define national identity and to legitimize war or peace (Fairclough, 1995; Chilton, 2004). Political leaders during the times of geopolitical tension choose carefully the rhetoric for framing of military action, positioning allies and adversaries with a view to win over public opinion. The 2025, Oval Office exchange between U.S. President Donald Trump, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and U.S. Vice President JD Vance is a valuable discursive site for understanding how language works at work in war, negotiation, and power.

It is evident that CDA is now a leading way of understanding political speech ideologies and power dynamics. As per scholar like Van Dijk (1995), Fairclough (1992), the texts that are the result of a political process and consequence must be analyzed in terms of not only the linguistic features but also sociopolitical ones. Based on this, this study deploys a specific tradition of political discourse analysis of War by Chilton (2004) who focuses on the use of language in the strategic territorial boundaries (e.g. use us vs. them), metaphors (e.g. war as a game), a framing of threats to national or global security.

During times of war, discourse has been used to make violence seem normal, to apportion blame and to lay claim to moral authority (Lakoff, 2003). For instance, calling a ceasefire a “bad deal”, or delivering the kind of emotional rhetoric that charges a political leader with “gambling with World War III,” is a lot more than just emotional rhetoric. It aims to redefine how conflict is seen and, through that, how it’s conducted. In Trump’s and Zelenskyy’s linguistic confrontations in such an arena, where competing narratives of sovereign gratitude and global responsibility found themselves, there was a resonating beyond the room and to global public discourse.

The current study analyzes how strategic language use deals with representation of war, diplomacy and political authority in the context of this televised political encounter. Through an analysis of deixis and metaphors as well as moral evaluation in this exchange the work seeks to identify the power structures underlying war time political rhetoric.

Significance of the Study

This study has a great value for understanding political language in shaping the public’s perception and possible policy narratives in international conflicts. The research critically examines how strategic use of language in the 2025 Oval Office exchange between Trump, Zelenskyy, and Vance structures war, responsibility, and diplomacy. This study injects the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by offering views on what a language is used as an ideological negotiating and a power displaying medium in an era of political communication that is increasingly mediatized and emotionally charged. In addition, the study builds on Chilton’s Political Discourse Analysis of War in order to strengthen our knowledge of the deictic framing, war metaphors and security rhetoric at work in high stakes political dialogue. In particular, it is a tool to assist scholars, and journalists in understanding to what extent political language influences issues pertaining to global peace, alliances, and morality in wartime diplomacy.

Statement of the Problem

The role of political discourse in modern geopolitical fights consists firstly in the building of international narratives, a justification of state actions and a moral and ideological position. Despite this, the strategic use of language in high stakes interactions (e.g., the 2025 Oval Office interaction between Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and JD Vance) has not been sufficiently examined with Critical Discourse Analysis with respect to the main frames of it (Chilton, 1996; Blum, 2018), particularly Political Discourse Analysis of War (Chilton, 2009). There is a gap in research that limits our knowledge of how political actors linguistically frame war, diplomacy, blame and national identity during live unscripted confrontation. Although an examination of metaphors, deictic structures, and security framings is not required for understanding arguments of state authority and dissent, it is nonetheless required for an understanding of the subtle, powerful ways that language legitimizes authority, marginalizes dissent, and directs both public opinion and foreign policy. This gap seeks to address prominent political encounter and kind of interaction in general. More broadly, this ‘speech’ itself fails to live up its potential to have any clear actionable ethical effect on its constituted commodity.

Research Questions

What metaphorical structures are employed by each speaker to frame war, peace, and diplomacy, and how do these metaphors reflect conflicting ideological positions?

In what ways is the language of security and moral evaluation used to legitimize or delegitimize political actions, alliances, and emotional appeals in the Oval Office exchange?

How do Trump, Zelenskyy, and Vance use deictic framing to position themselves and others in relation to power, responsibility, and moral authority during discourse on the Ukraine conflict?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis has investigated uses of language in political discourse and the conflicts of high stakes. This literature review examines key studies analyzing what political leaders say and entail; specifically in the case of: U.S. President Donald Trump, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and U.S. Vice President JD Vance. Language in political discourse does not relate only to communication, but can be used as a very effective instrument for the construction of ideologies, the

legitimizing of war, and the construction of authority (Fairclough, 1992; 2013; Van Dijk, 1995). At such times, such conflict is negotiated through discourse as a site of strategic negotiation of discourses of diplomacy, aggression, and national identity. Critical discursive analysis (CDA) has widely been regarded as a suitable approach to rhetorical studies on the relations and nature of power and texts in the context of political communication.

Theoretical Framework

Chilton's model of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), and especially his writings on the discourse and politics of war, seeks to answer how political leaders linguistic strategies are used in the discourse and politics of crisis and war. According to Chilton (2004), the political discourse is not just the mirror of political events but it is the political tool, which shapes ideologies, justifies actions and constitutes perceived realities in the wartime scenarios.

Deictic Space and Spatial Framing

Deictic space is one of the most important concepts in Chilton's framework based on spatial and personal deixis to establish social relations and power hierarchies. All those terms like "we," "they," "here," "there," help to place actors therefore in the ideological and moral spaces. Deictic expressions in turn are used to construct in group vs. out group dynamics and mark who is our ally, enemy, victim or aggressor. These distinctions also often feature on wartime discourse in terms of national identity, morality and strategies (Chilton, 2004). Thus, for example, in the political exchange under investigation, utterances like "He killed our people" or "You don't have the cards" send quite strong ideological boundaries and indicate the location of the speaker in the wider geopolitical conflict.

Metaphors of War and Peace

According to Chilton metaphor is used as a vehicle for cognition. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory is used by Chilton (2004) in drawing upon the metaphor of 'playing cards', 'gambling', or 'ceasefire' etc. Political actors conceive of and talk about war and diplomacy. All of this is not neutral; these metaphors make war either a game of strategy, a moral crusade, or an unfortunate necessity, depending on what a speaker wants to argue. In the case of the Trump/Zelenskyy/Vance exchange, metaphors like "you are the one playing with the World War III," or "you do not have the cards" simplify a complex conflict into a game like logic which could see the moral stakes of Ukraine's resistance delegitimized and U.S. dominance reinforced.

Security Framing and Moral Evaluation

The third analytical lens from Chilton's model is to build security threats and moral hierarchies. In reality, the terms protectors and violators, along with the associated threats to peace, sovereignty, or humanity, are intrinsic components of definitions of political discourse. It makes it possible for political leaders to claim that military and diplomatic interventions are necessary acts of defense or rescue (Chilton & Schaffner, 1997). Chilton's PDA provides a multi-layered interpretation of this high stakes interaction and its underlying ideological structures and their power relations, it can be interpreted as a particularly rich case study for accounting for the strategic use of language in political speech.

Previous Studies

There has been a great deal of literature on the type of rhetorical strategies that are used by political personalities like Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. Prafitri and Nasir (2023) recognized that Trump uses such rhetorical strategies as repetition, emotional appeal, and direct address to build solidarity with viewers, and make a populist savior that justifies everything. Likewise, Mohammadi and Javadi (2017) described how Trump strategically employed personal pronouns and emotive language in 2016 campaign to position himself as someone who will protect American values. Tian (2021) also details an analysis of Trump's televised speeches that further explores the ways authority and blame is expressed through modality, transitivity and pronominal shifts within the Fairclough's model of CDA.

This study's theoretical core is based on Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) of War, which uses the three elements of deictic space, metaphors of war and peace, and the security framing (Chilton, 2004, Chilton & Schäffner, 2011). Chilton maintains that deixis ('we', 'they', 'here', 'there'),

metaphors and security rhetoric are used by political actors to define ideological boundaries, to shape cognitive perceptions of conflict and to construct moral evaluations of threats and allies. Lakoff's (1992, 2012) work on metaphor and war, that is, metaphors like "surgical strikes" or "collateral damage," shows how metaphors of this type parse out the violence of war and make its collateral effects appear to simply be a matter of fact in this way. Historical and recent work on the use of metaphors and framing devices in war time speech has been conducted. In Alina-Elena's (2024) analysis, how leaders in famous war-time speeches use metaphors and emotional appeal to persuade resistance, or to justify a war. For instance, as Sharififar and Rahimi (2015) showed, Obama and Rouhani similarly used discursive strategies at the UN in order to engage discourses of peace and resistance on the global scene.

In this vein, Win (2025) performed a CDA using a multi method approach to the U.S.–Ukraine encounter referred to as the Oval Office Trump-Zelenskyy–Vance encounter. The results of this study showed that the exchange of gratitude, dependency, and moral authority was mediated by the form of the linguistic exchange itself. Both 'You don't have the cards,' and 'you should be thankful' delegitimized Ukrainian autonomy while it elevated American benevolence for Trump to repeat. CDA has also been directed to Putin's political rhetoric. In a 2018 speech, Puspita et al. (2022) analyzed how Putin used his nationalistic framing and claim of the need to handle historical grievances, to justify his military posturing. These are lines along the same lines which Trump and Vance use to describe U.S. support, as a support which has nothing to do with the sentiment of solidarity but is rather a transactional exchange to be explicitly returned.

Studies has determined that the way in which the speech is formulated and framed is also part of the way political discourse is constructed. In President Trump's inaugural speech, according to Khan et al. (2019), the use of linguistic connectors like reference, substitution and lexical cohesion are purposefully used to create cohesive unity in political narratives, to empower authority and to appeal to the national identity. In other words, what their analysis shows is that political discourse cohesion is a means of a deeper rhetorical end, that is, it creates a unified and forceful picture of leadership. Ashraf et al. (2024) further complement this by utilizing Fairclough's (2003) three dimensional model to analyze the 2024 U. S. presidential debate, which shows how at the same time discourse is at work at the textual, discursive and social level to mirror and further the power ideologies. Most notably, their study focused on the fact that language in political debate is not without ideology and political actors use it as a means to negotiate dominance, legitimize actions and contest meaning. Together these studies offer a way forward for understanding the present analysis of Trump's Zelenskyy–Vance exchange, by showing the role cohesion and ideological framing play in deciding how to construct authority and fight the political struggle on a rhetorical battlefield.

The reviewed literature shows that the use of CDA in analyzing political leaders' strategic use of language in conflict is very significant. These studies lay the groundwork for mapping out how rhetorical techniques are implemented to reinforce the installation of power dynamics, give a reason for action and alter the public image in cases when politics are at stake. In general, the findings in the reviewed literature are conducive also to the analytical objectives of this study, especially in implementing Chilton's PDA model to an actual, very tense ongoing political feud. This framework allowed to analyze, systematically, how language work as a form of power, how it save ways in which it can help build perceptions of war, diplomacy and moral legitimacy.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, the qualitative research design has been used followed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In particular, the research was adapted Chilton's (2004) Political Discourse Analysis framework concentrating on War:

Deictic Space: It involves pronoun usage, and spatial references to identify in-group and out of group dynamics.

Metaphors of War and Peace: Finding metaphorical language that describes conflict and diplomacy concepts.

Security Framing and Moral Evaluation: It investigates how language does the notions of security threats and moral judgments.

Data Collection

The transcript of the February 28, 2025 Oval Office exchange between former U.S. President Donald Trump, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. Vice President JD Vance was the primary data source. This transcript appears in Turan, official website of Anadolu Agency (2025). This transcript was publically available.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was follows these steps.

Data Familiarization: For an in depth meaning of the content and the context, the transcript was read repeatedly.

Identification of Discursive Strategies: Deictic utterances, war and peace metaphors and security analogies were identified and underlined.

Application of Chilton's Framework: Linguistic features identified were analyzed with regard to Chilton's (2004) model to interpret the use of language to justify or oppose positions concerning war, aggression, and diplomacy.

Contextual Interpretation: The contextualization of findings are within a larger geopolitical context taking into account historical and political factors regarding the discourse.

Ethical Considerations

The study used publically available data so that such consent and confidentiality standards were upheld. All such analysis was done objectively and attempts were made to represent perspectives of all persons and subsisting individuals in the discourse.

Data Analysis

This section reviews in critical detail the language employed by Donald Trump, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and JD Vance in the 2025 Oval Office exchange and how discourse constructs the relationships of power, the moral authority, and ideological positioning regarding the Ukraine crisis. The data was blindly analyzed by means of three lenses: deictic framing, metaphorical structures and security framing with moral evaluation, guided by the framework of the Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) of War by Chilton. The selected excerpts found in the official transcript of the Presidential Scholarly Conference were used to illustrate how each speaker strategically used language to negotiate dominance, justify political actions, and manipulated perceptions of diplomacy and war.

Table 1. Deictic Framing

Speaker	Key Deictic Phrases	Positioning Strategy	Discursive Effect
Trump	"I'm aligned with the U.S.", "I'm aligned with the world"	Projects neutrality and universality; refuses to pick a side	Removes moral responsibility from the conflict; positions himself as a peace-seeker
Zelenskyy	"He killed our people", "we signed the ceasefire"	Constructs "us" (Ukraine) vs. "he" (Putin); emotional in-group solidarity	Highlights Ukraine's victimhood and betrayal by Russia; appeals to empathy and justice
Vance	"You guys", "your country", "this country"	Distances U.S. from Ukraine; asserts American authority	Minimizes Ukrainian input and moral claim; reinforces U.S. as rational actor in control

Findings are presented for the discourse of Trump, Zelenskyy, and Vance that demonstrate ways in which they position themselves into deictic frames tailored to resonate with their purposeful alignments to ideological spaces within the geopolitical conflict. Trump's clean references to being 'aligned with the U.S.' and 'the world' construct an image of him as a neutral, global peace seeker trying to avoid direct alignment with either Ukraine or Russia. Thus, with the deflection of moral responsibility, he deictically positions himself as rational and universal. While Zelenskyy, as is typical

for language, employs such emotionally charged pronouns as *our people*, *we*, versus *he* (Putin), this is one stark contrast that creates clear convoy for the victim and aggressor. By using this in-group/out group depiction, Zelenskyy draws on common human values and international empathy to highlight Ukrainian suffering and betrayal. Meanwhile, Vance's deictic '*you guys*' and '*your country*' as they maneuver deictically to distance the U.S. from Ukraine position the U.S. as a rational, authoritative observer and subtly undermine Zelenskyy's moral claims. Taken as a whole, these are all deictic choices that help mediate the use of language in a strategically political function to define and distribute roles, to allocate blame, and to legitimate claims of power.

Table 2. Metaphors of War and Peace

Speaker	Metaphorical Expressions	Underlying Conceptual Frame	Function in Discourse
Trump	"Playing cards", "gambling with WWII"	War as game of risk, diplomacy as interpersonal exchange	Shifts blame to Zelenskyy for escalating danger; reduces war to strategy and performance
Zelenskyy	"We signed a ceasefire", "He killed our people"	Peace as fragile legal order, war as betrayal and violence	Frames Russia as violator of peace; invokes legitimacy and broken promises
Vance	"Pathway of diplomacy", "pretending words matter"	Diplomacy as a road to peace; rhetorical performance vs. action	Elevates Trump's actions; undermines others' diplomacy as performative and ineffective

Trump, Zelenskyy and Vance's metaphors are powerful conceptual framing devices that provide conceptual framing tools on how to perceive and evaluate war and diplomacy in Oval Office exchange. Trump's allegories ('Playing cards,' 'gambled with World War III') treat the conflict as a strategic game, diplomacy as a transactional or interpersonal performance, and way of living it down on Zelenskyy for increasing the world at stake. This softens humanitarian cost and treats Trump as pragmatic dealmaker. On the other hand, Zelenskyy's (metaphorically speaking) 'we signed a ceasefire' and 'he killed our people' metaphors are legal and moral—where peace is the rare rule-bound agreement that can easily become a fragile one, and a war is violent, pitched, and betrayal. The framing paints Russia as a violator of the major norms of international law in an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the world and show how Ukraine deserves moral legitimacy. At the same time, Vance's language 'pathway of diplomacy' and 'pretending words matter' understand diplomacy, and the peace, in proverbial linear terms, then with action, but not empty words. The metaphor given here goes to present Trump's pragmatism as elevated and to devalue other diplomatic undertakings as either hollow or symbolic. Together, these metaphorical choices display strategic players' ways to frame politics as conflict in which conflict can be interpreted, linked to policy support, and assigned blame.

Table 3. Security Framing and Moral Evaluation

Speaker	Security/Moral Statements	Framing of Threat	Moral Evaluation
Trump	"You're gambling with WWII", "You're not in a good position"	Zelenskyy's decisions framed as risky and destabilizing	Suggests Ukraine is reckless and should be grateful, not confrontational
Zelenskyy	"He killed people", "He didn't exchange prisoners"	Russia framed as direct and violent aggressor	Russia is immoral and untrustworthy; appeals for global moral support
Vance	"You should be thanking the president", "Disrespectful to come to the Oval Office"	Ukraine framed as desperate and inappropriate	U.S. diplomacy is morally superior; Zelenskyy's confrontation is improper

Trump, Zelenskyy, and Vance's narrative of threat, responsibility and legitimacy are so sharply discordant, however, that their discourse draws effectively on security framing and moral evaluations. On the other hand, Trump's commentary, "You're gambling with WWII" and "You're not in a good position," have characterized Ukraine as a reckless victim of itself globally and have, in doing so, failed to concede it as a victim at all. In that latter rhetoric, moral responsibility is shifted from Russian aggression to Ukrainian persistence, and that for this U.S. support, gratitude, not confrontation, is what should be returning. Whereas Zelenskyy hinges his moral appeal on Russia's

violent actions, he invokes such evidence as “He killed people” and “He didn’t exchange prisoners” in order to paint Putin as a morally corrupt violator of peace deals. This framing is also to empower Ukraine to be the aggrieved party, to seek moral solidarity and international justice. Meanwhile, Vance picks up on a narrative of American superiority and authority, chastising Zelenskyy for being ‘disrespectful’ and that ‘he should be thanking the president.’ His way of framing, he makes Ukraine appear desperate, ungrateful, politically wrong, while portraying US diplomacy as benevolent and morally right. Together, these contrasting frames show how discourse is used to create competing international politics stories of which have power, who is at blame, and who should be supported.

Table 4. Deictic Framing

Speaker	Key Deictic Phrases	Positioning Strategy	Discursive Effect
Trump	“We gave you...”, “your country is in big trouble”, “you don’t have the cards”	Frames the U.S. (and himself) as the savior, Ukraine as dependent and powerless	Emphasizes asymmetrical power; reinforces obligation and hierarchy
Zelenskyy	“We are staying in our country... we are thankful”, “ask our people”	Positions Ukraine as resilient and independent, while still acknowledging help	Pushes back against dependency narrative; asserts national agency
Vance	“You went to Pennsylvania and campaigned for the opposition”, “you’re wrong”	Positions Zelenskyy as ungrateful and politically disruptive	Reinforces narrative of American superiority and Zelenskyy’s indebtedness

Table 4 shows the power signaling through deictic framing used by each speaker in relation to U.S.–Ukraine relations in order to affirm positional, moral, and political identity. Phrases such as “We gave you...”, “You don’t have all the cards” place the U.S., and by extension, himself, in the role of save and Ukraine as weak, in debt, and dependent. Its deictic structure helps to reify a power hierarchy in which it is Ukraine’s duty to have grateful faith; a debt that cannot reciprocate. On the other hand, in contrast, Zelenskyy regains agency with collective pronouns ‘we are staying in our country’ and ‘ask our people,’ presenting Ukraine as a strong and self-governing state in struggle against support. Subtly, he also rejects sameness and reasserts national dignity. However, Vance, as Slobodan notes, is particularly politicizing Zelenskyy’s actions by employing direct and accusatory deixis, including “you went to Pennsylvania” and “you’re wrong,” to demonstrate Zelenskyy as ungrateful and disruptive. As an image of American authority and conditional support, help is given only if in return there is appreciation. Taken together, the deictic choices point to how language is instituted to place the self and others relative to a form of moral and political hierarchy that has its own set of geopolitical tensions.

Table 5. Metaphors of War and Peace

Speaker	Metaphorical Expressions	Underlying Conceptual Frame	Function in Discourse
Trump	“You don’t have the cards”, “You’re buried there”, “bullets stop flying”	War as a strategic game, Ukraine as losing; ceasefire as relief	Reduces war to bargaining; delegitimizes Ukraine’s fight for sovereignty
Zelenskyy	“We’ve been alone... we are thankful”, “ask our people about ceasefire”	War as shared suffering; peace as collective will	Reframes war from a military game to a people-centered struggle
Vance	“Offer some words of appreciation... he’s trying to save your country”	Diplomacy as generosity and rescue	Frames the U.S. as a heroic benefactor; downplays Ukraine’s agency

Table 5 demonstrates how the metaphors of war and peace are utilized by each speaker with an aim to fabricate different narratives of the conflict and the roles of each party to it. Trump’s metaphors for war as a ‘strategic game’ in which, Ukraine is losing, and ceasefire is only ‘justice in a moment’, or another kind of escape, are metaphorical blinding war. By this metaphoric framing, it simplifies and

dispossesses the complexity and Ukrainian struggle sovereignty to that of tactical maneuvering, delegitimizing Zelenskyy's moral, political position. On the other hand, Zelenskyy brings a figurative frame shift by making war collective suffering and common peace as democratic choice, with phrases like ask our people about ceasefire. His metaphors serve to humanize the cost and agency of Ukrainians as opposed to the depersonalized strategic lens of Trump. Vance meanwhile refers to diplomacy as charity or salvation — 'he's trying to save your country.' The use of this metaphor situates the U.S. (and, specifically, Trump) as a wondrous, heroic benefactor, as well as a powerful but diminished actor, particularly in terms of Ukraine's autonomy or its ability to undertake strategic decisions. Taken as a whole, these metaphors show how language does not only describe war also, it defines who controls the story, to whom one owes their thank yous, and to whom the necessary justifications for certain actions belong.

Table 6. Security Framing and Moral Evaluation

Speaker	Security/Moral Statements	Framing of Threat	Moral Evaluation
Trump	"You're not winning... People are dying... You're running low on soldiers"	Ukraine's continued resistance is framed as futile and reckless	Suggests Ukraine must comply with U.S. direction for its own survival
Zelenskyy	"From the beginning of the war, we've been alone... we are thankful"	Ukraine as morally upright but abandoned	Seeks recognition without being subservient; appeals to fairness and dignity
Vance	"Try to litigate this in front of the American media... you're wrong"	Zelenskyy as misusing diplomatic space	Paints Zelenskyy's assertiveness as rude and inappropriate, undermining his credibility

Table 6 shows how each speaker uses security framing and moral evaluation of threat, responsibility and legitimacy in constructing different perspectives on threat, responsibility, and legitimacy in the conflict discourse. By repeatedly repeating Ukraine's losses, losing, saving lives, being low on soldiers, Trump subtly paints a picture of U.S. benefits of Ukraine losing as unavoidable, something necessary to instill in Ukraine, thus his framing of Ukraine as an inevitable losing war. Not only does he frame Ukraine's survival as depending on following U.S. advice during wartime, but he helps strengthen U.S. control over wartime strategy. But when Zelenskyy speaks his sentiments are about moral perseverance: "Since the very start of the war, we have been alone," as Ukraine is presented as a principled but unheeded nation grateful in the face of abandonment. In his framing, he seeks recognition and solidarity without being subservient, and it comes from a moral high ground based in resilience and dignity. On the other hand, Vance's charge that Zelenskyy is attempting to 'litigate up in front of the American press' portrays the Ukrainian leader as improperly commotion and overpowering, indecently. The purpose here is to delegitimize Zelenskyy's moral appeals and to rehabilitate American diplomatic balance. Looking at these moral evaluations together it exposes how the speakers use discourse to define who deserves sympathy and authority and what should political actors do with their actions during war time diplomacy.

DISCUSSION

Trump, Zelenskyy, and Vance utilize the deictic framing to rhetorically create a version of themselves and the other actors involved in the context of Ukraine conflict as part of strategic placement of each other and themselves according to how power and responsibility is distributed and how to exercise moral authority. With constant usage of deictic phrases like "We gave you...", "your country is in big trouble", and "you don't have the cards", Trump emphasizes the countering asymmetrical power relationship between the United States and Ukraine. They put the U.S. and himself, in this fashion, as the main beneficiary and rescuer, with Ukraine as powerless and indebted, furthering a narrative of obligation and superiority.

Zelenskyy is using inclusive and collective pronouns such as "we are staying in our country...we are thankful" and "ask our people" to reject the dependency narrative. It frames Ukraine as resilient, sovereign and morally grounded while acknowledging assistance to it as external. The inclusion of the collective 'we' through the use of national agency and moral legitimacy allows Zelenskyy to explicitly reassert the agency and moral legitimacy of the national project, hence, asserting Ukraine as a nation enduring hardship with dignity, but not as one completely reliant upon foreign support.

However, Vance chooses a more accusatory and distancing stance through deictic choices such as 'you went to Pennsylvania and campaigned for the opposition' and 'you're wrong'. Zelenskyy is described as politically provocative and impossibly ungrateful with these expressions which give American authority and diplomatic restraint a boost. His language codifies patron client relations in which Zelenskyy's assertiveness is reading as too far beyond diplomatic decorum. The deictic framing by all three speakers is a rhetorical tactic that is employed to negotiate power relations and to disperse and take on or deny moral authority in a high stakes geopolitical discourse.

By comparing each of the speakers Trump, Zelenskyy and Vance—each speaker has their own metaphorical structures which each provide his own idea of war, peace, and diplomacy and all of these different ideas from both the ideologics points of view of the speaker and the strategic world views. Trump is a prolific user of game based metaphors like, "you don't have the cards," "you're buried there," and gambling with World War Three. Immoral and humanitarian aspects of war and diplomacy are reduced in these metaphors based on the idea of war as a contest of strategy and diplomacy as a performance or negotiation. By supplying Ukraine's opposition with this characterization, Trump offers Ukraine harsh opposition to him as being emotionally driven and irrational and aligns himself with an ideology of transactional pragmatism rather than principled solidarity.

Whereas metaphorically, Zelenskyy speaks of war as a jointly borne national suffering and the language of peace is a collective will of the people. In real life, this consists of phrases like "otherwise, we were alone and we are grateful" and "ask our people about the ceasefire", which create a metaphorical point of reference in which Ukraine is not a player in a game of geopolitical interests, but a country suffering and fighting for its sovereignty with dignity. This ideological, or as it may be termed, ideogrammatic structure finds its ground in a metonymical structure (i.e. in honoring two other nations, which, also in turn, gave birth to democracy, etc.), given that the same is an ideological stance, influenced by democratic agency, national resilience and moral legitimacy, and strives to attract the world's moral sense of justice and empathy.

Meanwhile, Vance turns to such metaphors of charity and rescue as 'he's trying to save your country,' and 'to offer some words of appreciation.' These metaphors make of diplomacy a benign offering of the U.S. to Ukraine with it as a recipient of the American generosity. This ideological framing is the height of a hierarchical, paternalistic formulation that presents Ukrainian agency in a low light and raises the importance of U.S. intervention as well as its importance and morality.

To sum up, Trump's way of looking at war is a risk that may or may not come to fruition, Zelenskyy's way of thinking is that 'This is the people's struggle', and Vance's belief is that 'Diplomacy as an American altruism'. The metaphorical structures in these cases do not only form discussion over the conflict, but they capture far more ideological rifts concerning agency, responsibility and meaning of international support.

In the Ukraine conflict, Trump, Zelenskyy, and Vance strategically use the language of security and moral evaluation to legitimize or delegitimize political actions, alliances, and emotional appeals in order to reframe their actions as legit, their allies as trustworthy, or themselves as moral, and their opponents as illegitimate, treacherous, or immoral.

Donald Trump's language paints Ukraine's ongoing fight against the Russian army as strategically mistaken and morally turned out of place. Statements like "You're not winning... People are dying... In the 'You're running low on soldiers' narrative, Ukraine's defiance isn't heroic but futile and perilous. Here the security framing shows the situation as one of compliance with U.S. leadership, one where Ukraine will only avoid further disaster if she is led by America. Because his moral evaluation is that Ukraine should be "grateful", not confrontational, this delegitimises Zelenskyy's emotional appeals and reframes U.S. support as a transaction, not a moral alliance.

On the other hand, Zelenskyy does the same, employing morally grounded and emotionally charged language to portray Ukraine as a victim with a morally upright straight face. "He killed people"; "From the start of the war we have been alone... we are grateful." Construct Russia as the malignant force that engulfs Ukraine as an innocent survivor. Through his language he tries to secure the right of Ukraine to have its moral claim to continued support and treats emotional appeals as not a sign of weakness but as a response to the lived suffering.

Vance declares that Zelenskyy uses moral evaluation rhetorically against his political opponents, but his own tone and tactics overly blame directness, a tactic that is considered inappropriate and political. Vance accuses Zelenskyy of trying to litigate this in front of the American media and says the Ukrainian leader should 'thank the president.' In so doing, Vance portrays Zelenskyy as emotionally irrational, politically manipulative and disrespectful. It harms the credibility of Zelenskyy's appeals and legitimizes a more controlled, U.S.-oriented diplomacy.

The way security and moral judgment are expressed in this exchange marks out who has the right to speak, who is entitled to support, and whose action is morally justifiable. For Trump and Vance, this becomes a mechanism for reinforcing American dominance and conditional aid; for Zelenskyy, it is a means of playing on the lone and moral authority that comes with being a last human hope for Europe, while appealing to an ethical responsibility placed upon the global community.

Findings of the Study

The analysis in this study points out that the language in high-stakes political discourse is a powerful instrument to construct the power relations, denote the blame, as well as create the perception on war and diplomacy in the public. By means of deictic framing, Trump identified the United States as a dominant benefactor and himself as a benefactor, featuring Ukraine as recipient and consequently morally obligated, whereas Zelenskyy refused to play the part of a recipient and resorted to his agency and national resilience. Additional metaphoric language showed ideological divides: Trump's war was now a generic game, Zelenskyy's a community, and Vance's a good deed of US. Using security and moral evaluation, Trump and Vance invalidated Zelenskyy's appeal and stance based on emotion as either reckless or inappropriate, while Zelenskyy's discourse centered on topics of betrayal of the moral ground, human cost and without subservience to be recognized. Overall, the study shows how political actors use strategic discourse to work out authority, legitimacy and international responsibility in their geographical environment of geopolitical confrontation.

This study confirms that language in political conflict is used as a strategic tool to add to power hierarchies, shape ideologies, or legitimize and de legitimize actors in line with existing scholarship in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis of War. Much like Chilton (2004) theorizes, ideological boundaries in this case were built around deictic framing as Trump and Vance framed the U.S. as a domineering beneficiary and Zelenskyy resisted by emphasizing Ukrainian resiliency and moral independence. These dynamics are reminiscent of Van Dijk (1995) ideological discourse structures where, "us versus them" binaries sets up in group being superior. Also, Chilton and Lakoff's (1992, 2012) findings on metaphors shaping perceptions of conflict are supported by the metaphorical structure of war as a game (Trump), suffering (Zelenskyy) or rescue (Vance). These rhetorical devices were not purely ideologically neutral as also observed by Prafitri and Nasir (2023), Tian (2021), and Mohammadi and Javadi (2017) in their analysis in their analyses of Trump's political speeches. Meanwhile, similarly, like Chiluwa and Ruzaita (2024), Win (2025) and Ashraf et al. (2024), security and moral evaluation, particularly in delegitimizing Zelenskyy's emotional appeals and reasserting American control, mirrors the morally charged power framing described in these studies. Overall, the discourse strategies used in the Oval Office exchange conform to the theoretical characteristics of the PDA, while empirically supporting more general CDA views regarding the way language plays a role as a domain of symbolic superiority, ideological challenge, and geopolitical mediation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study have shown that strategies of language use in the Oval Office debate between Trump, Zelenskyy, and Vance so markedly shaped political discourse in high stakes international conflict because they worked to construe power, morality, and legitimacy. Using Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis framework, it was found how deictic framing, metaphorical structures and security oriented moral evaluations were used towards speaker positioning on a hierarchies of authority and towards perceptions of war and diplomacy. Along these lines, Trump portrayed himself as a pragmatic mediator while referring to Ukraine as a dependent actor, in contrast, Zelenskyy referred to Ukraine as a resilient and democratic actor, defining himself as a national hero who has suffered moral pain. Vance also sought to discredit Zelenskyy's assertiveness and redefine diplomacy as an act of benevolence which would display America's superiority. Among its successes, these rhetorical strategies exposed thus the existence of ideological conflicts

underlying international relations, and more importantly the mediation by language, or it's becoming a site of diplomatic struggle and symbolic power in international relations. Finally, the study is based on the finding that political speech is an essential part of legitimization, alliance formation, and the global story about war and peace.

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