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# DONALD J. TRUMP'S SPEECH ON THE ORLANDO SHOOTING: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

*Joni Susanto*

*Rio Satria*

*Chindy Hanggara Rosa*

*Stiba Malang (Malang, East Java, Indonesia)*

*Ikip Budiutomo (Malang, East Java, Indonesia)*

*mochtarkamtin@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** Maintaining communication may sometimes be ignored by the speaker. One may have a style of offensive and controversial statements while others speak based on the rules of communication without violating the theory of Grice's conversational maxims. An example of the former is Trump's speech about the Orlando Mass Shooting on March 16, 2016. Very often Donald J. Trump's speeches seem to be offensive and controversial. However, some audiences find them effectively acceptable. To explore Trump's big phenomenon speech, the authors carry out thorough research by applying the Critical Discourse Analysis which focuses on the text dimension. The results of this research are analyzed by using the qualitative approach. The application of the text dimension theory makes it possible to conclude that in the analysed speech Donald Trump successfully delivered his conservative beliefs and values to the audience by utilizing fear and making use of the media and the tragedy which took place in Orlando in March 2016. His victory in the 2016 presidential elections also points to the effectiveness of the speech. This research contributes to the understanding of critical discourse analysis and the way it functions in the study of various social issues.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), ideology, political discourse, communicative norms, US elections

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Speech is one way people deliver their thoughts and ideas. There are many ways people convey their opinions or statements. To avoid direct conflict when delivering speech, they may say what they think directly, hide the message to make people think about it, or show their ideology. From the above statement, it can be concluded that language is a form of social practice

and thus focuses on how social and political domination is reproduced in the text. Social practice is the message receiver who has the authority to interpret the discourse freely based on their thoughts and the social power in their community [Fairclough, 1995]. Since no one has the same background knowledge, everyone has a different perception of how to interpret the discourse in a particular context.

According to Fairclough, it is not easy to judge one's speech to be right or wrong. The judgment of people's speeches could cause agreement and approval or controversy and disagreement. That is why some of Donald J. Trump's speeches seem to be quite controversial to the audience. People need a specific approach to understand the speech of Donald J. Trump, as he always conveys his ideology in all his speeches. In this research, the authors took Donald Trump's speech during the US presidential election in 2016, as this speech was full of controversial points. This was shown in the news item issued by Veronica Stracqualursi on October 29, 2016, at 5:47 PM, entitled "7 most controversial lines of the 2016 election" [Stracqualursi, 2016]. The goal of Trump's controversial speech was to help him win the presidential election and influence the audience into believing that this speech was enough to elect him as the president.

The present study is different from the research done by Kadim [2022] entitled "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Election Campaign Speeches". In his research, the author emphasized the controversial racism speech focused on emigrants coming to the USA, in which Trump highlighted his ideology of discrediting Muslim emigrants.

However, the given article employs critical discourse analysis to focus on how Trump used his ideology to discredit his opponents in the presidential election. His speech received a lot of responses from many countries. Since there are always different ways of how to interpret someone's ideology, this speech was generally considered controversial. Fairclough's theory, which contends that critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that can be used in analyzing language that is related to ideology [Fairclough, 1995], is one way of such interpretation. In CDA, the term "ideology" itself is broader than the term "ideology" viewed from the political perspective, and the speaker's belief or ideology can be observed by analyzing the language used by the producer or speaker.

The CDA approach can be exploited to study numerous texts or discourses, whether they are written or spoken. This idea is also supported by van Dijk [1993], who argued that critical discourse analysis focuses in its study on the relationship between discourse, power, dominance, and social inequality. The spoken type of text is the text utilized by the speaker in such types of discourse as public speech, conversation, interviews, and talk shows. In this study, the researchers use Donald Trump's speech as the object of analysis, since Trump has a very noteworthy way of imposing his belief in his speech by using some provocative words, sometimes to the difficulty of the audience coping with what he said. Sometimes, Trump states his argument implicitly using various choices of words and language components, which makes the researcher believe that the words are not easily understood by the listener and need to be interpreted critically. Concerning the difficulty of text analysis, Fairclough [2001] suggested using three dimensions: A) text analysis (text description), B) text processing analysis (text interpretation), and C) social event (explanation).

In this article the text analysis dimension is aimed to study:

1. Repetition of words, phrases, and sentences applied by Donald Trump in his speech;
2. Synonyms and antonyms used in the speech;
3. Pronouns, employed to substitute for a noun or noun phrase used in the speech. According to Halliday & Hassan [1976, p.37], a pronoun or personal reference is defined by its function in the speech situation through the category of personal;

4. **Diction.** It reveals the speaker's distinctive vocabulary or choice of words used in a speech or text. Speakers' word choices, in particular, have some connection to the activity in a specific set of themes. It is important in CDA to determine reality, which is signed through language, and to reveal how reality is constructed through language;

5. An implicit assumption about the world or background belief relating to an utterance, in which the truth itself is taken for granted in the discourse, i.e. presupposition. According to Yule [1996], a presupposition is something that the speaker assumes to be the case before making an utterance. It is the speaker and not a sentence that has a presupposition.

Text processing analysis entails investigating how a particular text was created, distributed, and consumed. Fairclough [2001] suggested exploring the following stages:

1. Text production, which will analyze the party related to the production of the text itself.
2. Text transmission. This second part of text processing will focus on how and what media were used in the previous stage – production of the text, whether newspapers, electronic media, or other kinds of media were used. Text distribution is important to analyze since it has its weaknesses and strengths.
3. Use of text messages. This last step in the text processing analysis will be the analysis that focuses on the side of those who receive the news or the text receiver. It will analyze who is the consumer of the text in the media, whether it is the ruling class, local people, or even official people.

A social event, or social dimension, the third dimension in CDA, is social analysis. According to Fairclough [2001], this dimension of analysis will focus on the opinion about the context from a social perspective, despite the influence created by the media. Therefore, social events will analyze three things. The text and media institutions are influenced by the economy, culture, and politics. There are three aspects of social analysis. These are as follows: 1) situational: every text is created because of a particular condition or a unique and specific situation. Specifically, the situational aspect is significant in understanding the context at the moment when the event is taking place. 2) Institutional: this stage of analysis shows how an institution or organization in social practice operates when the text is produced. The text could be influenced by the institutions due to institutional power and the government. 3) Social: this level of analysis will include the economic, political, and cultural systems in society as a whole. Therefore, by implementing this kind of discourse analysis, we will be able to uncover the idea that lies behind the text itself. The text contains a certain ideology that makes society understand what the producer is trying to convey through his/her text to the audience.

In the case of Donald Trump, the way he argued and gave comments was unique, which sometimes creates difficulty for the audience when processing what he said. Sometimes Trump states his argument implicitly using a different choice of words, which the researcher believes needs to be interpreted critically. Therefore, the authors of the article believe that CDA is the appropriate approach to conduct this research. The researchers adopt this approach to analyze the speech given by Trump on the Orlando mass shooting tragedy. The result of this research will hopefully make the audience understand what the speaker intends to say. The researchers chose this particular speech because the speech and the tragedy coincide with the time of the political campaign for the American presidential election. Thus, the researchers aimed to reveal the implicit meaning or ideology hidden behind Trump's speech on the Orlando mass shooting tragedy, which coincided with the next American presidential election and Trump's portrayal as one of the candidates that ran for president. In this research, we do not apply the analysis of all CDA dimensions, but only one theory related to the interpretation of Trump's speech, which is the text analysis dimension.

Knowing the text dimension used by Trump is enough to interpret the speech related to the Orlando mass shooting.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The empirical material of the research is Trump's speech transcription [Politico, 2016]. The source of the data in this research is a video uploaded by Fox 10 Phoenix news outlet, one of the American television media. This video showed Trump himself delivering his speech in front of the media regarding the mass shooting that had recently occurred [Fox 10 Phoenix]. The research design applied in this article is qualitative analysis. According to Bogdan & Biklen [1982], qualitative research is descriptive, meaning that the data is acquired using words or pictures rather than figures. The study's conclusions are presented via quotes from documents, field notes, and interviews, as well as extracts from videotapes, audiotapes, and electronic exchanges.

The researchers took the following steps to carry out the analysis: 1) watching Donald Trump's speech regarding the Orlando mass shooting and reading the script based on Trump's speech. Since this research is qualitative and the goal of the qualitative research is to generate a theory, the researchers coded the speech script containing the phenomena of the controversial text that Trump used in his speech to make readers and listeners believe him concerning the Orlando mass shooting. 2) Sorting out the selected data, which was prepared to be analyzed based on the theory of critical discourse analysis.

Before analyzing the data, the researchers validated it by doing triangulation and cross-checking with the data of the previous research in the same research genre and theory. 3) Then the researchers analyzed the data based on Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis theory and interpreted the result of the analysis.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The text dimension found in Trump's speech covers repetition, synonyms and antonyms, pronouns, diction, and presupposition.

### 3.1. Repetition

*But the current politically correct response cripples our ability to talk and think and act clearly. If we don't get tough, and we don't get smart – and fast – we're not going to have a country anymore. There will be **nothing**, absolutely **nothing** left. [Politico, 2016].*

In this statement, Trump wanted to point out that, according to his belief, the government had disabled people's voices by establishing a law that limits their ability to speak up. Therefore, Trump emphasized his statement by using the repetition of the word "*nothing*". He was trying to convey to the audience his view that if this condition continued, there would be nothing left for the American people's future unless they started to get tougher, faster, and smarter than they were at the time the text was being prepared.

*The bottom line is that the only reason the killer was in America in the first place was that we allowed his family to come here. That is a **fact**, and it's a **fact** we need to talk about. [Politico, 2016].*

The above statement shows how Trump tried to emphasize the fact that America had a serious problem in its immigration system which was not yet fixed by the current government at that time. In his view, it allowed everyone with an unknown background and radical ideology to enter the US

freely. By repeating the word “*fact*”, Trump was trying to convince people that immigration was the root of every problem in America, especially terrorism.

*Our President doesn't know what he is doing. He has **failed us** and **failed us** badly, and under his leadership, this situation will not get any better—it will only get worse. [Politico, 2016].*

The word “*failed*”, which Trump repeatedly mentioned in his speech, shows his view of the current President at that time, Barack Hussein Obama, who, in his opinion, had failed in protecting Americans from the so-called radical Islamists. Further, Trump also said that the President had no clue about the real state of affairs. Therefore, it was so unfortunate that the president had disappointed his people by letting more immigrants enter the US.

### 3.2. Antonyms and Synonyms

*I refuse to allow America to become a place where gay people, Christian people, and Jewish people are the targets of **persecution** and **intimidation** by radical Islamic preachers of hate and violence. [Politico, 2016].*

Synonyms are used by Trump to make the speech more captivating. By using the words “*persecution*” and “*intimidation*”, Trump also wanted to provide an image in the minds of the audience of how the radical Islamic preachers had imposed their violent ideology on the Jewish, Christian, and gay communities.

*President Obama must release the **full** and **complete** immigration histories of all individuals implicated in terrorist activity of any kind since September eleventh. So important. [Politico, 2016].*

It shows how Trump tried to avoid passive and dull text by using synonyms to make his speech more dynamic and interesting. The words “*full*” and “*complete*”, which are synonyms, were used by Trump to show how urgent and important the holistic information of an immigrant was to guarantee the safety of people in the United States of America.

*When I am President, I pledge to **protect** and **defend** all Americans who live inside of our borders. [Politico, 2016].*

In the statement above, Trump uses synonyms (“*protecting*” and “*defending*”) to improve communication between him and the audience and to affirm his notion to the audience by showing how strong his commitment to making America a better place in the future is.

*If we want to protect the quality of life for all Americans—women and children, **gay** and **straight**, Jews and Christians, and all people—then we need to tell the truth about radical Islam. And we need to do it now. [Politico, 2016].*

The words “*gay*” and “*straight*” are antonyms. Trump used the antonyms to show that he did not only stand for one particular group but all layers of society as a whole, which is to lead to the perception that he is a wise and fair person.

### 3.3. Pronouns

The use of pronouns in the speech made by Trump regarding the Orlando mass shooting needs to be analyzed since it can be a determining factor in achieving political goals by the speaker. The following is the analysis of the most frequent pronouns used in the speech. The most used pronouns found in this research are “*I*”, “*we*”, and “*they*”.

*We have an incompetent administration, and if I am elected President, that will not change, at least not in the next four years. We have an administration that will not change--but if **I** get in there, it's going to change quickly. We're going from totally incompetent to just the opposite, believe me. [Politico, 2016].*



By saying “I”, Trump excludes others, and the speech becomes so subjective that it positively affects the audience, as they could sense Trump’s commitment to a more functional and safer America. Here, Trump blames the Democratic Party for its ideology as being not pro-America and not for the American people as it allows importing more immigrants, which in his view are all terrorists or drug dealers, through that incompetent administration system.

*I will use this power to **protect** the American people. When **I** am elected, **I** will suspend immigration from areas of the world where there is a proven history of terrorism against the United States, Europe, or our allies, until we understand how to end these threats. [Politico, 2016].*

As can be seen in the above example, Trump placed himself in a better position and almost as a hero by using the pronoun “I” many times because he would fight against all those Democratic ideologies. Moreover, the verb “*protect*” is associated with the battle frame or condition. When Trump uses the verb “*protect*”, he also frames himself as a guardian or warrior for the American people.

*I will be meeting with the NRA, which has given **me** their earliest endorsement in a Presidential race, to discuss how to ensure Americans have the means to protect themselves in this age of terror. [Politico, 2016].*

The excerpt above shows that Trump communicated a statement concerning his endorsement of the national organization illustrated by the pronouns “*me*” and “*I*” which have a personal reference. Since Democrats were trying to ban the use of guns to solve the problem of gun violence in America, Trump and his party were trying to draw sympathy from the American people by offering the opposite vision of his rival. By mentioning the fact that he already had support from the NRA (National Rifle Association), Trump was trying to convince the American people that his view made more sense than what Hillary Clinton had offered and that having a gun was the way to ensure people’s safety.

*If **we** want to remain a free and open society, and we do, **we** have to control our borders. We have to control them and we have to control them now, not later, right now. [Politico, 2016].*

“*We*” in this case involved Trump and his audience or supporters, so people who are outside of the context are excluded. “*We*” at the beginning of the sentence has an impact on the outcome because Trump informed his audience that they can influence the future of America. In this statement, Trump became very clear in his remark because it concerned what could be the positive outcome of controlling the border for Americans.

*The Obama Administration, with the support of Hillary Clinton and others, has also damaged our security by restraining our intelligence-gathering. We have just had no intelligence-gathering information. We need this information so badly and he stopped it. We don’t have the support of the law enforcement system because Obama is not letting them do their job. **They** are not being allowed to do their job, and **they** could do it well, better than anybody. We need a new leader. We need a new leader fast. **They** have put political correctness above common sense, above your safety, and above all else. [Politico, 2016].*

Trump blames Obama and H. Clinton, who belonged to the same party (the Democratic Party), for having weak and bad regulations on immigration, so they appeared untrustworthy.

*The days of deadly ignorance will end, and **they** will end soon if I’m elected. [Politico, 2016].*

The sentence above shows that Trump emphasizes his commitment to regulating the issues of the administration’s program and also emphasizes that the time for the Democratic Party and its weak administration or regulations must end after he gets elected to be the next president of the United States of America.

*So she says the solution is to ban guns. **They** tried that in France, which has among the toughest gun laws in the world, and 130 people were brutally murdered by Islamic terrorists in cold blood. [Politico, 2016].*

In this statement, Trump again showed how his beliefs were different from the notions that H. Clinton and the Democrats held. Also, by giving a concrete example of his statement, he made his ideas look more relevant and reliable.

### 3.4. Diction

The researchers found that in Trump's speech regarding the mass shooting tragedy in Orlando, the speaker used various metaphors in stating his ideas and thoughts. Here are some examples collected by the researcher.

*But the current politically correct response **cripples** our ability to talk, think, and act clearly. [Politico, 2016].*

The verb "cripple" literally means "to deprive of the use of a limb and especially a leg" [Merriam-Webster Dictionary]. In this case "cripple" is not used in its primary meaning as it describes how the government's regulations restricted people from expressing their thoughts and opinions. Thus, here it means "to deprive of capability for service or of strength, efficiency, or wholeness" [Merriam-Webster Dictionary].

*They're **pouring** in, and we don't know what we were doing. [Politico, 2016].*

The attribute of water, expressed by the verb "pouring", symbolizes the tremendous number of immigrants entering America. Unfortunately, the government and the authorities have not yet been capable of handling the problem of the high number of immigrants with the applicable regulations to control immigration properly.

*We also need to tell the truth about how radical Islam is coming to our **shores**. [Politico, 2016].*

In this example, instead of using other words such as "land" or "soil", for instance, Trump opts for the word "shore", since in his mindset a group of people whom he is referring to as "radical Islam" is mostly those who come to America from nations experiencing a humanitarian crisis caused by the civil war or conflict. Trump chose to use the word "shore" to label them as a low-class society. It can also be used to describe the invader who comes to America to terrorize and take over, since, throughout history, colonists such as Columbus invaded another nation commonly by sailing across the sea.

*They tried that in France, which has among the toughest gun laws in the world, and 130 people were **brutally murdered** by Islamic terrorists in **cold blood**. [Politico, 2016].*

The phrases "brutally murdered" and "in cold blood" show how those who Trump referred to as radical Islamists had no sense of humanity.

*She wants to take away Americans' guns and then admit the very people who want to **slaughter** us. [Politico, 2016].*

"Slaughter" is "the act of killing many people cruelly and unfairly" [Cambridge Dictionary]. In this case, the word "slaughter" was used by Trump to dramatize his speech. It was also used to convey his views on immigrants from the Middle East. By using the word "slaughter", he portrayed the Middle Eastern immigrants as barbaric and soulless people.

*Hillary Clinton's **catastrophic** immigration plan will bring vastly more radical Islamic immigration into this country, threatening not only our security but our entire way of life. [Politico, 2016].*

The word “catastrophic” here indicates how the immigration plan that H. Clinton offered to the Americans, as viewed by Trump, would only bring even more destruction to the American immigration system by giving more room for the occurrence of deviation in the system itself.

*We have to stop the tremendous flow of Syrian refugees into the United States. We don't know who they are, they have no documentation, and we don't know what they're planning. [Politico, 2016].*

The excerpt above shows that Trump specified the object of his statement, which was the group of people that immigrated to the United States in a massive number from a Muslim nation with an issue of terrorism and civil war. Moreover, the word “tremendous” itself in the example above symbolizes the countless number of immigrants that came to the United States of America. In this case, Trump tried to state that there was a poor regulation of immigration in America that could not be handled by the president at that time, which caused a huge number of immigrants to enter the United States of America and potentially caused a high risk to American safety.

### 3.5. Presupposition

In this part of the discussion, the researcher will elaborate on the use of presupposition employed by Trump in his speech regarding the Orlando mass shooting tragedy.

*But today there is only one thing to discuss: the growing threat of terrorism inside our borders. [Politico, 2016].*

In this statement, the presupposition that Trump wanted to impose on his audience is that “there is terrorism in the United States”. Trump attempted to convey the idea that there is still a terrorist threat in America that has yet to be resolved by the current government. The idea is supported by the statement: “The attack on the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, was the worst terrorist strike on our soil since September 11th, and the worst mass shooting in our country's history” [Politico, 2016]. That statement indicates how the government was incapable of protecting its citizens.

*We are importing Radical Islamic Terrorism into the West through a failed immigration system – and through an intelligence community held back by our president. [Politico, 2016].*

In this second example of a statement made by Trump in his speech, it can be seen that the presupposition of the statement is that “there is an immigration system in America”. Using the claim above, Trump tried to convey to the audience his thoughts about the government which had failed to protect American citizens from radical terrorists by still maintaining the use of premature or failed regulations on the immigration system.

*Large numbers of Somali refugees in Minnesota have tried to join ISIS. [Politico, 2016].*

The statement above is used by Trump to give a concrete example of the phenomenon itself. The presupposition of the statement above is that “Somali refugees in Minnesota have tried to join ISIS”. The example of the issue makes the speech performed by Trump more reliable from the audience's point of view. Moreover, by using an example from a related issue to support his argument, he automatically strengthened his idea.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research, critical discourse analysis plays an important role in understanding Trump's speech since CDA is a method of analysis that focuses on both textual and non-textual data. In his speech, Trump used provocative terms and diction to drive the sympathy of the masses. The way he built a narrative using offensive and insulting statements is, for instance, by having



his choice of words state his ideas, such as the word “*slaughter*” to portray the Middle Eastern immigrants as barbaric and uncivilized people. Not only did Trump use a lot of lexical units, which tended to express negative pragmatics, but he also frequently used repetition in his speech to solidify and emphasize his ideas and claims. The use of presupposition in his speech also proved that Trump tried multiple times to convey the intended meaning of his speech to the audience indirectly by using assumptions.

Furthermore, because the majority of the American people were conservative, the way he and the Republican Party used one of the most famous cable networks for political advertisements, Fox News Channel, which was owned by one of the party’s members, gave him an advantage by continuously building a positive image for him to gain trust and power from the American people, particularly conservatives. Trump’s speech in response to a terrorist attack in Orlando benefited him by granting him more obvious power. He made use of the current situation at that time to help him build a good image among the Americans and create a positive impression by making use of the mass shooting tragedy in Orlando to easily convince the American people about whatever he said, and it made his statement sound more rational and more reliable.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

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