THE POWER OF SIMPLIFIED LANGUAGE IN SHAPING POLITICAL IDENTITY: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF DONALD TRUMP'S SPEECHES

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Abstract

This study examines the role of simplified language in shaping political identity, focusing on Donald Trump's speeches during his presidential campaigns. Modern political discourse often relies on linguistic strategies to connect with diverse audiences, yet the specific impact of simple, accessible language on political identity construction remains underexplored. The primary objective of this research is to analyze how Trump's deliberate use of plain vocabulary, repetitive structures, and emotionally charged rhetoric engages supporters and strengthens his populist appeal. Employing a qualitative methodology, this study conducts a discourse analysis of selected speeches, emphasizing lexical simplicity, rhetorical devices, and audience response. The findings reveal that Trump's simplified language not only facilitates comprehension across a broad demographic spectrum but also reinforces an "us versus them" narrative central to his political messaging. This strategic use of language fosters a sense of inclusion among supporters while projecting a relatable, authentic persona. The research underscores the significance of linguistic simplicity in political communication, offering insights into its effectiveness in shaping public opinion and fostering political loyalty.

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1. Introduction

Language doesn't only serve to convey information; it's an important medium through which political concepts are created in addition to being transmitted and accepted by the masses. When it concerns political discussion, the usage of simplified languages has been identified as an effective method of communicating with people in establishing a sense communality and forming coalitions of the political. The use of language communicated through slogans, sounds clips, as well as emotional stimulating phrases are now popular in the discourse of populists throughout the globe (Lunt and Stenner, 2005). In the process of transforming complex political concepts into an easily digestible and palatable form which is easily understood by people They are adept at transcending established boundaries of class as well as education and political ideology of their respective parties by giving people a sense of an unifying cause and an identity that is shared by many people.

The streamlined language used in political discourse serves a variety of reasons. It enhances understanding, helps recall and improves emotional bond. Also, it influences how people view their political surroundings and the way they perceive themselves as identifying with the range of beliefs as well as to align themselves with particular policies. For instance, words such as "Yes We Can," "Make America Great Again," or "Take Back Control" are not just appealing due to their simpleness, but they help in forming common ideas. They can transform multiple agendas that seek to change the political landscape into a couple of phrases that appeal to the general public and assist in strengthening the identities of the groups (Chilton, 2004). The language simplifying plays a crucial role in the process of separating groups from in-groups by advancing ideologies and prompting people to engage.

From a social and sociological sense, a less complicated language could help create the feeling of belonging and of coherence between beliefs. The study of psychology research into political issues shows that people are more likely feel a connection to the stories they understand and feel emotionally attached to (Lakoff, 2004). Simple words can help create bridges between political elites as well as the general public and decreases the impression of disconnection caused by technical jargon, like the bureaucratic speak or

abstractions about ideologies. Language can be employed as a method for strategic communication, which allows the political leadership to represent "the people" while distinguishing themselves from perceived people who are not believers and elites.

The roots of the simplified style of speech in politics are traced back to the populist rhetorical style. In this context, the power of "the people" is emphasized against corrupt elites. People who are leaders in populist movements typically use simple emotive expressions and words to connect to the public about their personal lives and frustrations (Wodak, 2015). The way of leadership is primarily not scholarly and is anti-technocratic. The aim is to cut through the complicated institutional politics in favor of simplicity and authenticity. The end result is that simple language doesn't simply convey the message of a politician however, it becomes the manifestation of a unique social culture that relies on the common sense of people, rather than technology, but an underlying sense of belonging.

In addition, advances in technology have increased the frequency and impact of a simplified language for political discourse. The social media platform encourage speed and popularity as well as being facilitated because of the linguistic concepts that are reduced. Hashtags and memes and videos in shorter form are used for political communication as well as slogans and speeches. are the mainstays of public debate. Politicians are urged to express themselves in strategies that are enthralling visually appealing, shared and share-able (Ott, 2017). It is the result that more people are likely to be engaging with political leaders not via lengthy speeches or even policies rather through the use of phrases that trigger emotions of belonging as well as opinions that are in conflict.

A language that is streamlined is a major factor in the division of personal identity of the politician. The political debate is reduced to emotionally loaded binary terms like evil vs. good. evil, us and. the patriots and them, and. the traitors. aside in favor of ideological loyalty. Our language does not focus on communicating information, but more concerned with establishing an identity and a sense of belonging. This strategy creates echo chambers in which particular types of language are believed to be legitimate that in turn strengthens the commonality of ideologies while suppressing any voices that are not in agreement (Mercieca, 2020). Thus the language that is simplified not only inform, but it also establishes identities. It also influences the way people think regarding themselves and other people in the political landscape.

The theories that underlie the phenomenon originate from the work of researchers like Lakoff (2004), who emphasized the significance of metaphors and cognitive framing inside the politics of language. Lakoff believes that political processes are intrinsically metaphorical and the frame of reference that is built into language impact what people think about legitimacy, truth and justice validity of their political position. Language that

is streamlined, working making use of familiar metaphors and mental shortcuts, bolsters the frame as well as bolsters our identities as political people. In the same manner, Fairclough (2003) explores the role played by politics by the discourse process saying that language is fundamentally political since it is able to encompass various social reality.

The system of authoritarianism uses language simplifying to establish a hegemony over the control. In the writings of Orwell's (1949) novel "Newspeak" is an extreme example of how language's complexity could simplify thinking that ultimately affects the mindset of an entire people. Though modern democratic societies don't reflect the same extremes as dystopian societies, however, the excessive use of simplified languages poses the same dangers of weakening critical thinking by denying the legitimacy of opposing viewpoint and creating an image that is based on oneness. The deliberate utilization of a language reduced isn't just an opportunity to be inclusive however it can also be used as a means to control.

It is not the case to assume that simplifying languages do not always lead to the alteration of ideas or the rigidity. Actually, it can assist in the process of democratic change by increasing the political dialogue and easily accessible. Communication, which is transparent, accessible and emotionally strong will help enable voices that aren't heard and increase the participation of people in politics and challenge the dominant views. Particularly, movement of the grassroots across in the Global South have effectively employed basic language to advocate for rights, fight injustice, and create a common identification (Spivak, 1993). In these circumstances simplifying is an approach to increase rather than limit this demonstrates the effectiveness of language in politics relies on the person that uses it, the person who is using it, and the reason that it serves.

The strength of a simple language lies in its capacity to create a sense of unity and division and to enable as well as to govern. Language is a potent power that does more than just communicate an identity but also creates it through the delivery of an captivating, emotional and stimulating language. In a culture which is increasingly media-driven and influenced by attention it is likely that the value of simple languages is likely to grow. It is crucial to comprehend this change when understanding the current state of politics as well as the growth of public opinion, and the legitimacy of democratic institutions. In the future, research will need to analyze critically the connection between the clarity and the delicacy of the area of communication in the political realm. This research should consider the possibilities of a language that is inclusive and the effects.

1.1. Research Objectives

- To analyze the linguistic features of simplified language, including vocabulary and syntax, in Donald Trump's speeches.
- To explore the role of rhetorical devices in amplifying the impact of simplified language on political identity construction.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of linguistic simplicity in fostering relatability and loyalty among Trump's supporters.

1.2. Research Questions

- How does Donald Trump use simplified language to engage and connect with diverse audience groups?
- What rhetorical strategies accompany the use of plain vocabulary in Trump's speeches to reinforce political identity?
- How does linguistic simplicity contribute to the construction of an "us versus them" narrative in Trump's political rhetoric?

1.3. Significance of Study

This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of how simplified language influences political communication and identity formation. In an era of increasing political polarization, the ability of leaders to connect with diverse audiences through accessible language has profound implications for public engagement and democratic participation. By focusing on Donald Trump's speeches, this research sheds light on how linguistic simplicity can transcend traditional political barriers, creating a sense of inclusion and relatability among supporters. The findings contribute to the fields of sociolinguistics and political discourse analysis by exploring how language functions as a tool for persuasion, identity construction, and fostering loyalty. Moreover, this study offers valuable insights for political strategists, speechwriters, and communication experts seeking to understand the effectiveness of language in influencing public opinion. Ultimately, it highlights the critical role of linguistic choices in shaping modern political dynamics.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a qualitative research paradigm, employing discourse analysis to explore how simplified language in political speeches—particularly those of Donald Trump—shapes political identity. At its core, the theoretical orientation of this research draws from critical discourse analysis (CDA), populist political theory, sociolinguistics, and framing theory, all of which provide a multi-layered lens for

understanding how linguistic choices influence audience cognition, emotion, and identity alignment.

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The foundation of this study lies in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a framework developed prominently by Fairclough (1995), which views language as a social practice that both reflects and produces power relations. CDA is particularly relevant in political contexts where discourse functions not only to communicate ideas but also to construct social realities and shape public consciousness. Political language is never neutral; it is ideologically driven and strategically designed to frame specific identities, legitimize actions, and marginalize oppositional views.

In Trump's speeches, the strategic use of plain language, repetition, and emotionally charged rhetoric does not merely reflect a preference for simplicity—it becomes a deliberate method of shaping an "us versus them" political narrative. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse (text, discursive practice, and social practice) guides the analytical process, allowing the researcher to move from surface-level textual features (such as vocabulary and syntax) to the socio-political implications embedded in speech patterns. Thus, CDA provides a comprehensive approach to dissecting how power dynamics and identity politics are linguistically constructed in populist discourse.

2.2. Populist Political Theory

The study is further informed by Laclau (2005) theory of populism, which views populism as a discursive strategy through which political actors construct "the people" as a unified and oppositional entity against an "elite" or "other." Laclau argues that populist discourse hinges on empty signifiers, words like "freedom," "patriotism," or "greatness" that carry vague yet emotionally potent meanings, allowing heterogeneous groups to project their grievances and hopes onto them.

Donald Trump's campaign speeches are saturated with such signifiers, enabling broad appeal despite ideological inconsistencies. His strategic simplicity facilitates resonance across class, race, and educational divides. This usage corresponds with Laclau's notion of hegemony, where language operates as a symbolic tool to forge a collective identity through exclusion and antagonism. Trump's discourse creates a political frontier: "real Americans" on one side, and immigrants, the media, or political elites on the other. The framework thus highlights how simplified language becomes an ideological apparatus to structure political subjectivities.

2.3. Sociolinguistics and Language Register

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the study employs Halliday (1978) concept of register—the variation of language according to context, purpose, and audience. Trump's lexical choices demonstrate a high-frequency use of common, monosyllabic words, informal expressions, and oral speech patterns, which reflect a low linguistic register that mimics everyday conversation. This informality bridges the communicative gap between the speaker and a linguistically diverse audience, thereby fostering perceived authenticity and relatability.

Furthermore, Labov (1972) work on language variation underscores how language operates as a marker of group identity. By aligning his speech with vernacular norms, Trump symbolically distances himself from elite political discourse, reinforcing his image as a political outsider who "speaks the people's language." This linguistic strategy contributes to the construction of ingroup solidarity and reinforces the division between "authentic" citizens and outgroups. Hence, simplified language is not just a stylistic choice but a form of linguistic capital that repositions power relations within the political sphere.

2.4. Framing Theory

The theoretical lens also incorporates framing theory, notably developed by Goffman (1974) and extended by Lakoff (2004), who emphasized the role of cognitive frames in shaping how people interpret information. In political communication, framing involves selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient to promote a particular problem definition, moral evaluation, or solution.

Trump's rhetorical frames—such as "Make America Great Again," "drain the swamp," or "build the wall"—are crafted using simple, emotionally charged language that aligns with intuitive moral narratives. These frames activate cognitive schemas within the audience, enabling rapid interpretation without deep deliberation. Lakoff suggests that conservative communication is often grounded in a strict father model, emphasizing authority, protection, and self-discipline, all of which are reinforced through Trump's linguistic strategies.

The interaction between frame resonance and audience predispositions is central here: simplified language increases the accessibility and retention of these frames, enhancing their persuasive impact. Thus, this framework helps us understand how Trump's speech patterns operate not only at the linguistic level but also at the ideological and psychological levels, shaping how audiences construct meaning and allegiance.

2.5. Emotional Discourse and Affect Theory

Additionally, the study draws upon insights from affect theory and emotional discourse analysis, particularly the work of Ahmed (2004) and Wetherell (2012), who highlight how emotions circulate through discourse to create attachments and exclusions. Trump's simplified and emotive language—often expressed through anger, pride, fear, or resentment—serves as a vehicle for affective mobilization.

Emotionally resonant phrases such as "they are taking our jobs," or "I love the poorly educated" function as affective triggers that foster identification with the speaker while vilifying outgroups. These affective performances are especially effective in populist politics, where emotions become the grammar of political allegiance. The simplistic packaging of these emotions makes them easily shareable in digital and oral forms, contributing to viral dissemination and collective identity formation.

3. Integration of Frameworks in Methodology

The convergence of these theoretical frameworks—CDA, populist discourse, sociolinguistics, framing theory, and affect studies—shapes the interpretive lens through which the selected political speeches are analyzed. The qualitative discourse analysis focuses on three major dimensions:

1. **Lexical Simplicity**: Repetition, monosyllabic word use, informal diction, and plain syntax are analyzed in relation to how they enhance accessibility and frame resonance.
2. **Rhetorical Devices**: Strategies such as metaphor, hyperbole, enumeration, slogans, and personification are evaluated for their ideological and emotional impact.
3. **Audience Response**: Public reactions—both verbal (e.g., applause, chants) and digital (e.g., social media engagement)—are examined to assess how simplified language facilitates political identification and emotional investment.

By integrating these frameworks, the study reveals how language, far from being a neutral medium, serves as a powerful ideological tool in political campaigns. The theoretical foundation provides the scaffolding necessary to understand how linguistic simplicity functions as a mode of political persuasion, identity construction, and social division.

4. Analysis

How Donald Trump Uses Simplified Language to Engage and Connect with Diverse Audience Groups

Donald Trump's political communication style, characterized by its simplicity, directness, and emotional intensity, represents a strategic and ideologically charged use of language aimed at connecting with a wide range of audience groups. This engagement is not accidental but is deeply rooted in discursive strategies aligned with theories from critical discourse analysis, populist political theory, sociolinguistics, framing, and affect studies. Through lexical simplicity, rhetorical framing, and emotional appeal, Trump effectively constructs a collective identity that resonates across class, race, and educational boundaries.

4.1. Lexical Simplicity and Accessibility

One of the most prominent features of Trump's language is its lexical simplicity, often drawing on high-frequency, monosyllabic words. For instance, in his campaign announcement speech (June 16, 2015), Trump stated, *"I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall"* (Trump, 2015). The sentence structure is basic and repetitive, making it easily understandable and memorable. This simplicity reflects Halliday (1978) concept of language register, tailored here to suit a general audience rather than political elites. By avoiding complex vocabulary and syntax, Trump ensures that his message is accessible to individuals regardless of educational background.

According to Fairclough (1995) model of critical discourse analysis, this textual choice is not neutral. It reflects a deeper discursive strategy aimed at constructing an inclusive "people" while simultaneously excluding a perceived "elite." Simplified language thus becomes a symbolic equalizer, allowing Trump to be perceived as someone who "talks like us," a powerful tool in constructing political allegiance among working-class voters, rural populations, and those who feel politically alienated.

4.2. Rhetorical Devices and Repetition

Trump frequently employs repetition and sloganization—rhetorical techniques central to populist discourse. Phrases like *"Make America Great Again," "Drain the Swamp,"* and *"Build the Wall"* are not only repeated but also crafted using emotionally evocative yet linguistically simple words. This practice echoes Laclau (2005) theory of populism, wherein empty signifiers allow diverse groups to attach their unique grievances to a common cause. *"Make America Great Again"* becomes a floating signifier capable of uniting farmers, industrial workers, and disenchanted suburban voters under a broad ideological umbrella.

These repeated slogans are cognitively sticky and align with Lakoff (2004) framing theory, which posits that repetition strengthens neural connections in the brain, making messages more likely to be accepted and retained. By framing issues in binary terms—*winners vs. losers*, *Americans vs. outsiders*, *us vs. them*—Trump simplifies complex policy issues into moral conflicts, creating emotional clarity and polarization.

4.3. Populist Framing and Identity Politics

Trump's speeches consistently draw boundaries between the virtuous people and corrupt elites, a key feature of populist discourse. In his speech at the 2016 Republican National Convention, he declared: *"I am your voice. I alone can fix it"* (Trump, 2016). The use of the first person singularly "*I alone*"—combined with the collective—*"your voice"*—produces a rhetorical fusion between leader and people. This form of populist framing constructs Trump not just as a representative but as a personification of the people's will, a central concept in Laclau's populism.

The binary opposition inherent in such statements promotes a sense of unity among the audience. Trump's *"law and order"* rhetoric, repeated in many of his rallies, constructs a moral frame where his supporters are the protectors of civilization, and others—immigrants, liberals, or the media—are depicted as threats. According to Goffman (1974) frame analysis, such strategic simplification enables audiences to interpret and emotionally respond to complex realities using pre-existing moral schemas.

4.4. Sociolinguistic Identity and Group Solidarity

Trump's informal and sometimes grammatically non-standard speech has drawn both criticism and admiration. In a 2016 rally, he declared: *"I love the poorly educated"* (Trump, 2016). While such a statement might seem derogatory out of context, in the framework of Labov (1972) sociolinguistics, it becomes a signal of ingroup solidarity. Trump appeals directly to groups often marginalized in mainstream discourse, validating their experiences and including them in his political vision.

His informal language style—including interjections like *"believe me,"* or dismissive phrases like *"fake news"*—fosters linguistic relatability. These are forms of code-switching that align with vernacular speech patterns rather than elite political jargon. This not only humanizes the speaker but also constructs a communicative bond between him and audiences from diverse demographic backgrounds, from rural communities to blue-collar workers to urban conservatives.

4.5. Emotional Appeals and Affective Performance

Trump's rhetorical power also lies in his ability to stir emotions—particularly fear, anger, pride, and hope—through linguistic simplicity. In his 2015 speech on immigration, he stated: *"They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people"* (Trump, 2015). This emotionally charged list, formed through anaphora (repetition of grammatical structures), produces a heightened affective response.

Drawing from Ahmed (2004) affect theory, we see how such language works to circulate emotion through bodies and texts. The repeated references to danger activate affective economies, where negative emotions are attached to outgroups (e.g., immigrants), reinforcing collective fear and cohesion among the ingroup. These emotional appeals do not require detailed policy analysis—they work viscerally, shaping political identities through felt experience rather than rational evaluation.

Moreover, Trump's exaggerated expressions—such as *"disaster," "tremendous," "the worst ever"*—simplify evaluations into emotionally loaded judgments, thus removing the need for interpretive complexity. Wetherell (2012) argues that emotional discourse often functions as a shortcut to political decision-making, bypassing cognitive deliberation in favor of immediate alignment or rejection.

4.6. Strategic Engagement Through Simplification

In sum, Trump's language is deliberately designed to bridge cognitive, cultural, and political divides through simplification. His speeches resonate across socio-economic groups because they reduce ambiguity, affirm identity, and stir affect. By using common language, clear moral frames, and emotionally charged repetition, Trump constructs a communicative environment where his audience feels recognized, empowered, and engaged.

This strategic simplicity—understood through CDA, sociolinguistics, populist theory, framing, and affect studies—demonstrates that political communication in the populist era is not about dumbing down but about restructuring discourse to mobilize emotion and identity. Trump's success in engaging diverse groups underscores the political utility of linguistic simplicity in an era marked by media saturation, information overload, and social fragmentation.

5. Rhetorical Strategies and Plain Vocabulary in Trump's Speeches: Reinforcing Political Identity

Donald Trump's political speeches are widely recognized for their simple, direct language, yet what makes them rhetorically powerful is not simplicity alone. His use of plain vocabulary is interwoven with deliberate rhetorical strategies that reinforce a sense of political identity among his followers. These strategies include repetition, binary oppositions, emotional framing, slogans, personalization, and the strategic use of blame— all operating within a populist discourse framework that seeks to define, solidify, and mobilize a collective "us" against a threatening "them."

5.1. Repetition and Catchphrases: Building Emotional Memory

One of Trump's most consistent rhetorical strategies is repetition, which enhances the memorability and emotional resonance of his message. In his 2016 campaign, he often repeated phrases like *"We will build the wall"*, *"Drain the swamp"*, and *"Lock her up"*. These slogans are linguistically minimal but ideologically dense, serving as "empty signifiers" in Laclau (2005) terms—simple phrases that allow a variety of meanings and grievances to coalesce under a common identity.

From a framing perspective (Lakoff, 2004), repetition functions cognitively by reinforcing neural pathways associated with particular moral or political evaluations. For example, in his Republican National Convention speech (2016), Trump said: *"I am your voice. I alone can fix it. I will restore law and order."* This series of short, emphatic declarations frames Trump as a singular savior figure. The repetition of "I" and "will" builds a sense of urgency and leadership, while the simplicity of the words ensures accessibility across educational levels.

According to Fairclough (1995) discourse model, such repetition also operates as a power device, naturalizing ideologically loaded ideas (such as national security, immigration threat, or elite corruption) by embedding them into routine political speech. This naturalization process contributes to the reinforcement of group-based political identity, as the audience internalizes and repeats these slogans as markers of shared belonging.

5.2. Binary Oppositions: Constructing "Us vs. Them"

Trump frequently uses binary oppositions to construct political identity by delineating a moral boundary between "real Americans" and outsiders. In a 2016 speech in Phoenix, Arizona, he declared:

"Either we have a country, or we don't. Either we have borders, or we don't. Either we enforce the law, or we don't." (Trump, 2016)

Each of these statements is framed as a stark choice, leaving no room for complexity or nuance. This Manichaean worldview, characteristic of populist discourse (Laclau, 2005), simplifies moral and political conflict into clear categories of good and evil, us and them. The plain vocabulary supports this dichotomy by avoiding abstract or legalistic terminology, instead favoring emotionally charged words like *"borders," "law," "country,"* and *"safety."*

These rhetorical contrasts activate Goffman (1974) concept of framing by presenting reality in polarized terms. The simplicity of these dichotomies helps galvanize support by tapping into affective investments—feelings of fear, anger, and belonging—which, as Ahmed (2004) explains, are central to the circulation of political emotions.

5.3. Personalization and Identity Fusion

Trump's speeches are also marked by personalization, where he positions himself as the embodiment of the people's will. In his 2016 RNC speech, he famously declared: *"I am your voice."* (Trump, 2016)

This simple yet potent phrase fuses the speaker with the collective, collapsing the boundary between leader and led. According to Laclau (2005), such personal identification is a hallmark of populist rhetoric, where the leader becomes the signifier of the people's unified identity. Through plain vocabulary, Trump strips away formal distance and crafts an image of proximity and empathy, enhancing ingroup solidarity.

The use of "your" also functions sociolinguistic ally. Labov (1972) highlights how personal pronouns and speech patterns can indicate social alignment. Trump's frequent use of "we," "you," and "us" cultivates a shared identity, even when referencing disparate social groups. This alignment is reinforced by informal language, including idioms like *"believe me,"* or *"nobody knows more than me,"* which simulate casual conversation rather than political oration.

5.4. Blame and Scapegoating: Externalizing Problems

Another critical rhetorical strategy is scapegoating, wherein blame is directed outward to foster internal unity. Trump's statements about immigration often illustrate this. For instance, in his 2015 campaign launch, he said: *"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best… They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."* (Trump, 2015)

This use of repetition, combined with stereotyping and vilification, creates an affective economy (Ahmed, 2004) where negative emotions—especially fear and anger—are attached to outgroup figures. The simplistic structure of the language makes the message easily repeatable and shareable, especially in digital formats where brevity and clarity are assets.

From a CDA perspective (Fairclough, 1995), scapegoating is a discursive move that constructs a false sense of cohesion within the ingroup by displacing responsibility onto an "other." In doing so, Trump reinforces political identity not only by telling supporters who they are, but also by making clear who they are not.

5.5. Storytelling and Anecdotes

Trump frequently incorporates anecdotal storytelling to support his political points, using plain narrative structures. For example, he often shares personal interactions: *"A great guy came up to me—he had tears in his eyes—and he said, 'Sir, thank you for saving our country.'"*

Such constructed dialogues serve as emotional validators, confirming Trump's value through imagined testimonials. According to Wetherell (2012), emotional storytelling is a way to mobilize collective feeling and legitimize political arguments through affect rather than evidence.

These stories are rarely sophisticated or nuanced. Instead, they rely on stock characters, simple problems, and triumphant resolutions—features that make them immediately understandable and emotionally gratifying to a wide audience.

5.6. Humor and Mockery

Another striking rhetorical feature is Trump's use of mockery and nicknames: *"Crooked Hillary," "Sleepy Joe," "Little Marco,"* etc. These nicknames are not just insults; they are rhetorical shorthand that simplifies complex political criticisms into

single, memorable words. Through this strategy, Trump ridicules opponents and frames them as morally or intellectually inferior.

This practice falls within the broader context of discursive delegitimization, as analyzed by Fairclough (1995). Simplistic mockery becomes a tool for political warfare, making opposition figures appear absurd and unworthy of serious consideration. This reinforces ingroup identity through shared laughter and emotional bonding, excluding those who are not "in on the joke."

5.7. Conclusion

Donald Trump's use of plain vocabulary in political speeches is amplified and weaponized through a series of rhetorical strategies designed to reinforce political identity. These include repetition, binary framing, personalization, scapegoating, anecdotal storytelling, and mockery. Each strategy works synergistically with linguistic simplicity to create accessible, emotionally charged, and ideologically loaded messages that resonate with a broad demographic base.

Through the lens of critical discourse analysis, populist political theory, framing, and affect theory, it becomes clear that Trump's language is not simple by accident—it is strategically simple. This simplicity enables emotional clarity, cognitive ease, and rapid political mobilization, making it a powerful tool for identity formation in contemporary populist politics.

6. Linguistic Simplicity and the "Us Versus Them" Narrative in Trump's Political Rhetoric

Donald Trump's political communication is widely recognized for its linguistic simplicity, but this plainness of speech serves a deeper ideological purpose. Far from being apolitical or incidental, the simplicity of his language is an essential tool in constructing a polarized "us versus them" narrative. Through the use of accessible vocabulary, repetition, emotional framing, and exclusionary tropes, Trump's rhetoric creates a dualistic worldview in which "the people" are juxtaposed against corrupt elites, dangerous outsiders, and untrustworthy institutions. This binary framework, rooted in populist ideology and articulated through simplified language, becomes a powerful means of shaping political identity, mobilizing support, and delegitimizing opposition.

6.1. Lexical Simplicity as an Inclusionary Tool

At the surface level, Trump's language is marked by short sentences, common vocabulary, and conversational tone. For example, in his 2016 Republican National Convention speech, Trump declared:

"I am your voice. I will restore law and order. I will make America strong again" (Trump, 2016).

Each sentence contains no more than six words, and all words are monosyllabic except for "America." This lexical simplicity makes the speech immediately comprehensible to a broad demographic, regardless of educational background or language proficiency. As Halliday (1978) notes in his theory of register, the tailoring of language to context and audience is central to effective communication. By simplifying his speech, Trump aligns himself linguistically with the average American, constructing a perceived solidarity between speaker and audience.

This strategy supports Labov (1972) argument that language use signals group membership. Trump's linguistic simplicity functions as a symbolic inclusionary device—a marker that he is "one of us," not part of the political elite who speak in complex or technical terms. The simplicity itself thus becomes a performative act of anti-elitism, reinforcing the speaker's alignment with the in-group.

6.2. Binary Opposition and Moral Simplification

Trump's simple language is frequently used to articulate binary oppositions, a key feature of populist rhetoric. This "us versus them" framing constructs a moral dichotomy between the virtuous, hard-working American people and the corrupt, incompetent, or dangerous "others." In his 2015 campaign announcement speech, Trump stated: *"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people"* (Trump, 2015).

The vocabulary is plain, but the implications are charged. The repetition of *"they're bringing…"* frames a specific out-group (Mexican immigrants) as a collective threat. The rhetorical pattern—short declarative statements using simple, negatively charged terms like "crime" and "rapists"—amplifies the emotional impact. According to Ahmed (2004), emotions such as fear and disgust are not just individual responses but are circulated through discourse, shaping collective affect and identity. Trump's simplified

language makes these emotional cues clear and repeatable, turning them into shared sentiments among his supporters.

6.3. Framing the Enemy with Simplistic Narratives

Trump's use of plain language also facilitates framing, a process that shapes how people perceive and interpret issues. Lakoff (2004) argues that effective political messaging relies on moral frames that resonate intuitively with audiences. In Trump's case, the moral universe is clearly defined: Americans are under threat from criminals, corrupt politicians, and globalists. Simplified language aids this framing by removing ambiguity and presenting reality in black-and-white terms.

For instance, Trump often used the phrase *"America First,"* a simple but ideologically loaded slogan. It frames foreign relations, immigration, and economic policy through a nationalist lens, implying that others have exploited America. In his 2017 inaugural address, he said:

"From this day forward, it's going to be only America first. America first" (Trump, 2017).

The repetition and simplicity ensure the slogan is easily memorable and emotionally resonant. From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective (Fairclough, 1995), such slogans work by condensing complex ideologies into digestible forms, which then become naturalized in everyday political conversation. The simplicity not only aids understanding but normalizes division, rendering the "us versus them" logic commonsensical.

6.4. The Role of Scapegoating and Emotional Polarization

A central element of Trump's binary rhetoric is scapegoating—blaming an identifiable out-group for the problems faced by the in-group. The clarity and accessibility of his language enhance the effectiveness of this tactic. In his Phoenix speech on immigration, Trump stated:

"We're going to build a wall. And Mexico is going to pay for it" (Trump, 2016).

These statements are simple, declarative, and repeatable. They also establish a clear antagonist—Mexico—while offering a simple solution—a wall. Wetherell (2012)

emphasizes that affective discourse, particularly when repeated and emotionally charged, generates social cohesion by focusing negative emotion outward. Trump's words evoke pride, fear, and resolve in his audience, consolidating their identity against a demonized "other."

6.5. Personal Pronouns and Group Alignment

Trump makes frequent use of personal pronouns like "we," "us," and "them," which serve to delineate group boundaries. This strategy is central to the construction of collective identity. In a 2020 rally, he said:

"They're not after me, they're after you. I'm just in the way" (Trump, 2020).

This framing portrays Trump as a protective barrier between "the people" and the threatening "them"—whether it be the media, the Democrats, or foreign entities. From a sociolinguistic standpoint (Labov, 1972), this use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns defines social boundaries and solidifies ingroup loyalty. The language is so simple that it bypasses analytical resistance and goes straight to emotional identification, which Ahmed (2004) describes as key to the formation of political attachments.

6.6. Simplified Storytelling and Enemy Narratives

Trump frequently uses anecdotal storytelling to personalize the threats posed by "them." These stories are rarely complex and often include phrases like *"I met a man…"* or *"A woman came to me crying…,"* followed by a simple, emotionally charged message. These narratives are easy to follow and recall, and they function as symbolic validations of Trump's worldview.

From the perspective of Fairclough (1995), these stories are not mere embellishments but are central to ideological work. They render abstract political issues into individual experiences, reinforcing the moral superiority of the in-group and the danger of the out-group. When paired with plain vocabulary, these stories become political parables—simple tales with strong moral messages.

6.7. Conclusion

Donald Trump's use of linguistic simplicity is not an accidental byproduct of his rhetorical style—it is a strategic mechanism for constructing and reinforcing a polarized "us versus them" worldview. By employing accessible vocabulary, repetition, binary oppositions, emotional appeals, and group-based pronoun use, Trump simplifies complex political realities into moral absolutes. This discursive structure enables audience identification, emotional resonance, and ideological reinforcement.

Through the lenses of Critical Discourse Analysis, Populist Political Theory, Sociolinguistics, Framing, and Affect Theory, we see how simplicity becomes a vehicle for ideological clarity, not neutrality. It shapes political identity by drawing emotional, moral, and linguistic boundaries between the in-group and the out-group, enabling Trump to mobilize a diverse base under a shared, simplified narrative of conflict and belonging.

7. Conclusion

Donald Trump's political rhetoric, marked by its conspicuous simplicity, is far more complex in its implications than it may initially appear. As the preceding analysis has demonstrated, the use of plain language in Trump's speeches is a strategic and highly effective rhetorical device, deeply embedded in the populist logic of constructing social binaries and shaping political identity. The deliberate linguistic choices—short sentences, common vocabulary, emotional appeals, repetition, and binary oppositions—do not merely aim for clarity or accessibility. They work actively to generate political meaning, stir collective emotions, and define ideological boundaries that separate "us" from "them."

At the heart of Trump's discourse lies a populist worldview, as theorized by Ernesto Laclau (2005), where politics is not about consensus or deliberation but about the creation of antagonistic camps. Linguistic simplicity becomes the communicative bridge that allows this antagonism to be clearly drawn and widely accepted. Through phrases like *"Build the wall," "Drain the swamp," "America First,"* and *"Fake news,"* Trump distills complex policy matters into emotionally charged slogans that tap into pre-existing frustrations and anxieties among his base. These slogans function as empty signifiers—open to interpretation but unified in opposition to some clearly defined "other," whether that be immigrants, the media, the Democratic party, or global institutions.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective (Fairclough, 1995), such use of language does ideological work by making certain assumptions seem "natural" and unchallengeable. When Trump says, *"I am your voice"* or *"They're not after me, they're*

after you," he invokes a moral order in which he alone represents the will of the people, and anyone opposing him is, by extension, opposing the people themselves. This binary worldview is enhanced through rhetorical repetition and emotional simplification, as Lakoff (2004) and Ahmed (2004) point out—strategies that ensure that the message resonates both cognitively and affectively.

Simplicity here does not signal weakness or intellectual deficiency but acts as a tool of affective mobilization. Emotional language—especially fear, anger, pride, and resentment—circulates within Trump's speeches and rallies, producing what Ahmed (2004) describes as affective economies. These emotions bind the audience to the speaker and to each other, reinforcing a shared identity that is constantly defined against an excluded out-group. Whether it's *"radical leftists," "illegal immigrants,"* or *"the deep state,"* the enemy is constructed in simplified, absolute terms—making it easier for the public to react, engage, and align themselves accordingly.

Moreover, the success of Trump's rhetorical strategy lies not only in content but in form. His speeches rarely rely on detailed policy outlines or sophisticated arguments; instead, they depend on easily repeatable, emotionally resonant messages that can circulate quickly in both oral and digital spaces. This aligns with Wetherell's (2012) understanding of affective discourse as socially contagious, particularly when delivered in forms that require minimal cognitive effort to understand but elicit maximum emotional reaction. Trump's mastery of this style—especially on social media platforms like Twitter—allowed him to communicate with immediacy and impact, often bypassing institutional filters such as the press or fact-checkers.

This mode of communication is particularly effective in an age of digital saturation, where attention spans are short, and emotionally charged content tends to outperform detailed analysis. Trump's linguistic style, thus, exemplifies a broader trend of linguistic populism—where simplified, emotionally powerful discourse becomes the norm rather than the exception. This trend, however, raises profound concerns for the health of democratic discourse. As Fairclough (1995) warns, when ideological positions are presented in overly simplified, emotionally manipulative ways, it erodes the space for rational deliberation, critical debate, and nuanced understanding of political realities.

In sum, the strategic use of linguistic simplicity in Trump's rhetoric is central to the construction of an "us versus them" narrative that underpins his populist appeal. It enables inclusion among his followers through familiarity and accessibility while promoting exclusion of perceived outgroups through emotional polarization. It transforms

complex social issues into clear moral choices and aligns public emotion with political action. Far from being an incidental stylistic choice, Trump's plain language is a highly effective discursive tool—one that simplifies, unifies, and polarizes all at once.

Understanding this mechanism is not just about analyzing one political figure; it is about recognizing a shift in how political communication operates in contemporary societies. As language continues to evolve alongside technology and media, the lessons of Trump's rhetoric will remain vital for scholars, journalists, and citizens concerned with the future of democratic engagement and the power of words to shape the political world.

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