



Predominance of utterances on Joe Biden's Presidential Campaign Speech 2020 in Georgia: Van Dijk Critical Discourse Analysis

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Article Info

Article history

Received: January 2025;
Accepted: March 2025; Published:
April 2026

Keywords:

Critical Discourse Analysis,
Political Speech, Van Dijk,
Presidential Campaign Speech

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Abstract (200-250)

This study aims to examine the predominance of discourse in Joe Biden's 2020 Presidential Campaign Speech delivered in Georgia. This study employs Van Dijk's critical discourse theory as its primary analytical framework. In addition, it adopts descriptive qualitative methods to interpret the findings. The data used in this study is Joe Biden's 2020 presidential campaign speech delivered in Atlanta, Georgia. The speech takes place in Georgia, where Biden won the presidential election. Van Dijk's critical discourse theory, encompassing the micro-level linguistic structure, is systematically applied in this study. Furthermore, the analysis of superstructure and macrostructure reveals significant discursive patterns. As a result, this political speech demonstrates how Biden employs the comparison technique to convey explicit persuasive aims. Moreover, this technique generates persuasive discourse that Van Dijk's critical theory comprehensively elaborates.

INTRODUCTION

Discourse takes several forms. It can be advertising text, news, or speech text. Speech text is defined as a linguistic skill in the art of oral expression (Gorys Keraf, 2009; Johnstone & Andrus, 2024). This language skill aims to convey a message, ideology, or even a specific goal. Furthermore, speeches can serve as a powerful tool to influence and convince listeners of a particular point of view (Isa & Zayyad, 2023).

Speeches come in various forms. For example, speeches delivered during ceremonies that cover educational topics can be tailored to the venue, purpose, and social environment. One such speech is a political speech. McNair, (2017)

defines political speeches as a form of purposeful communication conducted by politicians to achieve specific goals. These political speeches are then divided into several functions. As Chilton, (2025) stated, political speeches can function as a means of societal control, enabling communicators to shape public opinion. It means that communicators have the authority to deliver speeches and attempt to control the public's way of thinking. Windlesham (as cited in (Effendy, 1992) further adds that political speeches also aim to influence society to behave in accordance with the communicator's wishes. These specific goals can be to win elections or to legitimise a system and power. Joe Biden's speech during the 2020 presidential campaign is one example.

Joe Biden's 2020 presidential campaign speech in Georgia carries a distinct purpose and ideology that warrants rigorous analysis. Therefore, applying Van Dijk's critical discourse theory constitutes a significant methodological tool for analysing the purposeful communication and embedded ideology in Biden's campaign speech (Van Dijk, 2020; Wodak, 2022). Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis (CDA) not only considers the micro-level linguistic structure of the text but also examines macro-content, social cognition, and sociopolitical context (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023; Kadim, 2022).

Several previous studies also helped this study, such as the research conducted by Dewi et al., (2025) entitled "Critical Discourse Analysis of Teun A. Van Dijk's Model of the Inaugural Speech of the President of the Republic of Indonesia in 2024." This study uses descriptive and explanatory methods using a qualitative model. The researchers use Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis to examine social cognition and context in the President of the Republic of Indonesia's 2024 speech. The results of the study also show that the speech was delivered persuasively and builds public optimism under the leadership of President Prabowo. This research helps this study to understand a comprehensive explanation of cognitive analysis and social context.

The next research comes from Purwanti et al., (2025), entitled "Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Using Teun A. Van Dijk's Model in the 'Kabur Aja Dulu' Hashtag in the Kompas.com News Channel". This research also draws on Van Dijk's theory of critical discourse analysis. Using Van Dijk's three dimensions, this study found that mass media play an important role in directing and framing information for the general public. For this reason, this is very helpful for

researchers in critically analysing the function and ideology using linguistic structural strategies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. Dewi et al., (2025) explains that this research approach aims to describe and explain certain behaviours, phenomena, or events through meaningful sentence descriptions, without using numerical calculations or predictions, with an emphasis on inductively and comprehensively understanding meaning. The data used in this study is taken from Joe Biden's 2020 presidential campaign speech. The setting of this speech was Atlanta, Georgia. Georgia was a pivotal swing state in the 2020 United States presidential election, where Biden secured a historic victory over Trump. Biden's victory in Georgia made this campaign speech a particularly significant object of analysis.

The research analysis was divided into several stages. Because this study utilised Van Dijk's critical discourse theory, the analysis was divided into four major sub-themes. The first was macro-level structural analysis, followed by micro-level structural analysis, social cognition, and, finally, social context.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of Joe Biden's speech at the presidential campaign in Georgia will be divided into three sections in accordance with Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis theory.

Joe Biden's Speech Text Structure in the 2020 United States Presidential Campaign in Georgia

Macro-Structure

Van Dijk's macrostructure is divided into two parts: themes and topics. Van Dijk (1980), as cited in Tannen et al., (2004), asserts that macro-level analysis reveals power, dominance, or even inequality in society (Julaeha et al., 2021; Winingsih et al., 2022). Therefore, theme and topic are not merely intended to reveal the core of a discussion. They can also reveal how a speech's topic and theme, in general, can demonstrate dominance and power.

In Joe Biden's speech, he indirectly emphasised his central theme to garner public support for his victory in the 2020 United States presidential election. This

indirect element was mentioned in Joe Biden's speech. He strategically described the perceived failures and shortcomings of Trump's administration during his previous term as President of the United States. This description was deliberately constructed to have a negative connotation toward Trump's leadership, thereby enhancing Biden's comparative appeal. For example, he said, "Well, that is what the Trump Administration has done," (03:20 mins). Then he added several sentences such as "He has not brought anybody together" (07:09 mins). Joe Biden used this sentence to emphasise that the American government under Trump's leadership was not running smoothly. In addition, Biden implied that Trump was a president for himself, not for the interests of others or his people.

In addition to containing persuasive elements, Joe Biden's speech also outlined the work plan for his cabinet if he were to lead the United States government. However, of course, this cannot be separated from comparing the results of the Trump administration. It can be seen from his statement, "I'll protect Security and Medicare. Meanwhile, Donald Trump says if he's re-elected, he's going to change how we fund it," (11:08). It can be seen from this data that Biden wants the people of Georgia to know that one of his work plans that will be realized if he is elected is to protect the regulation in security and Medicare yields for Americans. However, he also tried to show that if the government were under Trump, this would not have happened, or would have even happened before. Thus, triggering Biden's statement as in the previous sentence. It can be concluded that Joe Biden systematically employs the Comparing Technique to attract listeners' support and reinforce his political credibility (Kadim, 2022; Rahro et al., 2024).

Therefore, every topic discussed in this campaign speech will lead to the overarching theme of Biden's speech. The overarching theme of Biden's speech, as mentioned earlier, is to encourage the public to consider and elect him as President of the United States in 2020. The persuasive elements in Biden's speech are implicit and aimed at attracting voters' attention and votes. He also uses comparison to capture the attention of sympathisers.

Superstructure

The superstructure in a discourse text can be interpreted as a scheme. A scheme refers to the flow of a speech. Irvine (1974), as cited in Tannen et al.,

(2004), states that schemes encompass several structural categories. The first is usually an opening greeting. However, opening greetings cannot be universally generalised for all types of social groups. Even a simple opening greeting must be carefully tailored to the type of speech, the setting, the audience's age group, and the specific social context (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023).

The scheme in Joe Biden's presidential campaign speech uses an opening, body, and closing flow. However, the way Joe Biden delivers each scheme has a specific pattern. For example, in the opening, Joe Biden introduces himself. As shown in the data, "My name is Joe Biden" (00:11 mins). Then continued with the sentence "I'm Jill Biden's husband, and I'm Kamala's running mate" (00:11). Several sentences above offer an interesting opening by mentioning personal identity and colleagues in a coalition. Then, the opening section is more interesting, where Biden directly alludes to his opponent in the presidential candidacy, Donald Trump. It is evident in the sentence "That's President Trump. He's having trouble being heard over there" (00:11). This shows Biden directly discussing the main point of the discussion, where he tried to use the comparison technique at the beginning of the opening. Then he enters the body scheme, which contains campaign promises, and does not escape the comparison technique. As stated in the sentence "Let's give the people of Georgia new senators who will fight for your interests, not for Donald Trump's interests," (04:23), Biden invited Georgians and campaigned for the election of senators under the Democratic Party, also by comparing senators under Trump and the Republican Party.

In the closing section, Biden also uses the technique of comparing. However, this is accompanied by rhetorical or persuasive discourse that indicates that there will always be hope for America. The hope Biden refers to is a leader and government led by America itself. Therefore, if the country's leadership returns to the right Americans, Biden believes the future will be bright if American leadership adheres to truth and unity. By adding sentences such as, "Everybody knows who Donald Trump is. Let's show them who we are" (18:52), this sentence can be seen as comparing Trump's image to the points Biden has already mentioned. On the other hand, Biden's positive message of winning the presidential election is also conveyed in this speech, as in "We win Georgia"

(18:52). This statement conveys a sense of victory without resorting to the word "will." Not to be forgotten, the closing speech concludes with a repeated sentence of thanks to convey the message that Biden is truly grateful.

Micro-structure

Microstructure refers to the analysis of language use itself, including verbal interactions and linguistic patterns (Lumah & Sulistyawati, 2022; Tannen et al., 2004). This language use refers to the analysis of individual words, sentence patterns, and the types of expressions used in a speech. Ngarfi, (2024) further adds that the meaning of a discourse can be comprehensively understood by meticulously analysing its sentence structure and lexical choices. Therefore, the elements that make up a speech paragraph are crucial for constructing meaning. Therefore, some of the micro-level structural findings from Biden's presidential campaign speech will be outlined below.

a. Coherence

Coherence refers to the logical continuity and thematic consistency between different parts of a discourse. This integration is deliberately constructed to make sentence patterns and overall discourse more engaging and varied (Apirakvanalee & Zhai, 2023). Furthermore, conjunctions or connecting words can help create harmony in the discourse. For example, in Biden's speech, he said:

*"Nobody should have to **work** two jobs to be above the poverty level. It's wrong. We're going to change it. And by the way, **when** we do it, what all experts will tell you, even the Wall Street types, we're going to **raise** the **economy**, **raise** the standard of living for everybody. **When** folks at the bottom do better, everybody does better all the way up the ladder."*
(12:56)

From this statement, we can see that Biden discussed jobs in the opening, followed by a guarantee of financial freedom for all. Furthermore, this continues with the next topic of discussion: improving a family's financial standing can guarantee a secure life for families in America. Furthermore, they will not need to work two jobs simultaneously—the conjunction "when" is also used repeatedly to equate time and opportunity.

b. Pronoun

Pronouns constitute one of the most revealing linguistic features in campaign speeches (Amaireh, 2023). Some data found in Biden's speeches include:

*"That sense of optimism. What **we** can do. What **we** will do. What **we** can overcome. What **we** will overcome."* (04:230)

*"**We**'re going to give black and minority families a real shot to own a home, start a small business, send a child to college..."* (13:23)

*"I'm optimistic because I know **we** can meet the challenge of the climate crisis by unleashing American ingenuity and manufacturing..."* (15:17)

The three data samples above demonstrate that Biden frequently uses the pronoun "we" across all topics he discusses. This pattern suggests that Biden strategically positions himself as part of the people, thereby constructing an inclusive political identity (Lathar et al., 2023). The diversity of the people is clearly evident in the second data point, which emphasises his call for unity to provide opportunities for minorities. He also emphasises equal access to facilities and infrastructure for all segments of society without any racist remarks. Furthermore, Biden repeatedly repeats the pronoun "we" in the first data point, along with the words "optimism" and "optimistic" in the first and third data points. Biden directly implies that he is one of them. He stands with these powerless people and encourages them to remain optimistic despite their challenges.

c. Lexicon

The diction used in a speech can also support the quality of the discourse before the public. We know this as lexicon. Lexicon plays an equally important role in constructing meaning in each sentence, reflecting the speaker's ideological stance (Isa & Zayyad, 2023). As in Biden's statement, "But still Donald Trump refuses to listen to science. We shouldn't be politicizing this race for a vaccine," (07:09). Biden uses the word "politicizing" to soften the meaning that not everything can be attributed to political conspiracies. It is because at that time the number of deaths due to COVID-19 in the United States was increasing, but President Trump, who was in office at that time, did not believe in the process of healing or prevention through vaccines. Therefore, Biden

softened the word "does not believe" and used the words "refuses" and "politicising."

d. Idiom

An idiom is a linguistic expression that does not exactly match its original meaning. For example, in this speech, when Biden says, "Donald Trump has waved the white flag..." (06:12), the term "white flag" does not mean a white flag. The meaning of the idiom is that President Trump "surrendered" to the surging COVID-19 situation in the United States at that time.

e. Presupposition

Presuppositions are defined as conditions in which listeners already know and believe something about a discourse that does not require detailed explanation (Dewi et al., 2025; Murillo & Yeh, 2021). In other words, this relates to the delivery of facts already known to the public, which the speaker then revalidates. In his campaign speech, Biden explained the consequences of Trump's work, which had negative effects on the citizens of the United States, such as Trump's unfair treatment of minorities, rejection of vaccines, and high tax rates that are burdened on the people. In his speech, one of Biden's sentences stated, "Trump got a Supreme Court Justice, and **you know** why he did it, it is clear to everybody now, to destroy the Affordable Care Act, to take away the healthcare for 20 million Americans who have it," (09:34). Bold words such as "**you know**" are considered presumptions, namely facts that are already known, and Biden added the phrase to emphasize and revalidate it.

Social Context

Van Dijk (1992) asserts that context is one of the fundamental elements that construct discourse, enabling it to be properly understood. As long as participants or listeners are involved in the discourse, this "context" is inseparable from it. Context can be interpreted and adapted to how listeners understand the conversation, and it also dynamically adapts to the prevailing social environment (Murillo & Yeh, 2021; Winingsih et al., 2022).

In Biden's speech, he clearly positioned himself as a common man, as previously explained in microstructure, by using the word "we." This "we" refers

to marginalised groups and minorities, such as Black people, those from lower economic classes, and those who lack access to adequate healthcare. Moreover, Biden called for unity in diversity and for the elimination of racism in his future leadership.

Social Cognition

Social cognition refers to the values of belief and knowledge formed through discourse (Marzuki, 2023; Van Dijk, 2020; Van Laar et al., 2019). These values of belief and knowledge are then indirectly recognised by the audience. This, in essence, is part of the speaker's power or authority.

In Biden's Presidential Campaign Speech in Georgia, he stated:

"And remember, remember the final words left to us by your late congressman, and my personal friend, an American hero, John Lewis. He said, "The vote is the most powerful, nonviolent change agent you have in a Democratic Society." He went on to say, "You must use it. It's not guaranteed. You can lose it." Use it. You have the power to win this election..." (18:52)

From this statement, we can see that Biden is again reminding Americans that the adage "American hero" will always be directed at them. Biden added a quote that ultimately leads to a persuasive discourse. The discourse invites him to exercise his right to vote in the presidential election. He also relates a belief that what John Lewis said is directed at future generations.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, Joe Biden's presidential campaign speech in Georgia powerfully demonstrated his authoritative and persuasive qualities as a keynote speaker (Hamed & Alqurashi, 2025; Wodak, 2022). Van Dijk's theoretical contribution, through critical discourse studies, demonstrates that a speech's discourse is not merely a vehicle for conveying a message but also contains specific structural patterns and strategic cues designed to achieve particular communication goals (Kadim, 2022; Hussain et al., 2023).

These sentence patterns were not constructed accidentally, but rather deliberately imbued with ideological meaning. For example, the technique of comparison was used throughout the speech. In addition to using comparison, Biden also indirectly conveyed his vision and mission while inviting voters to support him. All word choices were designed to convey sympathy, as if the future presidential candidate were also part of the common people.

This study, however, is limited by the volume of speech data analysed. For further research, a broader corpus of Biden's campaign speeches from various states across the United States could be systematically analysed (Amaireh, 2022; Al-Azzawi et al., 2022). Additionally, using corpus linguistics software to collect large amounts of data would be highly beneficial. This large amount of data can help researchers analyse and interpret campaign speech patterns more generally and absolutely.

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