Constructing International Collective Identity in Crisis: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Zelenskyy's Political Speeches During the Ukraine-Russia War

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بناء الهوية الجمعية الدولية في ظل الأزمات: تحليل نقدي لخطابات زيلينسكي السياسية خلال الحرب الأوكرانية الروسية

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Abstract

In the context of war, leaders' political speeches are characterized by certain identity charged concepts in the form of discourse. Collective identity is one of the most distinguished concepts in leaders' speech as it reflects set of shared values and traditions. Despite extensive research on war rhetoric and ideology, little attention has been given to how political leaders discursively construct collective identity during wartime. This study fills that gap by applying Critical Discourse Analysis to examine Zelenskyy's discursive strategies in the context of the Ukraine war. This study aims to shed light on the analysis of the political discursive strategies employed by Volodymyr Zelenskyy to frame collective identity in attempt to gain international support during the war. In the anlignment with aims of the study, Van Dijk's (2006) Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) and Reisigl & Wodak (2009) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) are adopted as they deal with discursive strategies and historical events. This study is conducted to answer the following questions: What linguistic and discursive strategies did Volodymyr Zelenskyy use in his political speeches during the Russian-Ukrainian war? How do Zelenskyy's speeches manage to construct international collective identity during the war? To what extend does Zelenskyy utilize language to gain international support, solidarity and resilience? The results show that Zelenskyy effectively employed certain strategies represented in nomination, argumentation, emotional intensification, and historical analogy. These results support the aims of the study, as they highlight how language helped shape collective identity, strengthen solidarity, and promote resilience during the war.

Keywords:

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Political Discourse, International Collective Identity, Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA), Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Ukraine-Russia War, Discursive Strategies, Solidarity and Resilience ,

المستخلص

في سياق الحرب، تتميز خطابات القادة السياسية بمفاهيم خطابية مشحونة بالهوية. وتُعد الهوية الجماعية من أبرز المفاهيم في خطاب القادة، إذ تعكس مجموعة من القيم والتقاليد المشتركة. ورغم البحوث المكثفة حول خطاب الحرب وأيديولوجيتها، لم يُولَ اهتمام يُذكر لكيفية بناء القادة السياسيين للهوية الجماعية خطابيًا خلال الحرب. تُغطي هذه الدراسة هذه الفجوة بتطبيق تحليل الخطاب النقدي لدراسة استراتيجيات زيلينسكي الخطابية في سياق حرب أوكرانيا. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على تحليل الاستراتيجيات الخطابية السياسية التي استخدمها فولوديمير زيلينسكي لتأطير الهوية الجماعية، سعيًا لكسب الدعم الدولي خلال الحرب. وفي إطار أهداف الدراسة، تم اعتماد المنهج الاجتماعي المعرفي (SCA) لفان دايك (٢٠٠٦)، والمنهج التاريخي الخطابي (DHA) لريزيجل وفوداك (٢٠٠٩)، حيث يتناولان الاستراتيجيات الخطابية والأحداث التاريخية. أُجريت هذه الدراسة للإجابة على الأسئلة التالية: ما هي الاستراتيجيات اللغوية والخطابية التي استخدمها فولوديمير زيلينسكي في خطاباته السياسية خلال الحرب الروسية الأوكرانية؟ هل نجحت خطاباته في بناء هوية جماعية دولية خلال الحرب؟ إلى أي مدى استخدم زيلينسكي اللغة لكسب الدعم والتضامن والمرونة الدولية؟ تُظهر النتائج أن زيلينسكي استخدم بفعالية استراتيجيات مُحددة، مثل الترشيح، والجدال، والتكثيف العاطفي، والتشبيه التاريخي. تدعم هذه النتائج أهداف الدراسة، إذ تُبرز كيف ساهمت اللغة في تشكيل الهوية الجماعية، وتعزيز التضامن، والمرونة خلال الحرب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل النقدي للخطاب، الخطاب السياسي، الهوية الجماعية الدولية، المقاربة الاجتماعيّة المعرفية، المقاربة التاريخية للخطاب، الحرب الأوكرانية–الروسية، الاستراتيجيات الخطابية، التضامن والمرونة

1. Introduction

International identity is very important because it helps people feel connected as one political group, sharing the same traditions, history, and values. During wars and conflicts, leaders often use political speeches to reshape international identity and influence public opinion. One leader who has done this is Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine, who became a strong voice in the Russian-Ukrainian war. He used language to strengthen Ukrainian international identity, bring people together, and gain international support (Gulevich & Gulevich, 2023; Elsharkawy, 2023).

Since the war started on February 24, 2022, Ukraine has struggled to protect its independence. Zelenskyy had to give powerful speeches to show that Ukrainians are united and fighting against Russian attacks. Whether speaking to Ukrainians or other countries, he described Ukraine as a democratic nation defending freedom. He also used historical and international symbols to make people feel more connected. His speeches were not only for Ukrainians but also for the international community. He spoke to different parliaments, global organizations, and conferences to gain support. Zelenskyy presented the war as a battle between democracy and dictatorship, which made many countries sympathize with Ukraine (Elsharkawy, 2023).

Zelenskyy's speeches include different language techniques, such as repeating words, using war-related comparisons, emotional expressions, and patriotic symbols which make people feel united. He also reminds the international community about past struggles, like the 9/11 attack and the Soviet occupation, to connect the present fight with history. Additionally, he calls Ukraine the "shield of Europe," showing that Ukraine's security is important for all of Europe. This way, he encourages Western

countries to give more military and financial help (Bilevych, 2024).

The study aims to analyze the language and ways of speaking used by President Zelenskyy during the war. The purpose of using CDA is to see how Zelenskyy's speeches help build a sense of unity among Ukrainians and support from the rest of the world. The analysis will focus on key speeches delivered to international communities, including the U.S. Congress and NATO, to understand how language serves as a tool for political persuasion and identity formation during times of war.

1.1. The research Questions:

1. What are the discursive strategies Zelenskyy employed while addressing the international leaders?
2. How do Zelenskyy's speeches manage to construct international collective identity during the war?
3. To what extend does Zelenskyy utilize language to gain international support, solidarity and resilience?

1.2. The Aims

This study aims at achieving the following points:

1. To identify the discursive strategies Zelenskyy employed while addressing the international leaders.
2. To examine how Zelenskyy's speeches construct international collective identity during the war.
3. To investigate how Zelenskyy utilize language to gain international support, solidarity and resilience?

2. Theoretical background

Political discourse, especially in times of war, reflects complex interactions among language, power, ideology, and identity. To systematically analyze these interactions, it is essential to ground the study within a well-established theoretical framework. This chapter outlines the key theoretical foundations that guide the current research, which seeks to explore how President Volodymyr Zelenskyy uses discourse to construct international collective identity during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to analyze how social power shapes language and how language, in turn, shapes social power. The role of language in supporting dominance, forming ideology and carrying out political plans is emphasized by Fairclough, van Dijk and Wodak. In this framework, researchers use two models: van Dijk's SCA which examines the mental structures behind language use and the DHA by Reisigl and Wodak which places discourse in its social and historical setting. The chapter also offers additional theories about political discourse, identity, ideology and power that help explain Zelenskyy's way of speaking. All of these theories and methods make it possible to analyze how Ukraine is presented as a defender of democracy and how support for the country is encouraged.

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA looks at the ways language, power and society are related. Fairclough (1995) points out that CDA studies the ways in which discourse, events, texts and social structures are connected. In CDA, language is never free of meaning and always reflects power and inequality (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). van Dijk (1998) points out that CDA examines how power, inequality and

dominance are maintained in various texts and across different periods (McClure, 2008). Fairclough, Wodak and Meyer are among the researchers who view CDA as a separate discipline with its own approaches and ways of organizing power (Breeze, 2011). Wodak and Meyer (2001) note that CDA examines both the overt and hidden ways power is expressed in language. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue that language is an activity that is guided by culture and society. Widdowson (2004) believes CDA centers on issues of ideology and social justice, whereas Kress (1996) believes it is concerned with challenges of unequal power. Bhatia and colleagues (2008) state that CDA investigates power, social change and inequality by examining language as a form of social action. CDA brings to light the ways in which power structures in texts affect society.

2.2. Socio-cognitve approach

To explore political discourse and discover how ideas are developed using language, van Dijk (1997a, 2006b) recommends using a cognitive approach. So, discourse structures are formed by our own thinking and mental activities. The term "cognitive" means that political ideas and beliefs are formed and stored through memories. For this reason, van Dijk's model is built around cognition, society and discourse. Because of this connection, political ideas are discussed and debated in social life.

van Dijk (2006c) points out that political groups and their struggles for power and interests happen through discourse. For these groups to remain strong and prosper, they must be aware of their beliefs and be well-organized. To understand how these ideologies function in speech, we can analyze the structures and methods used in language. It involves looking at how people communicate in various circumstances. To accomplish this,

researchers study "concepts, propositions, mental representations and the ways people use these in their thought processes". How groups come together and form their views on their struggles reveals how social ideologies function. Van Dijk further argued that there are two levels of discourse analysis: macro vs. micro. As the micro deals with Language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication, the macro level refers to power, dominance and inequality between social groups (Van Dijk, 2006).

By using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it is possible to examine political discourse by focusing on the language strategies used by political speakers. This includes how people are presented, which authorities are seen as important, how arguments are built, and how different social groups are shown. CDA also helps in studying how evidence, facts, assumptions, unclear language, victimization, and self-praise are used in discourse to promote certain ideologies. This method is useful because it is flexible and can be applied to different theories and viewpoints (Van Dijk, 2006).

2.3. Discourse-Historical Approach

Wodak (2001) defines discourse as a set of connected language acts that happen in social situations. These can be spoken, written, or semiotic texts that are thematically linked. Like Fairclough, Wodak (2001) sees texts as results of discourse and describes them as lasting products of language use. Normally, the discourse-historical approach coincides text analysis with genre and discourse relationships involving both social elements and contextual factors. No two texts are separate entities in discourse analysis according to this method because intertextuality describes textual relationships between elements, and interdiscursivity defines the way various discourse systems affect

each other. DHA enables researchers to understand modifications in texts and discourses which result from social and political events (Wodak, 2001).

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) includes essential elements which enable researchers to conduct CDA. The critical aspect of DHA enables researchers to identify concealed power structures and ideologies and inequalities which exist in discourse. The research approach requires self-reflectiveness because it examines data together with the researcher's involvement. DHA explores how language creates ideologies while also showing how ideologies undergo both challenges and maintenance during the creation process. Social values together with beliefs find representation through discourse as they both reflect existing values and shape them. Moreover, power is also central to DHA, as it examines how language is used to control, maintain, or resist dominance in society. Lastly, context which plays a key role in DHA because understanding discourse requires looking at the historical, social, and political background where it is used (Wodak, 2001).

Reisigl & Wodak's 2006 elaborated five discursive strategies to study discourse. Theses strategies are developed to fullful certain linguistic, political or psychlogical aims. The first one is known as Nomination which refers to how social actors, objects, and events are named in discourse. The second one is Predication which means analyzing what characteristics are assigned to these actors, objects, or events. The third one is Argumentation which deals with how ideas are justified or opposed in discourse. The fourth one is Perspectivization which looks at the speaker's position and viewpoint in a discourse. Finally, Mitigation and Intensification which examine how certain elements in discourse

are made stronger or weaker, depending on the speaker's intention (Wodak, 2001).

Accordingly, Reisigl & Wodak (2009) apply DHA in a study to show how national identity is constructed in Austria. In the meanwhile, they analyze different types of texts, such as interviews, media reports, and political speeches. The method involves three interconnected levels of discourse analysis. The first level focuses on identifying the topics and contents of the discourse. The second level examines discursive strategies (how language is used to fulfill political, psychological, or ideological functions). The third level deals with the linguistic means and forms of realization, analyzing how ideas are linguistically expressed, including lexical choices, syntactic structures, and rhetorical devices.

Reisigl & Wodak (2009) focus on linguistic devices used in constructing identity discourse. They study lexical choices and sentence structures that create unity, difference, uniqueness, and continuity. They also highlight deixis, which refers to words that indicate time, place, and people. According to Fowler (1991), deixis helps connect a text to its time and place of communication, as well as its participants. Reisigl & Wodak (2009) also analyze rhetorical and linguistic tools, such as euphemisms, allusions, rhetorical questions, and the use of passive or active voice.

The study by Reisigl & Wodak (2009) assumes that identity is built and maintained through discourse. However, it also shows that identity is shaped by institutions and social structures. Their study argues that there is no fixed identity; instead, it is constructed in different ways depending on the situation. Factors such as the audience, topic, and context influence how national identity is represented.

Reisigl & Wodak (2009) also show that identity discourses are connected to larger **social strategies.** They compare how **politicians and media elites** discuss identity with how it appears in everyday conversations. They find that **political and media elites shape their messages** based on what the public expects. These elites try to meet the public's desire for a national identity by strengthening certain ideas, creating new ones, or downplaying certain elements—such as the myth of permanent neutrality.

2.4. Political discourse

The study of political discourse maintains strong connections with CDA because these fields investigate how political powers manifest through linguistic expressions. The critical study of political discourse is necessary according to van Dijk (1997) because it demonstrates how political power functions through spoken and communicative practices. The formal statements of politicians make up political discourse alongside broader discourse practices which impact power dynamics and cooperative and resistant behaviors (Muntigl, 2002). In political speeches, speakers use specific language to convey messages, reflect their viewpoints, and to persuade audiences. Political discourse often involves classic forms like slogans, speeches and press conference statements. In the same context, Scott et al. (2002) define political speech as a standardized and repeated message used by politicians to gain recognition and support.

The language used in political speeches plays a conciderable role in shaping public perception, as it allows politicians to frame issues in a way that aligns with their interests (Wodak, 2009). Noticeably, political speeches are different from other forms of speech because they express the speaker's stance on significant

political and economic issues. Collins (2002) describes political speeches as deliberate oratory focused on actions that should be taken by society.

In this regard, the level of acceptance or rejection of certain political speeches usally depends on how effectively a speech presents them. These speeches address matters of common interest and their success depends on the speaker's ability to use persuasive language. More specifically, words in political discourse are powerful tools that can shape public opinion. Price (2000) states that political speeches are inherently linked to power. Politicians use authority to control their audience and gain influence. Effective speech delivery captures the audience's attention and convinces them of the speaker's perspective. The primary goal of political speeches is to highlight critical social and economic issues while persuading the audience that the speaker's policies serve their best interests.

2.5. Identity

Identity has been widely studied in social and discourse analysis. Social Theory has played a major role in European social psychology, while discourse studies have extensively examined identity (van Dijk, 2010; Schiffring & Bamberg, 2006). However, discourse studies often overlook the social and psychological traditions that contribute to identity formation. Van Dijk (2010) explains that identity is socio-cognitive, meaning that it is shaped by shared social cognition, discourse, and interaction. This link between identity, language, and context adds value to discourse analysis. Different scholars have defined identity in various ways. Gilroy (1997) associates identity with belonging and argues that the formation of "we" automatically implies the exclusion of "they." Kidd and Teagle (2012) suggest that identity is about how we see ourselves, how others see us,

and how we try to define who we are. Another view connects identity to comparison, emphasizing that the verb "to identify" plays a key role in the concept of identity. Hegel (1807, cited in Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) considers identity inter-subjective rather than just personal, meaning that external factors like society shape individual consciousness. He argues that recognition by others is crucial in forming identity. Based on this idea, the "self" is shaped by its identification with a specific group. In politics, McAllister and Wilmsen (1996) assert that collective identities often serve to justify inequality. Laclu and Mouffe (1985, cited in Benwell & Stokoe, 2006) argue that society itself is discursive, meaning that identity is constructed through language and interaction. Identity is shaped by the community, self-perception, and discourse. Van Dijk (2010) describes identity as a property of human collectivities, including gender, ethnicity, class, ideology, and language. While social identities may change over time, they are not instantly created or discarded. Identity is a shared social construct, existing in the minds of individuals within the same community. These shared representations can take various forms, including knowledge, attitudes, emotions, and ideologies (van Dijk, 2010). Understanding identity involves examining how individuals define themselves within their social groups and how discourse shapes these identities.

2.6. Ideology

The social framework of cognition known as ideology connects to both social structures and functions (Van Dijk, 1995). CDA seeks through discourse analysis to reveal suppressed ideological elements thus helping people understand societal power structures and fight against dominant forces (Eagleton 1994).

Schwarzmantel (2008) divides ideology into two distinct categories which include control-related elements and organizational principles for society with its established variations. The second form of ideology proves essential because it operates without detection yet shapes how people see the world and interact with others. The utilization of language through political discourse by participants serves as a powerful defense mechanism which requires CDA analysis to examine these strategies properly. Wodak & Meyer (2001) state that CDA deeply studies ideology because it shows how power structures establish their authority and gain legitimacy. Research teams study political speeches together with media reports as well as advertising materials to discover how ideological structures support power dynamics including nationalism alongside racism and sexism. Language plays a central role in ideology because it generates meaning through constant choices made by speakers (Verschueren, 2011). Ideology is not directly tied to beliefs but is reflected in language use. It is present in discourse and requires critical analysis to reveal biases, discrimination, and distortions of reality (Xin, 2005). Language structures like transitivity, modality, and intertextuality are effective tools for ideological analysis (Fowler & Kress, 1979). Ideology has a long history, first appearing in France in the 18th century as a social process of spreading symbols (Thompson, 1990). It originates from the Greek words "idea" and "logos," meaning the study of ideas (Feng & Xu, 2000). Over time, the concept has evolved, leading to various interpretations across academic fields (Li, 2009). In CDA, ideology is influenced by Marxist and post-structuralist traditions, particularly the Frankfurt School (Xin, 2016). Different scholars have provided their perspectives on ideology. Fowler and Kress examined media reports, revealing how

language reflects ideological biases (Fowler & Kress, 1979). Fairclough followed this approach, defining ideology as "meaning in the service of power" (Fairclough, 1995). According to Van Dijk (1995) ideology represents the collective understanding of social mental processes that groups use to define their membership and essential values. Van Dijk (1998; 2004) developed his original concept to show ideologies determine group identities and establish opponents while controlling resource distribution and rights allocation. Through language ideology shapes power systems and social interactions in discourse while being deeply rooted within discourse.

2.7. Power

Power functions as a fundamental element of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explain the distribution of social, economic and political imbalances. Through CDA researchers investigate how dominant groups build power structures which they use to maintain their dominance while those who are dominated fight back against this control. Fairclough (1995) expands power beyond authority to include control over discourse creation and its production processes and the power to decide who gets to participate. According to Van Dijk (1996) power manifests through social relationships between institutional and organizational groups as well as between social collectives. The dominance of certain social groups depends on social power which shapes both their conduct and their continued superiority. To understand domination, inequality, and racism, it is necessary to study power in discourse (Van Dijk, 1993). Power is often reflected in language, where social roles grant individuals the authority to make decisions, ask questions, or claim knowledge (Fowler, 1985). Johnstone (2008) argues that power is more

about agency than dominance, as individuals can influence activities and shape interactions, either positively or negatively. Some speakers use language and social strategies to control discourse, manipulate knowledge, and maintain authority. Wodak (2008) identifies three approaches to power. The first sees power as the result of resources possessed by individuals (French & Raven, 1959). The second approach links power to interactions and social exchanges (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962, 1975). The third approach considers power a systemic characteristic of society (Foucault, 1975; Giddens, 1984). Understanding power in discourse helps reveal how language is used to control, influence, and shape reality.

3. Method

This study adopt qualitative approach to analyze discursive strategies employed by the president of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky. The data collection are based on Zelenskyy's speeches related to Russian-Ukrainian war that began on February 24, 2022. A total of 3 speeches are gathered from three prominent media channels CNN, BBC and The Times of Isreal. Three speeches are selected according related subjects, the first one was delivered before the Congress in Mar 16 2022 and the second one was delivered virtually addressing NATO leaders in Mar 17 2022 and the third one was delivered to Israeli lawmakers on March 20, 2022. The reason these three speeches are choosen simply because these three speeches are turned out to be the most common ones in which historical events were evoked. Following the linguistic analysis, the findings were interpreted in relation to the research questions to understand how Zelenskyy framed international collective identity.

3.1. The Model

Two models are applied in this study in oreder to adequately meet the aims of this study. The first approach used in this study is van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach as it partly deals with aims of this study such as constructing international identity, the choice of words and reinforcing ideologies. Meanwhile, Reisigl & Wodak's (2009) Discourse-Historical approach is also used as it deals with the other part of the study represented in showing the discursive strategies which involve nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization and Mitigation and Intensification. This dual framework enables a multi-dimensional analysis of political discourse, particularly focusing on the rhetorical strategies employed by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in constructing collective identity and garnering international solidarity during the Russian-Ukrainian war.

3.1.1. Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) – van Dijk (2006)

Van Dijk's approach adds a cognitive dimension to discourse analysis by linking linguistic structures to mental representations and social knowledge. It emphasizes how discourse influences and is influenced by people's beliefs, ideologies, and shared memories. This approach is devided into three categories:

- **Discourse Structure**: This component examines the organization of political speeches and the rhetorical strategies used, such as repetition, metaphors, and inclusive pronouns, which reinforce collective identity.
- **Cognitive Processes**: SCA investigates how discourse activates mental models in audiences. It explores how leaders shape public opinion by aligning their narratives with shared values, historical memory, and identity constructs.

- **Social Context**: Language does not exist in a vacuum; it is deeply embedded in societal structures. This element analyzes how Zelenskyy's discourse reflects and engages with the broader political, historical, and geopolitical contexts, including war, diplomacy, and international alliances.

By incorporating these three levels, the SCA accounts for both the micro-level of language use and the macro-level of power and ideology.
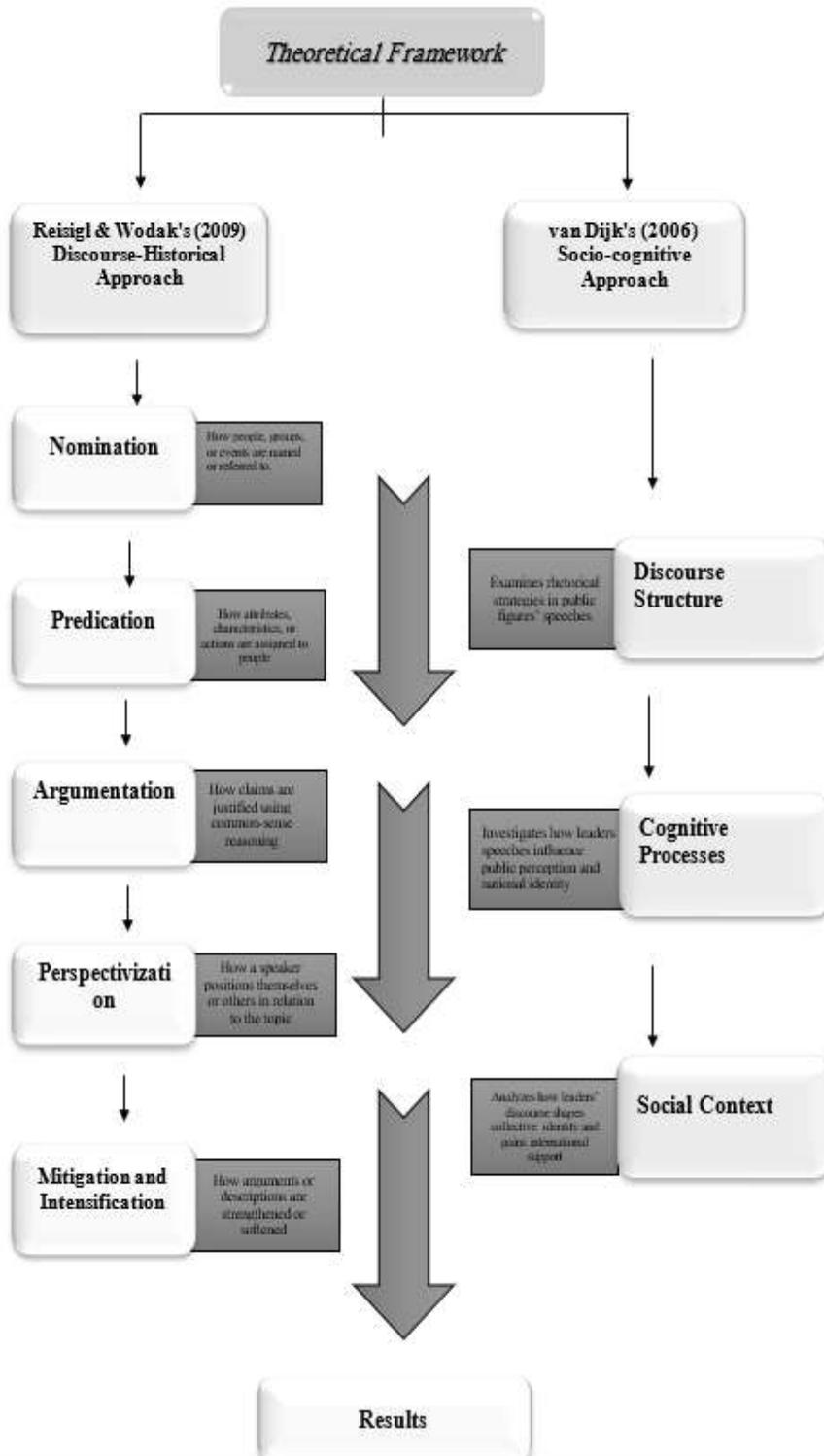
3.1.2. Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) – Reisigl & Wodak (2009)

The DHA is rooted in a historical and contextual understanding of discourse. It emphasizes how language is used to express ideologies, legitimize actions, and construct identities across time and within specific socio-political environments. In this framework, five discursive strategies are employed:

- **Nomination**: This refers to the naming or labeling of social actors, events, or phenomena. It explores how individuals or groups are categorized (e.g., "freedom fighters," "aggressors") and what ideologies underlie such choices.

- **Predication**: This strategy examines how specific characteristics, actions, or values are attributed to those actors. It helps reveal evaluative language and stereotypes, often used to legitimize or delegitimize actors in discourse.

- **Argumentation**: Here, the focus is on the justifications or reasoning mechanisms used to support claims. These include the use of topoi (commonplaces or argumentative warrants) such as justice, history, threat, or responsibility.

- **Perspectivization**: This involves analyzing the speaker's stance, point of view, or level of involvement. It identifies how proximity or distance to certain issues or groups is discursively constructed.
- **Mitigation and Intensification**: This strategy studies how discourse is modulated—either softened or heightened—to influence reception. Intensifiers (e.g., "brutal aggression") or mitigation (e.g., "minor conflict") can emotionally or politically charge the message.

These categories allow a structured analysis of Zelenskyy's discourse and how his rhetoric frames Ukraine's identity and moral position in the war. The following figure illustrates how these two approches are constructed:

Theoretical Framework

Reisigl & Wodak's (2009) Discourse-Historical Approach

van Dijk's (2006) Socio-cognitive Approach

Nomination — How people, groups, or events are named or referred to.

Predication — How attributes, characteristics, or actions are assigned to people.

Discourse Structure — Examines rhetorical strategies in public figures' speeches.

Argumentation — How claims are justified using common-sense reasoning.

Cognitive Processes — Investigates how leaders' speeches influence public perception and national identity.

Perspectivization — How a speaker positions themselves or others in relation to the topic.

Social Context — Analyzes how leaders' discourse shapes collective identity and gains international support.

Mitigation and Intensification — How arguments or descriptions are strengthened or softened.

Results

3.3. Data Analysis

Following Creswell's (2014) model for qualitative research, the data analysis in this study followed a six-step process to ensure a systematic and rigorous examination of Zelenskyy's political discourse and his construction of international collective identity during the Ukraine-Russia war. First, the three selected speeches, delivered on March 16, 17, and 20, 2022, to the U.S. Congress, NATO, and the Israeli Knesset, were collected from trusted media sources (CNN, BBC, Times of Israel), transcribed manually, and organized with contextual details. Second, the speeches were read multiple times for accuracy, allowing the researcher to grasp their tone, emotional force, and thematic direction, while memos captured early observations such as democratic values, historical references, and emotional appeals. Third, the data was manually coded using discursive strategies from Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) DHA (e.g., nomination, argumentation) and van Dijk's (2006) SCA (e.g., cognitive processes, discourse structure), with examples such as "Ukrainians are brave, freedom-loving people" and "Remember Pearl Harbor… 9/11" coded under nomination and argumentation, respectively. Fourth, thematic analysis was employed to generate broader themes including binary oppositions (Ukraine vs. Russia), historical analogies, emotional appeals, and strategic moderatio, each aligned with the study's research questions and frameworks. Fifth, the identified themes were interpreted through the dual framework: DHA clarified how Zelenskyy used historical and linguistic strategies to construct identity and justify action, while SCA explained the cognitive and ideological impact on audiences, particularly through inclusive phrases like "we" and "our land," which reinforced solidarity and appealed to global democratic values.

4. Results

4.1. The Discursive Strategies Zelenskyy Employed While Addressing the International Leaders:

Zelenskyy's discourse begins by constructing collective identities, drawing a sharp line between "us" the Ukrainian people and "them" the Russian aggressors. This is achieved through nomination, one of the core DHA strategies. At the start of his address to the U.S. Congress, he states: **"I have the honor to greet you on behalf of the Ukrainian people — brave and freedom-loving people who for eight years have been resisting the Russian aggression."** This sentence is carefully crafted. The adjectives "brave" and "freedom-loving" are not just compliments, they are ideological markers. They create a cognitive model in the audience's mind of Ukrainians as heroic, moral, and democratic. From van Dijk's perspective, this activates positive in-group schemas that position Ukraine within the same value system as the United States and the broader West. These positive self-representations are essential in building international legitimacy. They are designed to elicit respect, empathy, and political alignment, especially when addressing democratic nations who share similar values of freedom and sovereignty. On the other side, Russia is nominated as an aggressor and violator of fundamental rights. Zelenskyy declares: **"Russia has attacked not just us, not just our land, not just our cities, it went on a brutal offensive against our values, basic human values."** The phrase "brutal offensive" and the concept of "basic human values" elevate the conflict from a territorial war to a global moral crisis. This isn't about military invasion alone, rather it's a symbolic assault on dignity, democracy, and the human condition. By naming Russia's actions in such terms, Zelenskyy mobilizes ideological

polarization, which DHA identifies as essential in wartime discourse. This creates an emotionally charged binary, positioning Ukraine as the front line of civilization against barbarity, good against evil, and modern democracy against imperial aggression.

Zelenskyy implements strategic measures to prevent damaging his relationships with international partners even though his requests require immediate action. During his NATO speech, Zelenskyy recognized that Ukraine remains outside the organization's membership. **"Yes, it is true we are not members of the alliance… But we are defending all our shared values… I am not blaming NATO. I want to be clear."** This statement performs several functions. The speaker establishes his position through this statement which DHA identifies as perspectivization. Zelenskyy demonstrates his awareness of political realities to preserve his credibility. Through mitigating criticism, he maintains a diplomatic tone which includes all parties.

He uses moral and emotional reasoning instead of demanding without reason. His gentle voice together with his precise and repeated requests generates pressure without causing confrontation. As he continues: **"You have at least 20,000 tanks. Ukraine asks for 1 percent, 1 percent of all your tanks."** The repetition of "1 percent" is both quantitative and rhetorical intensification. Zelenskyy uses this approach to change audience perception from feeling obligated to donate toward feeling ashamed when refusing to help.. This is achieved through nomination, one of the core DHA strategies. At the start of his address to the U.S. Congress, he states: "**I have the honor to greet you on behalf of the Ukrainian people, brave and freedom-loving people, who for eight years have been**

resisting the Russian aggression." This sentence is also carefully constructed. The adjectives "brave" and "freedom-loving" are not just compliments, they are ideological markers. They create a cognitive model in the audience's mind of Ukrainians as heroic, moral, and democratic. From van Dijk's perspective, this activates positive in-group schemas that position Ukraine within the same value system as the United States and the broader West. These positive self-representations are essential in building international legitimacy. They are designed to elicit respect, empathy, and political alignment, especially when addressing democratic nations who share similar values of freedom and sovereignty. On the other side, Russia is nominated as an aggressor and violator of fundamental rights. Zelenskyy declares: **"Russia has attacked not just us, not just our land, not just our cities, it went on a brutal offensive against our values, basic human values."**

The phrase "brutal offensive" and the concept of "basic human values" elevate the conflict from a territorial war to a global moral crisis. This isn't about military invasion alone, rather it's a symbolic assault on dignity, democracy, and the human condition. By naming Russia's actions in such terms, Zelenskyy mobilizes ideological polarization, which DHA identifies as essential in wartime discourse. This creates an emotionally charged binary, positioning Ukraine as the front line of civilization against barbarity, good against evil, and modern democracy against imperial aggression.

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4.2. The Construction of International Collective Identity

During the War, Zelenskyy's speeches are rich with historical references and analogies, which serve as powerful tools of argumentation. In his address to Congress, he draws a parallel between Ukraine's situation and two defining moments in American history: **“Remember Pearl Harbor. Terrible morning of December 7, 1941, when your sky was black from the planes attacking you… Remember September 11… when evil tried to turn your cities, independent territories, into battlefields.”**

According to van Dijk, such historical analogies activate deep-seated episodic memory structures in the audience's mind. When American legislators recall Pearl Harbor or 9/11, they remember not only the facts but the feelings of shock, fear, unity, and determination that followed. Zelenskyy draws the logical connection: **“Our country experiences the same every day right now.”** This sentence functions as a tope of similarity, a classic rhetorical device in DHA. It argues that just as Americans responded to attacks on their soil with courage and collective effort, so should they support Ukraine in its current ordeal.

Zelenskyy presents Ukraine as more than a threatened country because he establishes it as a universal symbol of democratic resistance. He states: **“Today, the Ukrainian people are**

**defending not only Ukraine. We are fighting for the values of
Europe and the world."** This reframing transforms Ukraine
from a small state into a global defender of democratic principles.
During his address to the Israeli lawmakers, Zelenskyy uses
intertextual memory: **"They called it 'the final solution to the
Jewish issue.'… Listen to what is sounding now in Moscow…
the 'Ukrainian issue."** The parallel creates an emotional danger
which proves effective for his rhetorical strategy. It reinforces
identity through historical trauma, linking Ukraine's current
struggle to broader global narratives of justice and survival.
Moreover, Zelenskyy adds: **"You saw Russian missiles hit
Kyiv, Babyn Yar. You know what kind of land it is. More
than 100,000 Holocaust victims are buried there. There are
ancient Kyiv cemeteries. There is a Jewish cemetery. Russian
missiles hit there."** This extract exemplifies **historical
argumentation** and **emotional intensification** simultaneously.
Zelenskyy references **Babyn Yar**, a sacred site of Holocaust
memory, to draw an emotionally potent **historical analogy**
between past atrocities and present violence. By emphasizing that
"more than 100,000 Holocaust victims are buried there", he
invokes shared collective trauma, particularly for Israeli and
Jewish audiences, aligning Ukraine's suffering with historically
recognized injustices.

This rhetorical move fits within **van Dijk's cognitive model** as
it activates **episodic memory** and emotional schemas tied to
genocide and persecution. Meanwhile, in DHA terms, it employs
argumentation (through the topos of history and justice) and
intensification (by repeating "Russian missiles hit there") to
evoke outrage and moral alignment. The **use of deixis** ("You
saw") positions the audience as direct witnesses, fostering
engagement and shared responsibility.

4.3. The Utilization of Language to Gain International Support, Solidarity and Resilience:

Zelenskyy's language is emotionally charged, often designed to escalate the audience's emotional engagement and moral sense of urgency. Toward the end of his address to Congress, he moves from geopolitical rhetoric to a raw human plea: **"Now I'm almost 45 years old. Today, my age stopped when the hearts of more than one hundred children stopped beating. I see no sense in life if it cannot stop the deaths."** This is a clear case of intensification. The use of personal age, coupled with the deaths of children, creates a devastating emotional contrast. Zelenskyy humanizes the cost of war, grounding it in irreversible loss. Moreover, Zelenskyy adds: **"That is why I want to remind you of the words of a great woman from Kyiv, whom you know very well. The words of Golda Meir. They are very famous, everyone has heard of them."** This quotation is a clear example of **intertextuality** and **discursive alignment**, strategically employed to reinforce political and emotional solidarity between Ukraine and Israel. By referring to **Golda Meir**, a globally recognized Israeli stateswoman who was born in Kyiv, Zelenskyy draws on **shared historical and cultural memory** to establish **a symbolic connection between Ukrainian and Jewish resilience**.

In terms of **DHA Approach**, this reference functions on multiple strategic levels. First, it serves the function of **nomination**, Golda Meir is explicitly named as a revered figure, representing moral clarity and national struggle. Second, the **predication** of her as **"a great woman from Kyiv"** underlines a positive valuation, suggesting shared origins and values that transcend national boundaries. Third, this move also constitutes **argumentation** via the topos of authority: by invoking Meir's well-known moral

stature, Zelenskyy legitimizes his own discourse and ethical claims in the eyes of his audience.

From **CDA perspective,** this discursive strategy taps into **shared mental models**, particularly those associated with historical memory, national pride, and collective trauma. By addressing Israeli lawmakers with "**whom you know very well**" and affirming that "**everyone has heard of them**," Zelenskyy activates **socially shared knowledge** that reinforces a **collective in-group identity**. The deixis ("you") establishes **proximity** and **personal relevance**, transforming a general historical reference into a direct appeal to memory, emotion, and ethical responsibility.

This is not a mere rhetorical flourish, it is a **strategic move to build international solidarity** by aligning Ukraine's current struggle with a historically grounded ethos of survival and moral resistance. It encourages Israeli audiences to see their national history reflected in Ukraine's present condition, thereby fostering empathy and political alignment.

He concludes with another powerful appeal: **"You can definitely help us protect our lives... But it is up to you, dear brothers and sisters, to choose the answer."** Here, Zelenskyy transforms passive observers into responsible decision-makers. His strategic language generates solidarity while inspiring ethical transformation across borders. By combining **historical intertextuality, identity construction**, and **discursive legitimization**, this passage exemplifies Zelenskyy's broader rhetorical pattern of transforming **cultural memory into political support.**

Discussion

Through his language, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy develops national unity and forged international support as he led Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion. The analytical approach which combines Socio-Cognitive Approach by van Dijk (2006) with Discourse-Historical Approach by Reisigl and Wodak (2009) reveales patterns that correspond to established research on political discourse and war rhetoric.

The building of identity through ideological polarization stands confirmed by multiple research investigations. Zelenskyy uses nomination and predication, for example: "***Today, the Ukrainian people are defending not only Ukraine. We are fighting for the values of Europe and the world***", to build an opposition between his Ukrainian nation and democratic allies on one side versus Russian aggressors on the other while portraying Ukraine as upholding basic human rights and Russia as an aggressor who violates these rights. Gökhan (2024) discovered that Zelenskyy used inclusive pronouns and shared value references to strategically build Western audience empathy and unity based on his research findings. The language selection through van Dijk (2006) activates mental group frameworks that show Ukraine as part of a democratic nation community.

Zelenskyy employs moral argumentation in his speeches which confirms research by Chiluwa and Ruzaite (2023) who identified his rhetoric demonstrates peace and justice through universal human values without showing direct hostility. Through his speech, Zelenskyy positions Ukraine to defend universal democratic values above being a country targeted by

Russian troops. His speech gains emotional power through his successful use of historical connections between Pearl Harbor and 9/11 events. The shared memory system enables audience members to relate Ukraine's war to their individual historical events through the combination of van Dijk's (2006) episodic memory activation theory and Reisigl and Wodak's (2009) historical topos framework.

Gomaa's (2023) research aligns with his analysis of Zelenskyy's presidential rhetoric in showing how the Ukrainian leader uses just war theory principles to position his nation's actions. The emotional appeals serve to establish Ukraine's place as a moral global actor fighting during this international conflict according to Gomaa. Zelenskyy employs traditional war-time presidential rhetoric patterns as identified by Rzepecka and Oddo (2018) within their analysis of leadership narratives seeking international support for intervention.

When speaking to international organizations such as NATO, Zelenskyy employs mitigation and perspectivization techniques in his political discourse instead of authoritarian communication methods. Zelenskyy supports NATO's weaknesses but asks for decisive action through simultaneously showing diplomatic restraint and emotional importance. The combination of emotional appeals and collective identity and shared values in such matters matches findings by Abu Hatab (2013) and Sakhiyya (2017) who observed that democratic leaders tend to use these methods instead of power declarations in public communication. Through his approach of vulnerability and resilience, Zelenskyy motivates global viewers to recognize themselves as participants in the shared ethical battle.

The way Alameda (2008) describes how discourse shapes identity development, aligns with Zelenskyy's rhetorical strategies. According to Alameda, identity develops actively through language especially when a crisis occurs. Through his references to historical trauma, Zelenskyy establishes Ukraine's place within a worldwide story about fighting against oppression and seeking justice. Through his discourse, Zelenskyy establishes identity by connecting Ukraine to universal values beyond cultural or geographical boundaries.

Zelenskyy effectively builds his ethos through emotional intensification by mentioning the deaths of children and stopping his age progression. His willingness to show weakness makes him more approachable and trustworthy which turns him from a distant politician into someone who speaks as a moral authority. Zelenskyy connects political authority with emotional sincerity which allows him to unite statehood with humanity during wartime.

The rhetorical strategies employed by Zelenskyy in his discourse prove effective through their consistent use of empathy and moral reasoning and identity-building methods. Through his speeches, Zelenskyy demonstrates political language functions to both depict and transform public awareness and drive worldwide support while building Ukraine's strong national identity during wartime.

Conclusion

President Zelenskyy strategically utilizes language in his international address to worldwide audiences while Ukraine experienced war. The analysis applied Socio-Cognitive

Approach by van Dijk (2006) and DHA by Reisigl & Woda (2009) to identify discursive strategies including nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, intensification, and mitigation. Through his strategic discourse Zelensky, establishes Ukraine and Russia as opposing moral entities by portraying Ukrainians as protectors of democratic values. His references to universal historical tragedies enabled him to establish a worldwide sense of unity that placed Ukraine at the forefront of a global fight for justice and human rights. Zelenskyy successfully unifies his supporters through his emotional arguments and rhetorical strategy despite maintaining their loyalty to his cause. Through his leadership, Zelenskyy turned Ukraine's crisis into a global moral responsibility that required worldwide action based on both emotional understanding and ethical principles. Through his speeches, Zelenskyy uses political language to form shared perceptions while uniting core values and generating global alliance during emergency situations.

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