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THREAT AND ITS VOLATILITY: A STYLISTIC STUDY OF SELECTED SPEECHES OF PRESIDENT TRUMP

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ABSTRACT

This study "Threat and its volatility: a stylistic study of selected speeches of President Trump" investigates some selected speeches of the president of United States of America; President Donald Trump to bring out linguistic features and stylistic strategies employed to convey threat and volatility in order to achieve a projected effect. The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which Trump's speeches reinforce a sense of urgency and importance to the hearers, and how his choice of words affects the understanding of threat and volatility in speech. This paper shows how threat and its volatility in speech of leaders can result in law and order; reinforce urgency and importance to the hearers. It also contributes to the understanding of the linguistic and stylistic choice of words of President Trump that enhances the perception of threat and volatility in speech. Two research questions guided the study and related Literatures were reviewed. Fairclogh's 1989 theory of 'Critical Discourse Analysis guided the study. Purposive sampling was used to select two speeches of President Trump on war between Israel and Hamas. Qualitative method of data analysis was used in the analysis of data collected. The findings show that threat and its volatility in speech can impact importance, firmness, power and urgency to the hearers. It can also instil fear, loyalty, peace and calmness to the hearers' minds. The study concludes that threat and volatility in speech can bring peace and tranquillity against war or rumours of war.

KEYWORDS: Threat, Volatility, Stylistics, Speech, Language.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Threats are usually statements meant to imply punishment on an individual or group of individuals especially if such an individual(s) defaults or violates an instruction. It implies possibility of danger, trouble or disaster on an individual or group of individuals. It can also mean a person or thing that is likely to cause trouble or danger. Threat can also be on a nation or nations. Threat is never a favourable way of communication whether written or verbal. Threats are typically given as warnings or as reactions to unfavourable actions. Cesar (2025) posits that "…threats act as directives toward the hearer not to do something by expressing the promised consequence given a condition". It may sometimes lead to anarchy or bring clemency to a situation "depending on the intent of the speaker or understanding of the hearer and the context of the utterance" (Storey 1995).

Volatility in speech often refers to disapproving of a person(s) or their moods thereby changing easily from one mood to another. It can be a situation likely to change suddenly and easily thereby becoming dangerous. Volatility in communication can degenerate to riots,

quarrels or even war due to unpredictable or rapid changes in a person's moods, thoughts, or emotional state. "Volatility is the quality of being subject to frequent, rapid and significant changes. Volatility accepts change. Build in slack and wiggle room for unaccounted issues" (TechTarget.2023).

Stylistics is the study of variations in language style according to the situation and the intended effect on the audience https://www.slideshare.net. It involves analysing how one chooses his or her diction and figurative language to convey meaning, create tone and influence readers and hearers. Stylistics is the study of language varieties or styles, depending on the situation or context whether spoken or written (Samson,2018). It focuses on the frequency of linguistics units employed in different styles of written or spoken communication (Mahliyo, 2024).

"Speech is an act of speaking or putting down the spoken words" (Uwadiegwu,2015:152). It is a form of human communication that allows individuals to express their thoughts, share ideas and interact with others. Speech is the use of sounds, words, phrases and sentences to convey meaning. If unwritten, aspects like accent, intonation and rhythm are considered in conveying meaning. Vocal inflections can convey emotions, attitudes and emphasis to the listener.

President Donald Trump's speeches have been characterized by their unpredictability, controversy and emotional appeal. It is also marked by emotional resonance and polarization with inflammatory rhetoric on immigration deportation since his assumption of duty in January 2025. President Donald Trump's threats to various entities, including Hamas, China, Immigrants and his withdrawal of USAID and WHO funding showcases his assertive and often divisive rhetoric.

President Trump's speeches often employ threats and volatile language to convey a sense of urgency, firmness and importance. He goes further to give a time-sensitive ultimatum threat statement to Hamas to release the Israeli hostages by 12 noon on Saturday (Liptalk and Judd, CNN February, 10, 2025). Trump states in his January 29, 2025 speech that he would deport "all Hamas sympathisers on college campuses" (Frantz/Reuters, Al Jazeera, January 29, 2025) and cancel their students' visas. These types of "threats" often create a sense of urgency and pressure to the opposing party into taking action of either obedience or reprisal. According to him:

> If they're not back by the time I get into office, all hell will break out in the Middle East. Trump repeated in January when asked about the status of the hostages deal. All hell will break out, he continued. I don't have to say anymore, but that's what it is. (https://abcnew.go.com).

He goes further to state:

> To all the resident aliens who joined in the pro-jihadist protest, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you.
> I will also quickly cancel the student visas of all Hamas sympathizers on college campuses, which have been infested with radicalism like never before (Al Jazeera www.aljazeera.com).

This study seeks to investigate the linguistic features and pragmatic strategies underlying the threats and volatility employed in President Trump's selected speeches in order to achieve a projected effect. Through analysis of selected speeches, we will identify the stylistic features that contribute to the perception of threat and volatility in President Trump's speeches.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM/ PRESIDENT TRUMP'S LANGUAGE USE

President Trump's speeches have been criticized for their aggressive tone and divisive language, which has contributed to a sense of uncertainty and instability across the globe. His speeches often employ threats and volatile language to convey a sense of urgency and importance. He is always blunt in his speech which is usually characterized with resultant effect in failure to strictly adhere to his order. President Trump's speeches usually sound military, authoritative rather than democratic as a democratically elected leader. This study aims to analyse the linguistic features and stylistic strategies employed by President Trump to convey threats and volatility in order to achieve a projected effect.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to undertake a stylistic analysis of Trump's speeches, focusing on the linguistic features and stylistic strategies employed to convey threats and volatility. It analyses the stylistic features of Trump's speeches on pro-jihadist supporters' immigration deportation and Hama's terrorism on Israel. The study specifically seeks to find out:

(1) The extent Trump's speeches reinforce a sense of urgency and importance to the hearers.

(2) The extent Trump's choice of words affects the understanding of threat and volatility in speech.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study is to show how threat and its volatility in speech of leaders or higher authority can bring about law and order, and reinforce a sense of urgency and importance to the hearer(s). This study will also contribute to the understanding of the linguistic and stylistic mechanisms underlying Trump's speeches and how choice of words contributes to the perception of threat and volatility in speech.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Two widely read speeches of President Trump on Israel's and Hamas' war were selected for the study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two research questions guided this study and they are:

1. To what extent does Trump's speeches reinforce a sense of urgency and importance to the hearer?
2. To what extent does Trump's choice of words affect the understanding of threat and volatility in speech?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some previous studies have analysed Trump's rhetoric focusing on his use of language and its impact on his audience. However, a few studies have undertaken a stylistic analysis of Trump's speeches on pro-jihadist immigration deportation and Hama's release of Israeli

hostages focusing on the linguistic features and stylistic strategies employed to convey threats and volatility in speech.

Threat in speech does not always connote negativity. Sometimes, it helps both the speaker and the hearers to achieve positive response within a limited time frame. However, Grant (1949:369) in Salgueiro (2010) opines that "a threat is an unwelcome promise". Threatening communication in Forensic Linguistics is described in terms that highlight its illegality (Solan and Tiersma 2005). Christensen (2019) sees threatening communication as "social disruptiveness" due to its volatility to the hearer. Threats display power when the hearer has done nothing to warrant the threat (Cesar, 2025).

Stylistics can be viewed from different perspectives. Lucas (1955:9) in Onwukwe (2008) is of the view that, stylistics "is the effective use of language, especially in prose whether to make statement or arouse emotions". Simpson (2004:2) opines that stylistics is a method of "textual interpretation in which primacy of places is assigned to language... is the study of different styles that are present in either a given utterance or a written text or document". It reveals one's inner character. A writer or speaker can be identified by specific features that characterize his or her utterance. A person's style or choice of words may be influenced due to his age, gender, idiosyncratic preferences, social status or regional background, psychological or situational context and religious inclination. A person's style of writing or speech can provoke threat and volatility in speech.

> Bradford (1997) in Obadan (2017:278) opines that stylistics can be defined as the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect...style does not arise out of a vacuum but that its production, purpose and effect are deeply embedded in the particular context in which both the writer and the reader...play their distinct roles.

President Trump's speeches can be understood from the aspect of meaning (discourse peculiarities) which are derived and not from the formal properties of words and constructions (appreciation discourse) but, from the way he uses his utterances (linguistics habits) within the context they are used. The reasons for the study of stylistics as Widdowson (1992) in Obadan (2017:282) puts are to establish discourse peculiarities, to induce appreciation of discourse and to ascertain linguistics habits.

Volatility in speech can be referred to as unpredictable, intense, aggressive or explosive nature of language use in communication which may manifest in various ways. It is the dynamic rate of change in communication. As the pace of our world increases, what we need to do to be effective in it is constantly changing https://www.pmi.org. Volatility in speech can culminate to emotional intensity (such as anger, passion or frustration), impassioned language (such as use of rhetorical devices, metaphors or hyperbole to convey strong convictions and feelings) and provocative statements (such as statements that challenge norms, spark controversy or provoke reactions.

Volatility in speech can be observed in different contents and at different speech situations. This may cut across personal and political speeches, social movements and public discourse. A personal volatile speech can reshape the mind-set of the listener either positively or negatively. Volatility in political speech can create urgency, mobilize support or demonize

opponents in the minds of the listeners. Volatile speech in social movements can be used by social activists in the form of volatile rhetoric to highlight injustices, challenge dominant narratives or even build social momentum among hearers. In public discourse, volatile speech can shape public opinion, spark debates or influence attitudes.

Volatility in speech can be both positive and negative. It can on one hand, be positive when it mobilizes action in a peaceful manner or geared towards achieving positive result such as when it inspires people to take positive action, challenge injustice or demand change for good. Positive volatility in speech can also yield emotional resonance which can foster empathy, build solidarity or create emotional connections through passionate language.

On the other hand, volatility in speech can yield negative result(s) when it is polarised. Polarization in volatile speech can create conflict, reinforce existing biases or create new ones or exacerbate divisions. Negative volatility in speech can be realized with inflammatory rhetoric. Inflammatory rhetoric can yield bitter, aggressive or provocative language which can threaten relationships, damage reputations or incite violence. It is crucial to understand volatility in speech for effective communication, critical thinking and navigating complex and erratic social issues. It is on this backdrop that this paper wants to do a stylistic study of some selected speeches of President Trump on pro-jihadist supporters' immigration deportation and Hamas terrorism on Israel.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework used in this paper is Fairclogh's 1989 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a theory that discusses the relationship between languages, power and ideology in social contexts. Baker and Ellece (2011:26) view CDA as an "approach to the analysis of discourse which views language as a social practice and is interested in the ways that ideologies and power relations are expressed through language". Johnstone (2008) sees CDA as a form of discourse analysis that studies the relationship between discourse ideologies. CDA can be used to analyse "a text covering a wide range of topics for example racism, sexism, politics, immigration, crime..." (Ndiribe 2017:137). Wodak (2001:11) opines that CDA analyses the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power. Locke (2004:32) and Wodak (2001:3) in Abaya and Kugbayi (2019;192) respectively are of the view that CDA in demystifying the opacity of linguistic structures primarily considers society as characterized by unequal power relations through social convention and establishes that "Dominant structures stabilize conventions". Van Djik (1993:254) is of the view that structural dominance of discourse are more powerfully established via subtle, everyday textual work of persuasion, dissimulation that sets out to change the minds of others in one's own interest.

This work is guided by Fairclough's (1989) "Discourse as social practice" which refers to the understanding that discourse, or the use of language is not simply a matter of linguistic forms but it is deeply intertwined with and shape by social structures, power relations and cultural norms. To Fairclough, discourse is not a separate entity from social life and its analysis must consider the social context in which it takes place. It aims to uncover the underlying power dynamics, social structures and cultural norms that shape discourse, often revealing hidden biases, inequalities and forms of social control. It involves analysing texts, speeches or other forms of communication of identity such as:

a. Power relations (how language is used to exercise power, dominance, or resistance, shape reality and reinforce social relationship).
b. Ideology (how language reflects and shapes social, cultural and political beliefs).
c. Social structures (how language reinforces or challenges existing social hierarchies and institutions).

Fairclough's (1989 and 1995) analytic framework is constituted by three levels of analysis:

i. the text analysis (description).
ii. the discursive practice/processing analysis (interpretation).
iii. the socio-cultural practice/social analysis (explanation).

With CDA, researchers can uncover hidden meanings, that is, reveal underlying assumptions, biases and power dynamics. Researchers can challenge dominant narratives, that is, question dominant discourses and promote alternative perspectives. They can understand social changes, that is, analyse how language contributes to social transformation and resistance. The three levels of analysis- macro, meso and micro discourse contexts are generally agreed to by CD analysts. The macro level analyses the relationship between the texts and the broader social processes and ideologies (social issues and time frame). The meso level analyses the context of production and reception of text (where, whom, what the text was meant for). And the micro level analyses what is actually said and the linguistic features and devices used in the text.

Purposive sampling was used to select two speeches of President Trump on war between Israel and Hamas. The data were taken from two speeches from President Donald Trump from cnn.com-c updated 8:04 PM EST, Mon. February 10, 2025 and Yale news 11:16 PM, JAN.29, 2025. The speeches were: "Trump says all hell is going to break out if Hamas doesn't release hostages by Saturday at noon", henceforth, known as "speech A" and "Trump threatens to deport international students who participated in pro-Palestinian protests" henceforth known as "speech B".

In linguistic analysis of CDA; "linguistic choices are not ideologically random but have purposefully been used to portray a particular idea" (Ndiribe 2027:140). Active or Passive voice, naming, pre modifiers and indirect quotes are some common linguistic devices studied in CDA.Qualitative method of data analysis is used as the research design in the analysis of the data collected.

(SPEECH A)

Trump says [1]"all hell is going to breakout" if [2]Hamas doesn't release [3]hostages by Saturday at [4]noon –By kelvin Liptak and Donald Judd, CNN Updated 8:04 PM EST, Mon. February 10,2025

(CNN) – President Donald Trump on Monday urged Israel to cancel its ceasefire deal with Hamas and "let all hell breakout" if Hamas does not return hostages still being held in Gaza by noon on Saturday.

"I'd say they ought to be returned by [5]12 o'clock on Saturday, and if they're not returned – [6]all of them, not in drips and drops, not two and one and three and four and two. Saturday at 12 o'clock, and after that, I would say, [7]"all hell is going to breakout"

Pressed on what "all hell" might entail in Gaza, Trump said, [8]"You'll find out, and they'll find out, and they'll find out – Hamas will find out what I mean".

"I'm speaking for myself. Israel can override it, but from myself, Saturday at 12 o'clock, and if they're not – they're not here, all hell is going to breakout," he added.

Trump expressed skepticism that many hostages remain alive to release, telling reporters, "I think a lot of the hostages are dead." Trump's [9]Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, was involved in negotiating the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which was secured in the [10]waning days of President Joe Biden's administration. But since taking office, Trump has suggested he wasn't sure the ceasefire would hold. His plan to permanently displace Palestinians from Gaza and for the United States to "own" the strip has injected yet more uncertainty into the process.

He responded to a question about how he intends to enforce his demands with, [11]"You'll find out. And they'll find out, too. Hamas will find out what I mean. These are sick people."

"We want them all back. [12]I'm speaking for myself. Israel can override it but for myself, Saturday at 12 o'clock – and if they're not here, all hell is going to breakout," he said.

He also demanded that all hostages be released at once. He said the hostages should be released "not in dribs and drabs not two and one and three and four and two"

Ceasefire deal at risk

Mr Trump's ultimatum might affect the weeks-old ceasefire, which brought to a halt months-long conflict that has resulted in the death and displacement of tens of thousands of people.

His ultimatum, alongside his statement on the forced displacement of Gazans, threatens the first phase of the ceasefire, which was set to continue until the end of February.

(SPEECH B)

Trump [1]threatens to deport international [2]students who participated in the [3]pro-Palestinian protests.

The President issued an [4]executive order that gives agencies [5]60 days to find ways to cancel visas of students and deport [6]"Hamas sympathizers [7]"on college campuses.(Yale news JAEHA JANG 11:16 PM JAN 29,2025)

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Wednesday instructing federal agencies to lay the foundations to deport international students who participated in pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

While the order broadly directs agencies to find ways to combat antisemitism, a fact sheet on the order acquired by Reuters calls for the deportation of non -citizen college students who participated in pro-Palestinian protests. It also calls for investigation into pro-Hamas graffiti and intimidation on college campuses.

According to the order, agency and department leaders will have 69 days to outline plans to combat anti-semitism on college campuses, while the fact sheet promises [8]"immediate action" by the Justice Department to prosecute "terroristic threats, arson, vandalism and violence against American Jews."

[9]"To all the resident aliens who died in the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, we will deport you," Trump wrote in the facts sheet to the executive order. [10]"I will also quickly cancel the students visas of all Hamas sympathizers on college campuses, which have been infested with radicalism like never before."

In total, [11]46 students were arrested during the pro-Palestinian protests on [12]Yale's campus last spring for various charges that included criminal trespassing, disorderly conduct and criminal mischief. Several cases were subsequently resolved, and 27 cases were dismissed in a [13]court hearing on Oct. 31.

At least two international students were arrested during the pro-Palestinian protests at Yale. One international student received 40 hours of community service in the October hearing.

When reached by the News for the comment, the University spokesman referred to a statement released in Jan. 28 by University President Maurie McInnis and Provost Scott Strobel on potential changes coming from the federal government.

On the campaign trail, Trump threatened to deport international students who participated in pro-Palestinian protests.

In an earlier executive order, Trump instructed agencies to find ways to "ensure that admitted aliens and aliens otherwise already present in the United States do not... support designated foreign terrorists," but did not single out pro-Palestinian college students.

In October, the Republican-led U.S House Committee on Education and the Workforce published a report that claimed administrators at Yale "overwhelmingly failed to impose meaningful discipline for those who engaged in antisemitic conduct."

ANALYSIS OF SPEECH A

Speech A has nine (9) paragraphs

1. Active verb (threat/volatility)
2. Naming (specificity)
3. Collective nouns rather than naming individuals
4. Post modifier
5. Pre modifier (threat)
6. Portrays complete return of hostages (threat)
7. Active verb

8. Vague source
9. Pre modifier (shows locality)
10. Pre modifier
11. Collective pronouns (showing inclusiveness and emphasis)
12. Personal/reflexive pronouns (show of power and superiority).

Summary of analysis of speech A

1. Micro Analysis

- Regular use of active verb "all hell is going to break out" perhaps as a threat and to reinforce a sense of urgency to the hearer.
- Tends to use collective noun rather than naming, for example: "hostages"
- Regular use of pre and post modification for example "by noon, on Saturday and by Saturday at noon".
- Evidence of indirect quotation from vague source such as: "I think a lot of the hostages are dead".

2. Meso Analysis

The speech is taken from CNN (Feb. 10, 2025 which has a global publicity.

3. Macro Analysis

President Trump's speeches at the moment are trending in the world and the war between Hamas and Israel is a global concern at the moment.

ANALYSIS OF SPEECH B

Speech B has ten (10) paragraphs.

1. Active verb
2. Collective noun rather than naming individually
3. Pre-modified noun- shows nationality of protesters
4. Direct report
5. Adverb of time
6. Pre-modified noun
7. Adverb of place- pre-modified
8. Pre-modified collective noun
9. Collective pronouns showing inclusiveness and emphasis (threat)
10. Personal/reflexive pronouns (show of power and superiority)
11. Pre-modified common noun
12. Naming (specificity)
13. Emphatic statements (with underline in the speech).

Summary of analysis of speech B:

1. Micro Analysis
    - Regular use of active verb "...threatens to deport international students..." perhaps as a threat or as a deterrent to the hearer.
    - Tend to use collective noun rather than naming.
    - Regular use of pre-modifications for example "pro-Palestinians protests, non-citizen college students and pro-Hama's graffiti.

- Evidence of direct report such as: "To all the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you"

2. Meso Analysis

The speech was taken from Yale Daily News (11:16FM, Jan, 29, 2025) which has a global publicity.

3. Macro Analysis

President Trump's speeches at the moment are trending in the world and the war between Hamas and Israel and their supporters is a global concern at the moment.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

President Donald Trump is one of the world power leaders whose speech draws a global attention and considerations. Trump's speech is always received with mixed reactions, to some it is a call to action while others see it as divisive. In his two speeches considered in this paper, threat and volatility are seen as style that characterizes his speech. Most often times, he uses threat and volatility to impact importance, firmness, power and urgency to the hearers so as to comply with his directives as seen in 'speech A' and, can instil fear, loyalty and calmness to the hearers as seen in 'speech B' .

Threat and volatility as a style in language use can go a long way to bring peace and tranquillity against spark of war and rumours of war. Trump's choice of words affects the understanding of threats and volatility in his speech as not always intended for war.

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