

# Applying Van Dijk Model in Analyzing President Joe Biden's speech on Russia's Attack on Ukraine. 24/02/2022.

■ Abdelmonem Mustafa F. Shebani \*

● Received: 13/ 10 / 2023.

● Accepted: 09/ 12 /2023

## ■ Abstract:

This paper presents a critical discourse analysis of a speech which was delivered by The United States of America Joe Biden speech on 24 Feb. 2022. Biden's speech was against President Putin, and his country Russia because of the war in Ukraine. Such speech against Russia will motivate many countries to be in alien with Ukraine, supporting it. And for these countries to join the war and start to support Ukraine till they defeat Russia. This study adopts Van Dijk's Model of discourse analysis. Hence, the study aims to show how Biden ideologically invested discursive strategies in the positive discourse of US (the USA, the Western countries and other allies). and the negative discourse of THEM (Putin, Russia, and their allies) Based on data analysis, the study found out that Biden ideologically invested the discourse strategies in almost all of his speech for political interests.

Van Dijk's CDA was selected as a theoretical framework in this study as it draws knowledge from several fields, including sociology, psychology, politics and economics, which contribute to deepening the insights of this study.

**Key words:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk Model, Societal Power Relations, Discourse as Ideology, Descriptive Analysis, Micro Analysis, Macro- Analysis.

---

## ■ المستخلص:

هذه الدراسة تقدم تحليلاً نقدياً للخطاب الذي ألقاه رئيس الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية جو بايدن في 24 فبراير 2022. وكان خطاب بايدن موجّهاً ضد الرئيس بوتين وروسيا بسبب الحرب

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of English Language - Faculty of Languages - University of Tripoli  
Email: monawshebani@yahoo.com

في أوكرانيا. ومثل هذا الخطاب ضد روسيا سيشجع العديد من الدول على التضامن مع أوكرانيا ودعمها. ولتلك الدول الانضمام إلى الحرب والبدء في دعم أوكرانيا حتى تهزم روسيا. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على نموذج فان دايك لتحليل الخطاب. وبالتالي، تهدف الدراسة إلى إظهار كيف استخدم بايدن استراتيجيات خطابية مشبعة أيديولوجياً في الخطاب الإيجابي حول «نحن» (الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، الدول الغربية والحلفاء الآخرون) والخطاب السلبي حول «هم» (بوتين، روسيا وحلفاؤهم). بناءً على تحليل البيانات، وجدت الدراسة أن بايدن استخدم استراتيجيات الخطاب مشبعة أيديولوجياً في معظم خطابه لتحقيق مصالح سياسية.

تم اختيار تحليل الخطاب الحرجي لفان دايك كإطار نظري في هذه الدراسة لأنه يستمد المعرفة من عدة مجالات، بما في ذلك علم الاجتماع وعلم النفس والسياسة والاقتصاد، والتي تساهم في تعميق رؤى هذه الدراسة.

● **الكلمات المفتاحية:** التحليل النقدي للخطاب، نموذج فان دايك، علاقات القوة المجتمعية، الخطاب كأيديولوجية، تحليل الوصفي، تحليل المفردات ومعانيها، تحليل قوة المفردات.

---

## ■ Introduction

US President Joe Biden arrived to speak about the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the East Room of the White House, on Thursday, February 24, 2022, in Washington, DC. The full text of US President Joe Biden's speech at the White House on February 24, 2022, after Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a component of critical studies in the humanities as well as social sciences, such as political science, law, psychology, sociology, and research on mass media and mass communication. Typically, successful study-related societal issues including sexism, racism, colonialism, and other types of social inequality are discussed. The underlying ideologies that contribute to the fight against inequality are the subject of much CDA research. Moreover, it emphasizes the connections and relationships between the discourse and society, including (Politics, culture, economic, etc). When studying how discourse affects society specifically, CDA pays close attention to how members of social groupings oppose power dynamics through conversation and written communication.

Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analysis research that, according to Van Dijk (2004), focuses mainly on how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted via text and speaking in social and political situations. According to Van Dijk (2003), CDA is a type of discourse analysis research that mainly investigates how text and speak in the social and political context act out, reproduce, and resist social power dominance abuse, and inequality.

### ■ Objectives of the Study

This study, is an attempt to analyze the speech applying Van Dijk Model, and pay a close attention to personal pronoun usage through the application of critical discourse analysis as it is one of the strategies used by most politicians to attract public attention. As well as some vocabularies that Biden intended to use in his speech supporting Ukraine against Russia.

### ■ Research Questions

This research paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the implicit meanings that can be analyzed in every personal pronoun and frequently used vocabularies of the Biden's speech?
2. How societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use in this speech?

### Literature Review

Van Dijk (1991: p. 198) is the first one who addresses prejudice and racism in discourse and the author of several books on news analysis. In his book *Racism and Press*, he points out that “implications, suggestions, presuppositions and other implicit, indirect or vague means of expressing underlying meaning or opinions may be used to persuade readers to the point of view of the newspaper”.

As van Dijk (2006) points out ideologies are expressed, reproduced, acquired and confirmed through social practices, the most important of which are language and discourse. It is through written and spoken language in fact that members of a social group share ideologically based opinions (van Dijk, 2000). Discourse is therefore not always ideologically transparent. According

to the context, the system of belief behind a certain language use might be explicit, such is the case with political propaganda, or not recognizable at first glance, for example in news reports. It is in analyzing the discourse structures, strategies, and context, hence in critically investigating the words used in a text, and the sociocultural and discourse practices surrounding that text, that potential hidden ideologies rise to the surface.

According to Van Dijk (2003), CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power dominance abuse, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.

As van Dijk (2006) points out ideologies are expressed, reproduced, acquired and confirmed through social practices, the most important of which are language and discourse. It is through written and spoken language in fact that members of a social group share ideologically based opinions (van Dijk, 2000). Discourse is therefore not always ideologically transparent. According to the context, the system of belief behind a certain language use might be explicit, such is the case with political propaganda, or not recognizable at first glance, for example in news reports. It is in analyzing the discourse structures, strategies, and context, hence in critically investigating the words used in a text, and the sociocultural and discourse practices surrounding that text, that potential hidden ideologies rise to the surface.

According to Van Dijk, studying a discourse requires more than just looking at the text; we must also consider how a text is generated. Discourse, according to Van Dijk, has three dimensions: text, social cognition, and social context. The structure of the text being studied, as well as the tactics utilized to represent the desired theme, is at the level of the text being studied. Individual texts are studied in social cognition. The social context examines the discourse framework that emerges in society. The text is divided into three levels by Van Dijk. First, there's the macro structure: a text's overall or broad meaning, which may be seen by looking at the topic or theme presented in a news story. Second, the superstructure refers to the structure of discourse in relation to a text's framework, or how the text's pieces are organized into the complete news. The micro structure,

on the other hand, is a discourse that may be discerned from a little portion of a text, such as words, sentences, propositions, clauses, and images.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271–80) summarize the main tenets of CDA as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action

The job of critical discourse analysts is to extract hidden ideologies from texts and make them clear to people (Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1993; Batstone, 1995). According to Trask (2007), CDA is concerned about answering questions such as why was this text constructed at all? To what people or societies is it addressed? and why? Does the writer or speaker have concealed purposes? What hidden assumptions and biases underlie the text? Joseph (2006) illustrates that politicians and media owners use propaganda, deception, and manipulation in their speeches to achieve political goals and interests on one hand, and to diminish the value or reputation of their opponents on the other.

Wilson (1990) believes that language of politicians not only conveys the message to the public but also it is not free from manipulation, deception, and persuasion.

Luke (1974) points out that Y uses power over Z by forcing Z to do what he/she wants him to do. But Y also uses other forms of power to control Z thoughts and desires such as manipulation, brainwashing, deception, and propaganda. Politicians and media owners know that such forms of power and control can only be achieved through the skillful use of language.

## ■ Research Methodology

This study applies critical discourse analysis approach in processing the data. It refers to the main objective of critical study which studies the way social power dominance abuse, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context in the political speech of Biden.

## ■ Data

Biden’s speech on the “ Russia’s Unprovoked and Unjustified Attack on Ukraine” which had been spread in online media. The data was one complete speech which was taken from the official website of the Wight House, the title was also copied and passed as it is.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks /2022 /02 /24 / remarks-by-president-biden-on-russias-unprovoked-and-unjustified-attack - on-ukraine/>

## Descriptive Analysis

### Actor Description:

Table:1

Lexicalization	brutal assault, premeditated attack, needless conflict. naked aggression.
Polarization	United States and our Allies. Russia
Victimization	The Russian military has begun a brutal assault on the people of Ukraine without provocation, without justification, without necessity. Within moments — moments, missile strikes began to fall on historic cities across Ukraine.
Self-Identity	We are actively working with countries around the world. Putin’s actions betray his sinister vision for the future of our world — one where nations take what they want by force.

**Applying Van Dijk Model in Analyzing President Joe Biden’s speech on  
Russia’s Attack on Ukraine. 24/ 02/ 2022.**

Categorization	The United States and our Allies and partners, G7 leaders, NATO. Twenty-seven members of the European Union, The rest of the World. Russia.
Norms and Values	vision that the United States and freedom-loving. Freedom will prevail. We stand up for freedom. global peace. Liberty, democracy, human dignity — these are the forces far more powerful than fear and oppression. Ukrainian people as they defend their country. America stands up to bullies. We stand up for freedom. This is who we are. Sorry to keep you waiting. Good afternoon.
Resource description	Putin’s aggression against Ukraine will end up costing Russia dearly — economically and strategically. we have been working closely with our private — with the private sector. We stopped the Russian government from raising money from U.S. or European investors.

President Biden was very clear in his speech, he is against the this war, and he described it by brutal assault, premeditated attack, needless conflict. naked aggression. And this was form the very beginning sentences of his speech. He put the United Sates Ukraine NATO, and The European Union in one side, and Russia in the other one. He describes Ukraine and its people as a victim of the Russian invasion. He depicted the United States and its allies as good and Russia as evil or bad one. Biden talked about the norms and values of the Democratic world and how it will be affected and defeat this war. He also explained how this war will affect the Russian economy by the sanctions.

**■ Discourse Analysis**

**Micro Analysis:**

**Lexicon**

The Theme of the speech was about the attack on Ukraine and how to prevent is by unity and Sanctions.

Table:2

<b>Words</b>	<b>Number mentioned</b>	<b>Words</b>	<b>Number mentioned</b>
Russia/ Russian	28	Economic	6
America/American/ US	16	Cyperattack	4
Ukraine/Ukrainian	21	Sanctions	2
NATO	16	War	3
Allies	8		
Military/troops/forces	12		

The President Biden devoted his speech entirely to the war in Ukraine, he repeated the words Russia/Russian “28” and it was the core of the speech, he put all the blame on The President Putin. Biden repeated the word “America/American/US” 16 times as it is the main supporter to Ukraine which he repeated “21” times. He repeated the word “NATO” 16” and Allies “8” as the main supporters for the USA in its support for Ukraine. He mentioned the words Military/Troops/Forces “12” times, and these words were divided between his country and its allies troops and the Russian ones. While the word Kremlin was repeated “3” to put all the blame on. He warned the Russian and their Cyberattacks”4” by the sanctions”2” through economy “6”.

■ **Syntax**

Table:3

<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Times Repeated</b>
We	44
our	32
I	15
Their	7
He	4
It	4
his	4
You	3

**Applying Van Dijk Model in Analyzing President Joe Biden’s speech on  
Russia’s Attack on Ukraine. 24/ 02/ 2022.**

President Biden used very clear and simple sentences, he was talking the whole world through this speech, when he used the pronoun we the most “44” times referring clearly to the USA and its allies. The pronoun Our as well. In order to speak simple and clear sentences he used the pronoun ‘I’ 15 times. He mentioned the pronoun ‘Their’ 7 times to refer to the Russians. The pronoun ‘It’ was used mainly to refer to the sanctions and actions. Biden used the pronouns ‘He’ and ‘his’ to refer to the President Putin. And ‘You’ for the addressee.

The application of personal pronouns is closely related to identity and ideology. They represent either collectivity or individuality (Fairclough, 2003). Moreover, they are frequently adopted when referring to a certain persons or the others even have been misused to split a coalition either inside or outside of a certain group (Van Dijk, 2002). Interpretation and options are generally mediated by several personal and social factors, including formality and informality, status, power access, social rank, and race. In terms of the personal pronoun usage, Van Dijk (ibid) argued that the personal pronouns we and our, can be adopted either inclusively or exclusively. They are inclusively adopted as a strategy to say solidarity. Meanwhile, they are exclusively used to share responsibility, so that any decided and agreed upon actions and policies are not merely imposed on an individual. On the other hand, the personal pronouns are often exploited by politicians as a strategy to gain support and develop trust.

**■ Lexicon**

Table:4

premeditated attack.	our mutual security	we’ve been building a coalition of partners
Brutal assault	This is a dangerous moment for all of Europe.	We’ve been transparent with the world
needless conflict	freedom-loving nations	to protect our NATO Allies
Shelling increase	for the freedom around the world.	our Allies and partners
outlandish and baseless claims		
Putin is the aggressor		

Since all the speech of Biden was devoted to talk about the war in Ukraine

most, if not all, his lexicons referred to it. He was very clear giving descriptive lexicons about this war, which made his view very clear against this war. And he also speaks about their alliance and unity against Russia and its war in Ukraine. And they are defending democracy and freedom.

### ■ Rhetorical devices and appeals

Table:5

Parallelism	Between democracy and autocracy, between sovereignty and subjugation,
Logos	He moved more than 175,000 troops, military equipment into positions along the Ukrainian border.
Pathos	needless conflict and avert human suffering.
Repetition	For weeks for weeks
Pathos	I know this is hard and that Americans are already hurting. I will do everything in my power to limit the pain the American people are feeling at the gas pump. This is critical to me.
Ethos	Putin's actions betray his sinister vision for the future of our world — one where nations take what they want by force.
Personification	and troops rolling in.

In order to get his audience attention, Biden had some sentences as rhetorical appeals in his speech. Speaking about “unjustified war” and people being killed needs such these appeals and devices in order to convince the audience and build a public opinion and main steam, against this war.

### ■ Macro- Analysis

#### Power:

-”Today, I’m authorizing additional strong sanctions and new limitations on what can be exported to Russia”.

-”The United States is not doing this alone. We’re going to impose major — and we’re going to impair their ability to compete in a high-tech 21st century economy”.

-”As promised, we’re also adding names to the list of Russian elites and their family members that are sanctioning — that we’re sanctioning as well”.

President Biden was very clear in using his power and his country behind him, as well as his allies, he promised to use all what he has from the power to prevent and defeat this attack on Ukraine. He mentioned some steps that he will perform, such as the economic and financial sanctions. And some steps that he didn’t mention, just by saying that we are prepared for it.

### ■ **Dominance:**

-”We will limit Russia’s ability to do business in Dollars, Euros, Pounds, and Yen. As we respond, my administration is using the tools — every tool at our disposal”.

-”We have purposefully designed these sanctions to maximize the long-term impact on Russia and to minimize the impact on the United States and our Allies”.

-”Let me also repeat the warning I made last week: If Russia pursues cyberattacks against our companies, our critical infrastructure, we are prepared to respond”.

-”Our NATO Allies and support the greatest military Alliance in the history of the world — NATO”.

The United States is the most powerful and dominant in the world in addition to that, they have the most European countries and the NATO supporting them in this campaign. So as a result of this, the speech of Biden was full of clear indications of dominance. In order to prevent the president Putin of continuing this war. In his speech, Biden tended to use the pronoun “We” in order to show power and dominance.

### ■ **Inequality:**

-”The Russian military has begun a brutal assault on the people of Ukraine without provocation, without justification”.

-”Our NATO Allies and support the greatest military Alliance in the history of the world — NATO”.

The President Biden started by showing that there is no equality between the Russian army and the Ukrainian one, and he mentioned the Ukrainian people, as if the war is between the Russian Army and the Ukrainian people with no mention to the Ukrainian Army at first. In order draw the picture that this war is not fair.

And then, during his speech Biden wanted to show Russia that Ukraine is not alone, and here he draws unequal picture between Russia from one side, and the United States and its allies form the other side, that is they much stronger than Russia, he wanted to show this inequality in order to stop the war.

### ■ **Conclusion**

In the use of pronouns and some specific vocabularies in his speech about the Russian invasion to Ukraine, Biden used the two pronouns “we” and “our” the most, in order to show the power and unity. He was developing a sense of togetherness in order to get more and more support for the issue of this war.

The personal pronoun «I» was used by Biden for statements in the form of personal views and heavy issues which need full responsibility and self-confidence. Biden also uses the pronoun «he» to refer back to the President Putin, to draw a picture that Putin is alone on the other side of «us». Biden made his speech very clear and direct that he is against this war from the first day, this was understood from some words and phrases that he used in this speech. For instance, premeditated attack, Brutal assault, needless conflict.

Also, he wanted to be clear that he is not alone in this way by saying; our Allies and partners, to protect our NATO Allies, we’ve been building a coalition of partners.

Biden showed himself the defender of the Democratic World; for the freedom around the world, This is a dangerous moment for all of Europe, freedom-loving nations.

## ■ References

- Batstone, R., 1995. Grammar in discourse: attitude and deniability. In: Cook, G., Seidlhofer, B. (Eds.), *Principle and Practice in Applied Linguistics*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
  - Fairclough, N., 1993. Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: the Universities. *J. Discour. Soc.* 4 (2), 133–168.
  - Fairclough, Norman and Ruth Wodak 1997. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. In *Discourse as Social Interaction*, Teun van Dijk, ed.. London: Sage. 258-84.
  - Fairclough, N. L. (2003). *Analyzing Discourse: textual analysis for social research*. UK: Amazon.
  - Fowler, R., 1991. *Language in the News*. Routledge, London.
  - Luke, S., 1974. *Power: A Radical View*. Macmillan.
  - Trask, R.L., 2007. *Language and Linguistics: the Key Concepts*. Taylor & Francis.
  - Van Dijk, T. (1991). *Racism and the Press* (p. 198). Routledge.
  - Van Dijk, T.A., 2000: *Language and Ideology: A Multidisciplinary introduction*, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona.
  - Van Dijk, A. Teun. (2002). *Critical Discourse Studies: A Socio Cognitive Approach*. London: Sage.
  - Van, Dijk, T. A. (2003). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H. E. Hamilton (ed), *The Handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352-371). Oxford: Blackwell.
  - Van Dijk, T (2005). War rhetoric of a little Ally: Political implicature and Aznar's legitimatization of the war in Iraq. *Journal of Language and Politics* 4 (1) GJ-91.
  - Van Dijk, T.A., 2006: *Ideology and Discourse Analysis*, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11:2, pp. 115-140.
  - Wilson, J., 1990. *Politically Speaking*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- «Remarks by President Biden on Russia's Unprovoked and Unjustified Attack on Ukraine»
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/24/remarks-by-president-biden-on-russias-unprovoked-and-unjustified-attack-on-ukraine/>