

**The ‘Us’ -vs- ‘Them’ Dichotomy in Biden’s Inaugural and First State of the Union Addresses: A Comparative Analysis in the Light of the Ideological Square Theory**

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**Abstract:**

This qualitative-quantitative, descriptive critical analysis is intended to gain an insight of the discursive and ideological nature of the presidential political discourse of the United States as representative of the U.S. political culture during one of the most extra ordinary turbulent circumstances in the history of the country. Without doubt, the political situation in the U.S. influences global affairs. Therefore, this study explores the Inaugural and State of the Union addresses by U.S. president Joe Biden as two forms of political discourse at the heart of American democracy in order to unpack their ideological underpinnings. To this end, the study applies the principle of the Ideological Square in order to define the ideology of the U.S. administration to counter effect the societal polarization that preceded the 2020 presidential inauguration. Analysis revealed discourse marked by a dichotomy of positive Self and negative Other presentation which resonates with the critical contextual background. In addition, the investigation showcased the rhetoric of American political discourse and highlights similarities and differences in the usage of discursive strategies in the two addresses.

**Key words:** Inaugural & State of the Union addresses, US political discourse and culture, the Ideological Square

الانقسام بين "نحن" مقابل "هم" في خطاب التنصيب وأول خطاب عن حالة الاتحاد ألقاهما

بايدن: تحليل مقارن في ضوء نظرية المربع الأيديولوجي

### الملخص:

يهدف هذا التحليل النقدي الوصفي النوعي إلى الحصول على نظرة ثاقبة للطبيعة الخطابية والأيديولوجية للخطاب السياسي لرئيس الولايات المتحدة بإعتباره ممثل للثقافة السياسية الأمريكية خلال مرحلة من أكثر المراحل اضطرابًا في تاريخ الولايات المتحدة. مما لا شك فيه أن الوضع السياسي في الولايات المتحدة يؤثر على الشؤون العالمية. ولذلك تبحث هذه الدراسة في خطابين ألقاهما الرئيس الأمريكي جو بايدن هما خطاب التنصيب وخطاب حالة الاتحاد باعتبارهما شكلين من أشكال الخطاب السياسي في قلب الديمقراطية الأمريكية من أجل فك رموز الأسس الأيديولوجية التي يقوم عليها الخطابان. وتحقيقاً لهذه الغاية، تطبق الدراسة مبدأ المربع الأيديولوجي من أجل تحديد أيديولوجية الإدارة الأمريكية لمواجهة تأثير الاستقطاب المجتمعي الذي سبق التنصيب الرئاسي في عام 2020. تكشف نتائج التحليل أن الخطاب يتميز بانقسام بين الذات الإيجابية والآخر السلبي وهو ما ينعكس في الخلفية السياقية للخطابين. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يظهر التحليل أسلوب الخطاب السياسي الأمريكي ويسلط الضوء على أوجه التشابه والاختلاف في استخدام الاستراتيجيات الخطابية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** خطاب التنصيب وخطاب وحالة الاتحاد، الخطاب السياسي والثقافة الأمريكية، المربع الأيديولوجي

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**Introduction:**

The study critically analyses the inaugural and first State of the Union addresses (hence forth IA and SoU, respectively) by Joe Biden, the 46th President of the United States. These two addresses were given during one of the most ‘tumultuous moments’ in recent U.S. history marked by sever societal and political cleavages resulting in cross-cutting permanent racial, political and religious divisions and extreme polarization. During the times when these two addresses were delivered, Biden was facing three “epoch-defining crises”: a deeply divided country; an escalating global pandemic; and a turbulent world order where American international moral legitimacy was reportedly at rock bottom. Meanwhile, the world, which seeks “stability more than leadership from the United States” (Najam, 2021), places high emphasis on “the rhetoric of the American presidency” given that “it represents one of the most influential political figures in the world” (Bani-Khaled & Azzam, 2021, p.37).

Inaugurations are significant political discourse events that "mark either the beginning of a major public leader's term of office, the opening or first public use of a new civic area, organization or project" (Collins Concise English Dictionary, 2011). While these official ceremonies are traditions strongly linked to American democracy, the SoU address is a discourse event mandated by Article II, Section 3, of the U.S. Constitution. In addition to being a “symbol and instrument of ‘national unity’” (Bevitori 2015 47), the SoU gained momentum through mediatization where an address originally targeting Congress now reaches both American and global audience.

A political speech is mainly a practice of interests. Political speakers inculcate targeted ideologies into the public minds through the deliberate non-random choice of topics and words. Therefore, the carefully chosen lexical items for specific domains of actors and recipients are goal driven. In a political speech, political attitudes are

articulated and emphasized, political power is legitimized, and political consent is manufactured. Moreover, political speeches are performed in specific discourse events with societal and global consequences (van Dijk, 1997; 2006; Gruber, 1993). Political discourse is an effective means to revive national values central to the nation's political ideology, and to evoke emotions of patriotism, superiority, and altruism. Therefore, it showcases the 'political culture' of a country, a term first introduced by political scientist Gabriel Almond (Atamali, 2021) to encompass a system of beliefs, values, symbols, and tools for the purpose of achieving political manipulation. The core ideologies of the political culture in the United States of America (USA) are inspired by "the history of America and its path from inception to the present day in building the traditions of statehood" (Atamali, 2021, p.51).

In a descriptive non-evaluative sense, 'Ideology' is a system of socially shared beliefs that defines group identities, shapes their discourse and controls their behaviour and attitudes (van Dijk, 2006). The cognitive functions of ideology include making a set of beliefs coherent, facilitating the acquisition and reproduction of these beliefs in daily life, and creating hegemony. Consequently, "ideology becomes conceptually quite close to culture...defined as a system of values common to all members of a given society" (Pýcha, 2021). Moreover, group identities can be triggered by societal conflicts over "material or symbolic resources" which, in turn, mobilizes the masses to adopt a certain ideology opposed to that of any outsiders. Discursively mapped ideologies are represented from a polarizing perspective through positive in-group and negative out-group descriptions. A group's "external identity strives to remove all differences among individual group members and promotes the ideas of sameness and unity" (Pýcha, 2021, p.20). In essence, ideology uses discourse to "explain, motivate, or justify (group-based) behaviour" (van Dijk, 2006, p.121) and to legitimize and/or delegitimize actions through highlighting values inspired by shared history (Hodges, 2015).

Although there is a considerable body of research on the discursal features and ideological leanings in American presidential political speeches, extant research does not include comparative studies that lay bare the perpetuation of ideological stances with respect to positive Self and negative Other representations and their linguistic constructions across IA and SoU address by a specific American president specially amidst grave national conditions.

Therefore, a comparative analysis is expected to unpack the representations of the 'Us' vs 'Them' dichotomy in the US political

discourse for an insightful understanding of its political culture and its ideological approach to combat societal, religious and political polarization. The current study hypothesizes that the two addresses under analysis reflect the dichotomy of positive Self and negative Other representation reifying the principle of the Ideological Square and use similar discursive strategies to reflect this dichotomy. The study also explores how far the two addresses are representative of the American political discourse and culture as well as the extent to which the discourse of the two addresses reflects their critical context. Analysis of IA and SoU address can, therefore, provide a vantage point into the ideology of “domestic healing” in the American political culture.

### **Discoursal Features and Dichotomy Representations in the American Presidential Addresses**

From a discoursal perspective, studies on the American presidential rhetoric revealed variance respective to the political party and the discourse event. Results of a comparative analysis of Obama and Trump’s IAs on the dissemination, function, and frequency of occurrence for speech acts (SAs) revealed equal variance in the use of speech acts regardless of party affiliation (Kambash & Jawad, 2019). Moreover, Hashim and Safwat’s (2015) analysis of Kerry’s 2004-candidacy speech and Bush’s 2001 IA revealed that types of SAs vary according to the discourse event whereby Kerry used more commissive SAs to emphasize his commitment to future actions, while Bush mostly used more assertive SAs to ascertain “A truth value which can only enhance the effect of the asserted proposition” (p. 699). This was further confirmed by Ahmed and Amir (2021) who reported that the use of assertive SAs prevailed in Biden’s IA.

Studies on the representations of the ‘Us’ vs ‘Them’ dichotomy and its linguistic manifestations showcased analogous variation. van Dijk’s socio-cognitive framework applied on 16 inaugural addresses delivered by American Democratic and Republican presidents from 1961 to 2017 showed that while the Republicans used negative-Other representation significantly more than that by the Democrats, the two parties employed more positive Self-representation than Other-negative representation (Mohammadi, Abdi & Eisazadeh, 2020). Vianica and Tanto (2021) applied the same framework to analyze Biden’s 2020 speech in the Democratic National Convention. Macro-level analysis showed an antithesis between light and darkness as the global topic of the speech coinciding with positive Self and negative Other representations. On the micro-level, the dominant tools for constructing the ideology of positive-Self and negative-Other representations are lexicalization,

rhetorical strategies of repetition, anaphora, diacope and antithesis. Rhetorical and thematic analyses indicated that Biden's IA is replete with references to unity and democracy as main themes, clear allusions to spirituality and shared history, appeals to emotions. This is indicated by the use of pathos which constituted 55% of Biden's IA, followed by ethos (37%), and logos (8%) as well as the use of empathetic lexicon to appeal to audience's emotions and to call for unity and togetherness to overcome differences and to send messages of positive hope to the Americans, his target audience, as well as to the whole world (Nurkhamidah, Fahira & Ningtyas, 2021; Perez, 2021). Furthermore, the linguistic resources Biden most resorted to are the pronouns 'We', 'My', the modal 'Can' and the solidarity term 'My fellows' (Bani-Khaled & Azzam, 2021). With this backdrop in mind, a comparative analysis of the IA and SoU address by the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the USA will likely bring to light the prevailing ideology in the American political culture to contest societal, religious and political polarization.

#### **Methodology:**

The two addresses under analysis were delivered amidst extraordinary challenging context critical to the American nation. A “divided nation” after the January 2021 attacks on the Capitol by Trump supporters attempting to stop the official certification of the Electoral College results, and the increasing spikes in the pandemic pushing the death toll to its highest since WW2 and millions of Americans combating unemployment. This all created one of the most hazardous times in the history of the nation. This article purports to fill in the gap in research exploring the ideological and discursual repercussions of the contextual background on the American political discourse and culture as epitomized in the IA and SoU addresses with a 100- days interval between these two pivotal speeches. The study, therefore, adopts an interdisciplinary approach which integrates critical discourse analysis with political studies and employs van Dijk's (2005; 2006) socio-cognitive framework for speech analysis hoping to capture a wide spectrum of the American presidential ideological perspective. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is “the analysis of linguistic and semiotic aspects of social processes and problems” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 271). CDA highlights the relationship between the social, political and historical contexts and the ideological content of the discourse. It is recommended that political discourse analysis “should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures” (van Dijk, 1997, p.15). However, the

study focuses on language modality as one of the various semiotic modalities CDA investigates, and it builds on the following five CDA premises (Locke, 2004):

- Discursive practices constitute relations and identities in the social world.
- Discourse constitutes the social world based on its practices.
- Linguistic textual analysis focuses on language use in social interaction.
- Language is a material form of ideology pervading the fabric of society to endow discursive practices with ideological effects.
- Discourse reflects a political commitment to social change.

The socio-cognitive framework emphasizes the mediating role of cognition in understanding the interrelationship between discourse structures and society. Society cognitions is the “beliefs or social representations that [they] people share with others or their groups or community “(van Dijk, 2009, p.78). The interrelationship between ideology, cognition and discourse results in an ideological square with four moves that identify “the opposed standpoints of the political others” and defend the political in-group positions. These four moves serve to:

- 1- Express/emphasize information positive towards ‘Us’.
- 2- Express/emphasize information negative towards ‘Them’.
- 3- Suppress/de-emphasize information positive towards ‘Them’.
- 4- Suppress/de-emphasize information negative towards ‘Us’.

Polarization in discourse is enacted either “explicitly by propositional means (topics, meanings)” or implicitly via “discursive moves that emphasize or de-emphasize Our/Their Good/Bad Things” (van Dijk, 2006, p.139). Accordingly, analysis is conducted on three levels:

- 1- The macropropositional level to:
  - a. compare the generic features reported in the literature on IA and SoU address as social practices to the two addresses under analysis.
  - b. identify the main topics of the speech and topical participants.
- 2- The superstructural level to highlight the four moves proposed by van Dijk’s Ideological Square theory.
- 3- The microstructural level to detect features of the lexicon, syntax, rhetoric (mainly repetition and antithesis, reflexivity, and modals), and types of speech acts

The study employs a qualitative-quantitative, descriptive research design. Biden’s IA is downloaded from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing->

[room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr/](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr/). Biden's first SoU, is downloaded from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/29/us/politics/joe-biden-speech-transcript.html/>.

For qualitative analysis, the researcher used intensive reading following the SQ3R technique (Survey, Questions, Read, Recall and Review). For quantitative analysis, categorization on all levels included labels for coding data for quantification by reporting frequency of occurrences for substantiated interpretation. For example, words such as “democracy”, “unity”, “resilience”, “women political rights”, “predecessors” and “the Constitution” are categorized under the label “American values”. Same procedure was followed for lexical, syntactic and speech acts categorization.

### **Results:**

#### **1- Results of the Macropropositional Level of Analysis:**

As social practices, IA and SoU differ according to their purpose. Campbell and Jamieson (1990, p.73) explain that the IA outlines the principles which the new presidency commits itself to, while in the SoU “presidents revive the principles to which they committed their presidencies”. That is, the IA gives impetus to the content of the SoU. In both addresses, Biden confronts the urgency of the moment by recalling the nation's history to reawaken belief in America's global leadership.

IAs, as “victory speeches”, are “an essential element in a ritual of transition in which the covenant between the citizenry and their leaders is renewed” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990, p.14). From a rhetorical perspective, the IA integrates the three speech forms: judicial (past-oriented/focus on justice); deliberative (future-oriented/consequences of actions); and the epideictic (present-oriented/commendations or denouncements of actions (Chanturidze, 2018). Moreover, IAs predominantly rely on rhetorical output; that is, the word choice and enunciation that render the address memorable to the audience (Chanturidze, 2018). On one hand, the ideological aims of IA include unifying a nation divided by the election processes. This is achieved by activating memories of national unity and glory and shared values of the past, as well as highlighting harmony and bipartisanship in order to endorse American democratic principles (Liu, 2012). Ideological aims also establish the nation's political attitudes, reawaken citizens' faith in basic principles such as liberty, freedom and religious beliefs. On the other hand, the IA's non-ideological aims include establishing the status



and identity of the president, confirming the president's acknowledgement of the requirements and limitations of executive functions and displaying emotions aroused by the event (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990; Lara, Márquez & Fuentes-Rodríguez, 2016). The IA also aims at expressing gratitude to all the supporters and voters for the candidate while reiterating the campaign promises and emphasizing the crucial character of the moment (Chanturidze, 2014).

Besides reflecting the IA's traditional ideological aims, Biden reconstructs political attitudes through promoting international cooperation, a solid ideology of the Democratic party. This contrasts to the Trump administration's failures, suggested by the word "again" in **"We will repair our alliances and engage with the world once again"**. Biden also reinforces his image as the 'right fit' for office in his declaration in **"we can make America once again the leading force for good in the world"**.

On the other hand, the SoU "boldly assures the citizenry that in the future as in the past, Americans will solve their problems" (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990, p.55). Therefore, Biden's SoU, which took place only 100 days after assuming office, shows a consistent problem-solution pattern by integrating policy plans and solutions supported by facts and numerical values. Furthermore, the address details the nation's challenges, outlines the annual legislation program, and sets national and international social, political, and economic priorities.

Biden's IA addresses an array of political topics. These include democracy, unity, "the resilience of the Constitution", political extremism, nativism, the right to vote, foreign policy, climate change, liberty in addition to multiple references to the Constitution. The address also integrated issues within the societal domain such as racial justice, white supremacy, domestic terrorism, the condition of the middle class, health care, women's political rights, jobs and unemployment, and pandemic fatalities. The same social issues are mentioned in the SoU, albeit with differences in presentation in terms of detail. For example, the question of violence is narrowed down to domestic and gun violence. Issues such as immigration and racial discrimination, the taxation system and the infrastructure are illustrated by personal anecdotes and numerical evidence.

'Topical participants' are "all those actors...able to contribute to the political process,... elite groups and organizations on the one hand, and the 'public' (citizens, the people, etc.) on the other" (van Dijk, 1997, p.26). In the IA, the participants are either represented by the plural political pronoun 'We' referring to all Americans regardless of party

affiliation as in **“We can join forces”**, or the president and his administration as in **“We can put people to work in good jobs”**. The enemies to America are implicitly referred to as in **“I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real.”** Exceptions are the explicit reference to the rioters and the Corona virus. In the more detailed SoU, the participants are explicitly named. For example, ‘Us’ may include Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, First Lady Jill, and George Floyd; in contrast, ‘Them’ refers to **“America’s adversaries – the autocrats of the world”** who interpreted the image of the angry mob assaulting the congress as a proof that **“the sun is setting on American democracy”**.

Topic analysis indicates polarization towards **“positive evaluations of ‘Us’ and negative evaluations of ‘Them’”** (van Dijk, 1997, p.28). In the IA, topics that inspire hope, assert capabilities and affirm positive values such as endurance are attributed to ‘Us’: **“We have never, ever, ever failed in America”**. In contrast, negative topics are assigned to ‘Them’ as in referring to the **“riotous mob”** who **“thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people, to stop the work of our democracy, and to drive us from this sacred ground.”** Those rioters **“stole the soul”** of America through **“political extremism, white supremacy, and domestic terrorism”**.

In the SoU, ‘Us’ engage in positive activities such as the Defense Department’s breakthrough research. In contrast, ‘Them’ conspire to undermine America and world peace, such as Russia’s cyber-attacks and Iran’s and North Korea’s nuclear programs, and Afghani and Middle Eastern terrorists’ attacks on the democratic system threatening homeland security.

## **2- Results of the Superstructural Level of Analysis:**

Exposition of the defended political in-group standpoints, as opposed to those of the out-group is manifest in both addresses. In the IA, Americans, as the in-group, personify positive qualities such as **“resilience in hard times.”** This contrasts the negatives of Trump’s administration, or the out-group, supposedly tarnishing true American values. They told **“lies ... for power and for profit”**, created **“competing factions”** and **“uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal”**, while marginalizing others different to white Americans in looks or ways of worship.

Similarly, the positives of ‘Us’ in the SoU are emphasized by **“We the People did not flinch”** in the face of adversaries. In addition to

praising American workers as **“the best-trained people in the world,”** the collective efforts of the middle class and the unions in building the country are acknowledged. In contrast, the SoU highlights negatives attributed to ‘Them’, or the previous administration, such as incompetency in addressing hunger and poverty, applying trickle-down economies favoring only the wealthy, pandemic mismanagement, failure to reduce the cost of prescription drugs and their discard of plans to trace the root causes of the immigration problem on the grounds that it **“was not worth it”**. The address denies decent Americans’ responsibility for any calamities by reiterating that **“all of this is through no fault of their own.”** Failure to address the climate crisis is attributed to unidentified ‘We’ as in **“For too long we’ve failed to use the most important word when it comes to meeting the climate crisis: Jobs.”** The good by ‘Others’ is understated as in **“I applaud a group of Republican senators who just put forward their own proposal.”** The ‘Them,’ on the world level, ‘blatantly’ violate human rights and lurk in the background while awaiting the downfall of America. ‘Them’ believe that **“the sun is setting on American democracy,”** thus casting doubt on the resilience of the Americans wondering **“We see America’s back, but for how long?”**.

### ***3- Results of the Microstructural level of Analysis:***

In political discourse, lexicals with positive or negative semantic implications affect the audience emotionally. This explains the use of positive/negative words to describe Us/Them. In the IA, Americans belonging to the in-group are the **“good people”**, who are **“bold [and] optimistic”** in facing challenges. Negative words describe the out-group and their actions as in the **“riotous mob”** created a **“dark winter”**, and the previous administration caused devastating effects amounting to **“raging fire”**, and the hate crimes of white supremacists marked by **“viciousness”** formed **“the most lethal terrorist threat to the homeland today”**. The enemies of America in the world are **“autocrats”**, which collocate with negative words such as **“interference”**, **“cyberattacks”** and **“serious threats”** that need to be **“metastasized”**.

Lexical cognitive verbs such as ‘believe’ and ‘think’ preceded by the first-person singular pronoun ‘I’ express epistemic commitment towards the topic of discussion, add to the pragmatic force of the proposition and compel the audience to adopt the speakers’ ideology (Fetzer, 2011). In his IA, Biden establishes the image of a knowledgeable

experienced politician as in **"I think I know"** to answer the self-imposed question: **"What are the common objects we love that define us as Americans?"** and to emphasize commitment to the duty that must be fulfilled as in **"I believe we must and I believe we will"** or in **"I believe America is better than this"**. Similarly, in his SoU, Biden displays his deep knowledge of the topic as in **"For me, when I think about climate change, I think jobs"**, and his profound belief in the importance of research as in **"I can think of no more worthy investment"**.

The inclusion of religious politics in the use of certain lexicals and the 'God strategy' is a powerful political tool. Apart from the common cluster "May God bless", which became prevalent in political speeches since the early 1980's (Bevitori, 2015), Biden's references to religion in his IA outnumbered those in his SoU. For example, he hinted that American unity is divinely blessed as in **"we come together as one nation, under God"** and is **"sustained by faith"**. Biden deliberately uses religion to legitimize the ideology of unity as in citing a commandment by Saint Augustine, a saint in Biden's church **"that people was a multitude defined by the common objects of their love."** His Biblical references bestow sacredness on his instructions to the nation **"as the Bible says weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning"**. To Biden, faith proved to be effective in overcoming challenges as in stating **"History, faith, and reason show the way, the way of unity"**.

*a. Syntax:*

As Table 1 here under shows, modality, categorizing actions as 'Necessary', 'Probable', 'Possible', or 'Wished For', is utilized to endorse positive qualities for self-presentation. In the IA, the modal 'Will' indicates future possibility, ambition, positivity, endurance and hopefulness as in **"We will get through this, together"**. The modal 'Can' emphasizes strength of purpose as in **"We can make America, once again, the leading force for good in the world."** The modal 'Must' reinforces a strong sense of commitment to obligations as in **"I believe we must and I believe we will"**. Similarly, in the SoU, the modal 'Will' reaffirms having a positive attitude as in **"The future will belong to America"**, while 'Can' emphasizes ability as in **"Our government still works – and can deliver for the people"**. The predicates in the present tense draw public attention to negative Other-presentation as in **"The battle is perennial. Victory is never assured"** whereas the simple past describes negative past events such as the January attacks on Capitol Hill.

**Table 1: Frequency of Modal Usage**

<b>Modal</b>	<b>Total number in IA</b>	<b>Total number in SoU</b>
Shall	2	0
Should	1	13
Can	21	37
Could	1	5
Will	32	44
Would	2	1
May	3 (2) for religious/ political references	3
Must	10	1
Might	1	Zero

The use of deictic pronouns represents identities, transmits ideologies and affects consensus and homogeneity (Fetzer, 2011). The audience connect with the speaker through identification as one of ‘Us’ where “‘Us’ is deemed to be good while the other ‘Them’ are bad” (Van Dijk, 2005). Table 2 here under shows high frequency in the use of ‘We’, an inclusive identification technique that creates collective identity as a practice of group categorization, represents the in-group members, and enables the speaker to present events from a speaker-audience perspective while excluding opponents (Wieczorek, 2015). This technique also compensates for excluding the construction ‘You and I’ which shortens the distance between presidents and proponents and creates a feeling of common purpose (Fairclough, 1989). In the SoU, the higher frequency of pronoun ‘We’ aims to elicit further support from the audience of the proposed solutions by persuading them that both the speaker and his ideas align with the people’s aspirations.

**Table 2: Pronouns and Voice Usage**

<b>The pronoun</b>	<b>The IA</b>	<b>The SoU</b>
We	91	144
Presidential I	28	57
You and I	0	1
Active voice	154	499
Passive voice	4	2

As table 2 above shows, the frequent use of reflexivity in the use of the presidential “I” is employed in Biden’s IA with the following aims: to underscore positive self-presentation and gratitude: **“I thank my predecessors of both parties for their presence here”**; align himself with notable predecessors: **“I have just taken the sacred oath each of**

these patriots took”; state the support expected from a unified country: **“I ask every American to join me in this cause”**; reinforce his fitness for office by referring to broad political experience: **“I know speaking of unity can sound to some like a foolish fantasy. I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new”**; or to make pledges **“And I pledge this to you: I will be a President for all Americans. I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did”**.

Biden's SoU more audaciously exploits reflexivity for positive self-presentation such as implying the capability to address critical issues as in **“I will do everything in my power to protect the American people from this epidemic of gun violence”**. Reflexivity is also evident in following up on candidacy promises **“After I promised 100 million COVID-19 vaccine shots in 100 days – we will have provided over 220 million COVID shots in 100 days”**. It can be concluded that because it creates an aura of separateness and disassociation from others (Wieczorek, 2015), presidential 'I' appears less frequently in the two addresses than the pronoun “We”. However, 'I' appears more frequently in the SoU in pledges and assertions.

Table 2 also indicates a preference of the active over the passive voice with higher frequency of the former in the SoU. This serves to highlight agency as opposed to passivation, which entails deleting agency, reifying, and maintaining unequal power relations.

Foregrounding through sentence order and topicalization draws attention to 'Our' good deeds while backgrounding 'Our' bad deeds. The 'Our' foregrounded values include the long-held values of devotion, truth, tolerance, secured liberty, democracy, unity and justice. Prominence is given to the American belief in individual responsibility as in **“...each of us has a duty and responsibility, as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders...to honor our Constitution and protect our nation — to defend the truth and to defeat the lies”**. Another indicator of positive Self-presentation is in emphasizing America as a global role model for human rights and freedom, which are core American values as in **“America will not back away from our commitments, our commitments to human rights and our fundamental freedom and our alliances”**. The devastating consequences of the actions of 'Others' are also foregrounded as in creating a **“crisis”** and a **“winter of peril”** caused by **“domestic terrorism”** and the **“state of chaos”**.

The SoU address foregrounds the positive actions by Biden's administration in the first 100 days to reverse the harms caused by

'Them'. Examples include initiating mass vaccination centres, the affordable care act, the American rescue plan, the jobs plan, the paycheck fairness act, paid medical leave, the comprehensive immigration bill and the voting rights acts and provision of affordable children care. The positives of Biden's administration, described as opening "**the door of opportunities**", overrule the negatives of Trump's administration, which included increasing tax burden, gun violence, mass shootings, assault weapons, systematic racism, climate damage, unfair trade practices, hate crimes and excessive bloodshed.

*b. Rhetoric:*

Rhetorical tools of repetition and antithesis enhance the persuasive power of political speeches. On one hand, the functions of repetition are to underline certain meanings and strengthen the construction of the mental models of these meanings (van Dijk 1997); on the other hand, antithesis "establishes a clear, contrasting relationship between two ideas by joining them together or juxtaposing them, often in parallel structure" (Harris, 2013, p.6).

Biden adopts repetition as a rhetorical tool in both addresses. Repetition serves the ideological purpose of inspiring collective consciousness of national political and cultural values as well as counterbalancing societal polarization. Common to both addresses is the repetition of the key words '**democracy**' (10 times in the IA and 17 times in the SoU) and '**unity**' (8 times in the IA and 12 times in the SoU). Other repeated keywords include '**jobs,**' '**American family plan,**' '**Covid-19**' and '**vaccine**'. Repetition also emphasizes positive qualities of the self, such as reiterating the commitment to promises in the IA as in: "**My whole soul is in it.... Bringing America together**".

Antithesis is effectively used for positive self-presentation. The IA projects contradicting images of a nation stripped of its soul and one that is now rising to regain it as in "**To overcome these challenges – to restore the soul and to secure the future of America – requires more than words**". Antithesis is also utilized for a forceful negative Other-presentation as in describing the previous administration desecrating: "**this hallowed ground**" through inciting "**violence sought to shake this Capitol's very foundation**".

Antithesis in the SoU boosts the feeling of national pride as in "**We all know life can knock us down. But in America, we never, ever, ever stay down**". There is pride over present-day achievements such as the issue of clean water as in

**“... up to 10 million homes in America and more than 400,000 schools and childcare centres have pipes with lead in them, including drinking water, a clear and present danger to our children's health. The American Jobs Plan creates jobs replacing 100 percent of the nation's lead pipes and service lines so every American can drink clean water”.**

The use of antithetical anecdotes juxtaposing misery and worry with hope and reassurance also mark the SoU as in **“...an educator in Florida, who has a child suffering from an autoimmune disease, wrote to me, said she's worried... about bringing the virus home... got vaccinated at a large site... and just cried, cried out of joy, and cried out of relief”.**

***c. Analysis of interaction:***

Analysis of interaction focuses on the pragmatics of utterances. Pragmatics views language not only as constative subject to truth and falsity, but also as performative utilized to affect the environment. Van Dijk's model adopts the Speech Acts theory which proposes that when utterances are made, a certain act is performed with a “resulting effect on the addressee” (Perkins, 2007, p.15). Searle classifies the types of speech acts (SAs) based on the following illocutionary forces (Searle, 1976, pp.10-16):

1. Assertive SAs: announcements, claims, denials, and refusals.
2. Directive SAs: asking, ordering, admonishing, requesting, begging, suggesting, inviting, permitting, and advising. They can use the imperative and/or interrogative syntactic structures.
3. Commissive SAs: vows, pledges, and guarantees.
4. Expressive SAs: condolences, acknowledgments, greetings and thanks.
5. Declarative SAs: effecting change in the real-world state of being (as in naming objects/people).

Command SAs and threats “presuppose relations of dominance and power” (van Dijk, 2005, p.30). Assertive SAs “commit the speaker to the fact of the expressed proposition”(Searle, 1979, p.12), while directives are “attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle, 1979, p.13). All of which are utilised as mobilisation methods. This not only further confirms that language use is ideological in nature, but it also explains how politicians convey various messages through speech acts. Therefore, political meaning lies in determining the illocutionary force of the speaker's utterances.



**Table 3: Speech Acts Distribution**

The Address	Assertives	Directives	Expressives	Commissives	Declaratives
IA	98	59	4	17	0
SoU	434	67	6	4	0

Table 3 above shows the predominance of assertive SAs in the two addresses to strengthen the truth value of stated claims, taken actions and suggested procedures (Ahmed & Amir, 2021). Directives usage is slightly higher in the SoU to require addressees to act and comply with the President’s commands. The table also demonstrates higher usage of commissive SAs in the IA than that in the SoU. Commissive SAs carry the illocutionary force of obligating the speaker to embark on a future course of action. As the country's newly elected president, Biden bears primary responsibility for making promises to the nation and to the world whereby he commits himself and his administration to specific future activities. In general, the use of assertive SAs and commissive SAs indicates sincerity of intentions, a tendency to assure the masses, and a consolidation of the speakers’ standpoints towards their audiences. Least used in both addresses are the expressive SAs indicative of a "psychological state" (Searle, 1976). Their use usually marks the start and conclusion of the address, to greet or bid farewell to the audience, make genuine endowments, express appreciation to predecessors and applaud joint efforts. Declarative SAs which "bring about correspondence between the propositional content and reality" (Searle, 1976, pp.16-17) are not used in both addresses.

**Discussion:**

The findings of the comparative study confirm that the four moves of the principle of the Ideological Square of positive Self and negative Other presentation persist in the two addresses. ‘Us’ refers to the good Americans who uphold ideologies that constitute the “American Dream” and ‘Them’ alludes to opponents of these ideologies. The moves of the Ideological Square propose a power struggle between ideologies embodying the American culture and the deifying ideologies of extremism and autocracy. Whether this struggle exists over symbolic resources (democratic values, respect of individual freedom and equality), or material resources (land or oil), it is employed to manipulate and homogenize the audience. Applying this ideological dichotomy symbolizes attempts to reduce societal polarization by emphasizing antithetical representations which sheds light on Biden’s ideology to combat polarization. These attempts include appealing to core American values indicating a commitment to effecting social change, making calls

for acts, plans and pledges for unification on the national level as in **“I will be a President for all Americans. I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did”** and through negotiating treaties and agreements on the international level. Interweaving politics with “topics from other societal domains” with strong social outcomes (van Dijk,1997, p.25) further confirms that both addresses are not dissociated from their critical context and proves the effects of the critical wider socio-cultural context on the discourse of the two addresses

Similar discursive strategies are depicted in both addresses. However, despite these commonalities, the frequency of usage differs in the two addresses according to the nature of the discourse event. Common strategies include topicalization, where unity and democracy are the main themes forming the essence of positive self-presentation (Bani-Khaled & Azzam, 2021). In addition, intertextuality by quoting previous American presidents and religious verses, relating personal experiences and the frequent use of the collective pronoun ‘we’ aim to legitimize political power and to establish rapport.

**“...I understand that many of my fellow Americans view the future with fear and trepidation. I understand they worry about their jobs. I understand like my dad, they lay in bed at night, staring at the ceiling wondering, “Can I keep my healthcare? Can I pay my mortgage?”**. The application of these strategies to appeal to the conative function confirms the results by Perez (2021) and echoes Atamall's statement that “a political person must be able to “reach and touch” the collective consciousness of the masses (2021, p.52).

The addresses by Biden, as an affiliate to the Democratic Party, reflect a pattern of political speeches typical of the Democrats. He emphasizes negative-Other representations in contrast to positive-Self representations. This concurs with the results reported by Mohammadi et al. (2020) on the variance in employing positive/negative Us/ Them representation respective to the political party. Examples of this variance in the usage of discursive strategies is the use of commissive SAs in Biden's IA where he aims to project an image of a positive self that is confident in the stability of the nation. In contrast, more assertive SAs are used in the SoU address to define needed solutions and actions to undo mistakes by the previous administration and to specify the action doers.

In general, both addresses display the aims and discursal features of political discourse such as the use of reflexivity in presenting the plans and policies politicians vow to support. Adherence to the traditions of American political discourse as inspired by national and cultural values is

illustrated by the recurring use of words such as “freedom, liberty, democracy, civil society, justice, faith, discipline, work, safety, security, unity, prosperity, comfort , progress, triumph, nation, national, peace, heart” (Atamali, 2021, p.53). This makes the addresses true examples of “the rhetoric of American politicians” which recycles the rhetoric of the “American grandeur, and especially the American Dream, regardless of party affiliation or belief” (Atamali, 2021, p.54).

**Conclusion:**

This paper unpacks the political ideology of the current U.S. administration regarding political and societal polarization by analysing President Joe Biden two pivotal addresses using van Dijk’s theory of Ideological Square. The IA and the SoU mainly intend to inspire hope and unity in a nation shattered by the practices of the previous presidency. This intention is realised in spite of the persistence of the ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ dichotomy as indicated by the emphasis on antithetical beliefs whereby ‘Us’ includes the Americans who believe in the possibility of change and hold firmly to the American values. Thus, the source of dichotomy is the challenges made to these beliefs as imposed by the increasing political extremism and racial injustice reflected by ‘Them’. For example, in the SoU address dichotomy lies in accentuating the dismal performance of the previous administration while offering corrective actions by the present administration.

Politics and language are inextricably linked; however, political discourse is a complex human activity worthy of serious examination due to its fundamental role in forming and controlling the societal fabric. While a political speech is prepared in advance in the form of a written text, it is presented orally with the possibility of improvisations. Consequently, the challenge in political speech text analysis lies in the special nature of this genre. It is suggested that future research focuses on conducting comparative investigations of political discourse across different political genres and cultures by the same political speaker. This can be of public benefit as it motivates individuals to apply critical thinking to discern how the discourse producers represent themselves and others (Vianica & Tanto, 2021).

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