



## Power and Ideology in Donald Trump's Address to the Nation on the Iran War (April 2, 2026): A Transitivity Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examines the transitivity patterns within the framework of systemic functional linguistics to analyze how different linguistics choices create meaning in discourse. The data consist of the speech delivered by American president Donald Trump when he addresses to the nation on the Iran war on 2nd April 2026. The selected speech was transcribed by using You Tube transcription tool and the clauses were identified and classified into different types of processes such as material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral and existential processes. The results show that process types are deliberately used to show actions, beliefs, identities, communication, behaviors, and existence in distinct ways. Material process and mental process are used frequently to show representation of actors and actions, identity formation, and assessment within discourse. Moreover, the analysis illustrates that transitivity choices play a role in the construction of power relations and ideological significance by highlighting certain actors, viewpoints and societal realities. The study draws a conclusion that transitivity analysis is a strong linguistic tool for revealing how discourse functions as a mode of representation, stance shaping and ideological significance.

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## Introduction

Language is considered a powerful tool that carries meaning and ideology. Our linguistic choices are never clear or neutral, when we speak or write, our words carry hidden ideologies and power (Taiwo 2007). Van Dijk (2006) describes ideology as a system of beliefs and values associated with various domains of life, such as politics, religion, society, and economics, which influence how people perceive, interpret, and construct reality. Several studies have investigated political narratives, especially in relation to presidential discourse. (Horváth 2009; Duran 2008; Green 2007; Opeibi 2006). They are perceived as father figures by the population, bearing responsibility for the social welfare and security of their citizens (Hinckley, 1990). Language has rules and symbols that help in human communication. Each language consists of specific

grammatical rules that help in conveying messages (Rabiah, 2018; Banga & Suri, 2015). Therefore, grammar is the basis of language (Saaristo, 2015). Usually, grammar mainly focuses on sentence structure and form of written language. On the other hand, functional grammar, developed by Halliday (1994), focuses on how language functions in different contexts. In functional grammar, transitivity is viewed differently as compared to traditional grammar. In traditional grammar, the concept of transitivity explains through verb-object relation, whereas SFL viewed transitivity as ideational representation of experience in language. So, transitivity analysis uses language to represent reality in different contexts. Various studies have analyzed political narratives, especially leader's speeches and communication. But very few studies have focused on transitivity analysis in the context of recent political speeches, particularly related to international conflict. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze transitivity patterns in Trump's speech on the Iran war to reveal how language create ideology and shift responsibility.

### **Research Questions**

1. Which process types and participant roles are used most frequently, and what do they reveal about the overall discourse?
2. How do transitivity patterns contribute to the construction of power relations in the selected speech?

### **Literature Review**

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) transitivity is considered a basic component that describe how language represents human experiences and it divides clauses into three elements: processes (verbs), participants (actor) and circumstances (context). They explain that transitivity helps us to uncover hidden meaning and ideologies through different linguistic choices. It shapes reality and considered valuable tool in discourse analysis.

Furthermore, Matthiessen (1999) explains transitivity as a "system of systems," where meaning is formed through different choices rather than simple grammatical rules. The frequency of different types of processes in any text can reveal hidden ideological patterns and repetition of different linguistic choices can shape ideological perspective.

### **Transitivity and Ideology in Discourse**

Transitivity analysis is widely used to explore how different linguistics patterns construct ideologies and power relations in discourse. According to Fairclough (2001) and Van Dijk (2006), discourse is not neutral. It plays a crucial role in constructing power, inequality and ideology. They argue that discourse shapes representation of reality and reinforcing ideological control. In discourse-oriented transitivity studies, the focus is on how different process types represent responsibility, agency, and power dynamics. Thus, transitivity plays a crucial role in revealing hidden ideologies encoded in the language use.

Oktifati and Damanhuri (2014) examined how Obamas used language in his second inaugural speech to reflect hidden ideologies and how transitivity patterns help in ideological framing. The findings show that material processes are frequently used in Obamas speech emphasizing action and agency. Material clauses used in Obamas speech show his commitment to public focusing on future initiatives rather than verbal assurance. Mental processes are also used to create emotional

connection with audience, expressing honesty and shaping audience views, whereas relational processes highlight national identity. This study suggests that transitivity choices play an important role in shaping audience perception.

Guswita and Suhardi (2020) investigated Indonesian presidential campaign speeches and identified how transitivity choices in the speeches of Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto shape public views. The findings showed that material processes were used frequently emphasizing action and future planning while behavioral and existential processes were used few or absent in certain cases. The research revealed that participants such as actors and goals were repeatedly used, showing construction of agency within political text. Furthermore, circumstances linked to time and place were frequently used to set political actions. This research concludes that transitivity choices in campaign speeches are used to produce political strategies and shape public perception and worldviews.

Supatmiwati et al. (2025) examined ideological framing and communicative practices of Indonesian presidential debate. This study used transitivity framework and explored that all candidates use six types of processes in their speeches, and material process were used frequently. The dominance of material process showed that all candidates focus on defining goals and planned political initiatives. Mental processes were used to develop emotional connection and shape audience views, while relational processes helped in identity construction and leadership stance.

Hong (2025) examined Donald Trump's inaugural speech and identified transitivity and grammatical metaphor in his speech. This study also highlighted how nominalisation and material processes created ideological meaning, for example, "*America's decline is over*" demonstrate agency deletion and hiding the responsibility and portraying problems as natural. This study shows how different linguistic patterns can influence audience perception and construct state authority.

CDA has been employed by different researchers in Pakistan to investigate how linguistic and semiotic resources construct ideological meanings in different media contexts (Ejaz, Anwar & Arshad, 2026; Yasmin, Kayani & Anwar, 2024). A few studies have also been conducted in the Pakistani context to examine differences across various genres, gender and varieties using the transitivity analysis framework (Kayani & Anwar, 2022; Anwar, Kayani & Ramiz, 2024; Ahmed, Anwar & Shahid, 2026). However, the combined use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and transitivity analysis has received limited scholarly attention.

## Research Gap

The previous studies analyzing transitivity patterns in inaugural or electoral speeches talk about dominant processes in speeches. But these studies do not talk about how ideology and agency construct reality and shape public perception on contemporary conflict. The present study focuses on identifying and counting transitivity processes and interpreting how these linguistic choices construct ideology and responsibility.

## Methodology

This study adopted a mixed method research design, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to give better understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The quantitative approach is used to identify frequency of different transitivity patterns and qualitative approach explains how these linguistic choices create ideologies and political strategies that shape public perception. Source also gives the value and authenticity to chosen data. The source of data is divided into two types; it includes primary and secondary data. The primary data refers to the first-hand data collected by researchers for instance, speeches or transcribed text, while secondary data refers to existing data for instance articles, reports and magazines. (Salkind, 2010; Martins, da Cunha, J., & Serra, F., 2018). The data of this present study consist of one speech of Donald trump delivered on Iran conflict on 2<sup>nd</sup> April. The data is collected from YouTube and then transcribed through automatic transcription features of YouTube. The transcribed text was cautiously analyzed and manually reviewed to improve linguistic accuracy. The researchers are key instruments for data collection whereas technological tools perform as secondary instruments.

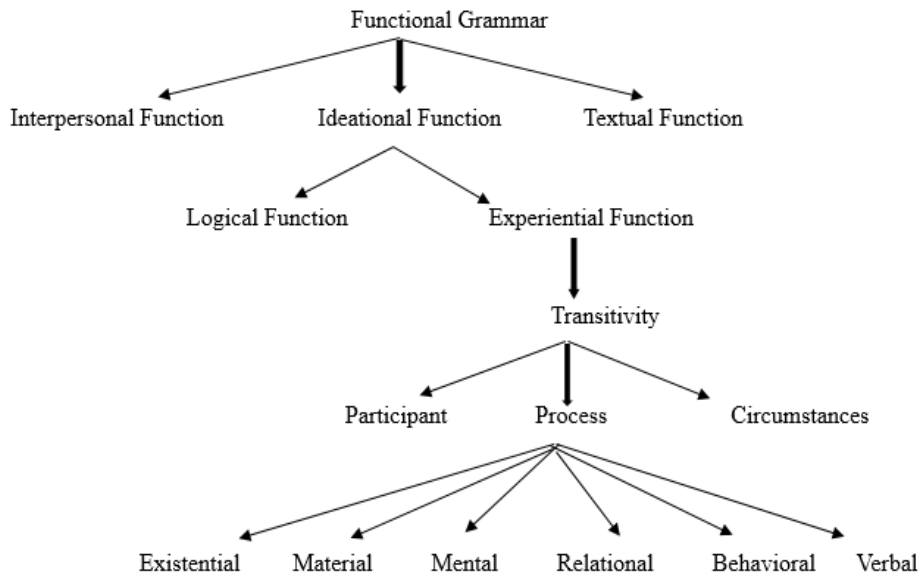
## Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) in combination with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its theoretical framework. SFG is described as "systemic" because it views language as a network of choices through which individuals construct meaning in discourse. The concept of choice is realized through grammar, which functions as a system of interconnected linguistic options. Building on this functional perspective, CDA examines how these linguistic choices contribute to the construction of ideology, power relations, and social inequality in discourse (Fairclough, 2001). By integrating SFG with CDA, the study not only identifies the grammatical patterns in the selected speech but also explores how these patterns are employed to represent agency, responsibility, and ideological meanings. According to Halliday (1994), language performs three main functions: the ideational metafunction (representation of reality), the interpersonal metafunction (developing the interaction between listener and speaker), and the textual metafunction (meaning about organization). But this study mainly focuses on how meaning of Trump's speech is reflected and realized in the transitivity grammar of the clause, which is considered a significant part in ideational metafunction.

## Findings and Discussion

### Frequency Distribution of Process Types

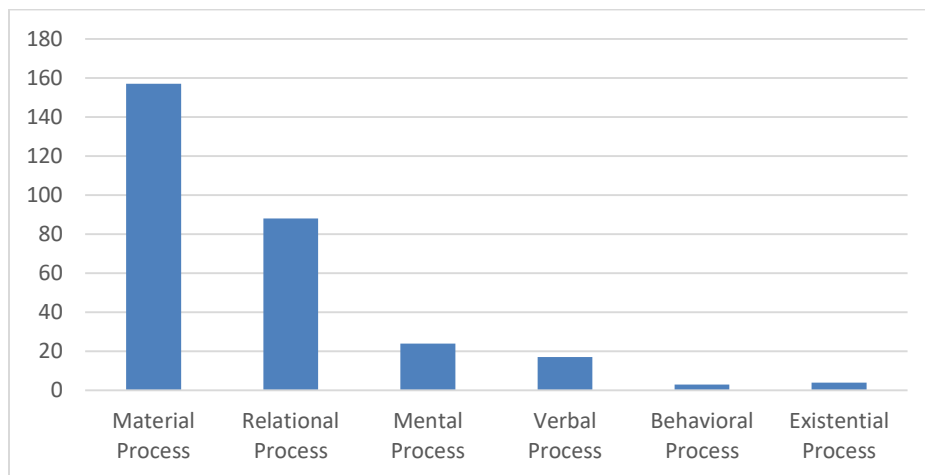
To analyze how different lexical choices create meanings associated with power and ideology, the speech was examined by using transitivity framework. There are 293 clauses found in the selected speech of Trump. Each clause was identified according to six process types which include material, relational, verbal, mental, behavioral, and existential processes. The numerical distribution of these processes shows the speaker's dominant way of portraying and point out the ideological and political function of language throughout the discourse. The frequency and percentage of each process type is given into following table, which shows the most frequent process type used in speech.



**Figure 1: Systemic Functional Grammar**

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Process Types**

| Process Type               | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Material process</b>    | 157       | 53.58%     |
| <b>Relational process</b>  | 88        | 30.03%     |
| <b>Mental process</b>      | 24        | 8.19%      |
| <b>Verbal process</b>      | 17        | 5.80%      |
| <b>Behavioral process</b>  | 03        | 1.02%      |
| <b>Existential process</b> | 04        | 1.37%      |
| <b>Total</b>               | 293       | 100%       |



**Figure 2: Visual Representation of Process Types**

The findings highlight that material process is the most dominant type of process in Trump's speech, showing heavy emphasis on actions, military involvement and state control. The second most frequent type is relational process helping in identity formation and ideological framing. Verbal and mental processes are less frequent but play a crucial role in convincing strategies and emotional engagement.

### Occurrence of Participants in the Speech

The occurrence of participants in the speech was also analyzed to identify how agency and authority are constructed in Trump's speech. Participants portray the social actors included in the different processes and highlight how power and responsibility is shared across the text. The following table shows the frequent participants role examined in the speech.

**Table 2: Role of Participants**

| Participants     | Frequency | Participants | Frequency |
|------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| <b>Actor</b>     | 149       | Verbiage     | 08        |
| <b>Goal</b>      | 123       | Receiver     | 08        |
| <b>Carrier</b>   | 88        | Senser       | 20        |
| <b>Attribute</b> | 86        | Phenomenon   | 20        |
| <b>Sayer</b>     | 17        | Existent     | 04        |
| <b>Behaver</b>   | 03        | Target       | 01        |
| <b>Total</b>     | 527       |              |           |

There are 527 participants in Trump's speech, the most dominant participant role is "actor" and second most dominant participant is "goal". Both participants are greater in numbers because the material process is dominant as shown in table 1. Participants are significant part of transitivity analysis as a driver is crucial for driving a car. The participants are identified by nominal group in given clauses.

### Process Types in Speech

#### Material Processes (Dominant)

This is the most frequent type of process that occurs in Trump's speech. Material process indicates actions, events, devastation, and transformation. For example,

| Clause                                                    | Process     | Participants                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>"Our armed forces have delivered swift victories."</b> | Delivered   | Actor: armed forces / Goal: victories |
| <b>"We totally obliterated those nuclear sites."</b>      | obliterated | Actor: we / Goal: nuclear sites       |

The clauses we chose, "Our armed forces have won quick victories" and "We totally obliterated those nuclear sites," are classified as material processes, highlighting action, agency, and power relations in the discourse. In the first clause, the material process "delivered" makes the Actor "our armed forces," building a collective institutional identity based on the sense of efficiency and success, while the Goal "swift victories" contains abstract achievements that are presented as

concrete results. The lexical item “delivered” connotes control and achievement, and thereby portrays military intervention as positive, orderly and justifies military action in terms of legitimacy and national pride, further reinforcing the image of military action. The second, on the other hand, enhances agency and force by means of the material of ‘obliterated’ and by means of ‘we’ as an Actor, the speaker is directly involved in the action, placing him in the first place in terms of authority and responsibility. ‘Those nuclear sites’ becomes objectification and distancing while the adverb ‘totally’ emphasizes the completeness and extremity of destruction. The use of such strong lexis creates an ideology of total military dominance and power. In summary, both clauses are realized as material processes. that emphasize the role of the military actor in the sentence and create a discourse of military efficacy, with military power, control, and the legitimization of force ideologically reinforced through strategic choice of words.

### Relational Processes

Relational processes help in identity construction and ideological representation. For example,

| Clause                                            | Process | Participants                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “America is winning.”                             | Is      | Carrier: America<br>Attribute: winning                              |
| “This murderous regime is an intolerable threat.” | Is      | Carrier: This murderous regime<br>/Attribute: an intolerable threat |

Relational processes are those that serve to identify, attribute and classify entities, rather than to represent actions, and are used to describe the definition, assessment or characterization of entities involved in discourse. America is winning is a clause in which the Carrier “America” is related to the Attribute “winning” and creates a state of being, thus framing the nation in a state of success and dominance. Likewise, in “This murderous regime is an intolerable threat,” the relational process “is” pairs up “This murderous regime” with the Attributes “murderous” and “an intolerable threat”, which are very evaluative and negative. The idea of relational constructions is important because they are not describing actions as such but rather stable identities and judgments that impact social actors' perceptions. In sum, these relational processes can help to create discursive forms of legitimacy and delegitimization by attributing and categorizing.

### Mental Processes

Mental processes help create emotional engagement and ideological reinforcement. For example,

| Clause                                             | Process | Participants |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------|
| “I believe America is strong.”                     | Believe | Senser: I    |
| “We think especially of the 13 American warriors.” | Think   | Senser: We   |

Representing internal experience not external actions: Mental processes express cognitive, perceptual, and affective states including thoughts, beliefs, desires, and perceptions. The mental process “believe” is the category that is assigned to “I” in the clause “I believe America is strong,” making “America is strong” appear as the Phenomenon that is evaluated, and emphasizing an individual's cognitive position. Likewise, in “We think especially of the 13 American warriors,” the mental process “think” makes “we” the Senser and the Phenomenon

“the 13 American warriors” the object. The importance of these constructions lies in their symbolic function as attitudes and evaluations that are internalized as mental states and thus can become “shared” or “legitimate” perspectives.

### Verbal Processes

| Clause                     | Process   | Participants                  |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| “I announced my campaign.” | Announced | Sayer: I / Verbiage: campaign |
| “I have vowed.”            | Vowed     | Sayer: I                      |

Verbal processes are communication processes (speaking, declaring, announcing, stating) that serve to encode the use of language to communicate a claim or commitment or convey information in discourse. The verbal group “announced” places “I” in the position of the Sayer, highlighting a clear act of publicly announcing, in which “my campaign” is the Verbiage being communicated. This construction is intended to communicate and establish authority in public statements. Likewise, “I have vowed” has a verb form “vowed” that exhibits a promise or intention in a speech act, though the intention or promise is not in the Verbiage. The lack of a clearly stated reported message directs the readers' or audience's attention to the seriousness and performative power of the action. Verbal processes generally support discourse by embodying an act of communication that establishes an authority, a commitment, and/or a public positioning with speech related actions.

### Behavioral Processes

| Clause                           | Process  | Participants                            |
|----------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------------|
| “The whole world is watching.”   | Watching | Behavior: the whole world               |
| “They laughed at our president.” | Laughed  | Behavior: they<br>Target: our president |

Behavioral processes are physiological and psychological actions that exist between material actions and mental states, and usually are human actions that can be observed, such as, seeing, hearing, smiling, or laughing. In the clause “The whole world is watching”, the behavioral process ‘watching’ is used to make the whole world the Behavior, so that ‘watching’ is a behavior that can be observed from the outside, in which the whole world is a player. This aspect highlights the need for ongoing monitoring globally, indicating increased attention and interaction. Likewise, in “They laughed at our president”, the behavioral process “laughed” sets “they” as the Behavior and “our president” as the target, indicating a social response which corresponds to an evaluation or reaction to “our president”.

### Existential Processes

| Clause                                  | Process               | Participants               |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| “There’s never been anything like it.”  | There is              | Existent: anything like it |
| “There would have been no Middle East.” | There would have been | Existent: no middle east   |

Existential processes are used to show that something exists or is present, usually with the structure “there is/are”, or its variants, but without assigning an action or agency to a particular participant. In the clause “There's never been anything like it”, the existential form ‘there is’ is used to assert the existence (or non-existence in this instance because of the negation) of something similar; the emphasis is on uniqueness and exceptionality. In “There would have been no Middle East” the existential modality “there would have been” is employed to think about the hypothetical lack of reality, making the Middle East contingent to specific conditions. These processes are important because they focus on what it means to be, as opposed to do, or have, and may serve to make persuasive or evaluative statements, often by making them appear as factual, generalized, or inevitable. The existential processes are generally used to create meaning by emphasizing the nature of something that exists, does not exist, or might exist in a specific context of discourse.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study show that transitivity analysis provides a useful linguistic tool to reveal the construction of meaning by language in discourse. Analysis of material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral and existential processes indicate that these are systemically and consistently chosen to represent actions, identities, thoughts, communications, behaviors and existence in specific ways. The patterns reflect that language does not just replicate reality but also constructs it by determining the roles of the participants and by emphasizing specific aspects of the experience. In addition, the results suggest that these process types involve building power relations and ideologies, since some actors appear as action actors, and others are objectified or assessed. This research recommended that further researchers use other frameworks of SFL such as mood and modality analysis, to give a broader understanding of how meaning is created within different linguistic dimensions.

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