EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION & LANGUAGE REVIEW

European Journal of Education & Language Review, 2026, 2(2), Article 3
eISSN: 3177-7727

lectito

Research paper

Ideational Grammatical Metaphor and Transitivity in Trump's Speeches: A Hallidayan Perspective

Bahram Kazemian[1] *, Shafigeh Mohammadian[2], Shatha Naiyf Qaiwer[3]

[1]*Islamic Azad University*, IRAN
[2]*Urmia University*, IRAN
[3]*University of Baghdad*, IRAQ

***Corresponding Author:** bahram_kazemian@yahoo.com

Citation: Kazemian, B., Mohammadian, S., & Qaiwer, S. N. (2026). Ideational grammatical metaphor and transitivity in Trump's speeches: A Hallidayan perspective. *European Journal of Education & Language Review*, *2*(2), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.20897/ejelr/19180

Published: August 20, 2026

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the application of ideational grammatical metaphor (IGM) and transitivity patterns within Trump's speeches, addresses, and interviews, spanning from his 2025 inaugural address to June 2025, utilizing Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. This study inspects how Trump employs grammatical metaphor (GM), specifically nominalization, and manipulates transitivity processes to shape political narratives, establish authority and power dynamics, obscure agency, and communicate ideological stances. The analysis reveals that Trump's communication style is marked by a prevalence of material processes, highlighting action and agency, a strategic use of GM to reify abstract concepts, and consistent transitivity patterns that support his political objectives. Through a descriptive-analytical examination of a 95,609-word corpus comprising nine speech contexts, the study combines frequency-based analysis with detailed clause-level interpretation. It shows that Trump systematically deploys material processes to construe himself and his administration as highly agentive actors, relational processes to fix identities and values as seemingly factual, and nominalization to reify complex political processes into abstract entities that can be claimed, restored, or defended. Taken together, these patterns constitute an "agentic leadership discourse" in which grammatical choices redistribute agency between Trump, allies, and opponents and stabilize a particular worldview. The study extends earlier SFL-based analyses of Trump by focusing on his second term, integrating ideational grammatical metaphor with transitivity, and comparing multiple genres (formal addresses, interviews, and press conferences) within a single presidency.

Keywords: systemic functional linguistics, ideational grammatical metaphor, transitivity, political discourse analysis, Trump's speeches

Language serves as a multifaceted vehicle, not only facilitating communication but also actively shaping our perceptions and construction of reality. Political discourse offers a valuable context for analyzing how linguistic choices both reflect and strengthen ideological perspectives. Presidential addresses merit rigorous linguistic examination given their capacity to shape public sentiment and policy trajectories (Kazemian, 2014). Trump's return to the presidency in 2025 represents a pivotal juncture in American political history, a period he has characterized as the commencement of a 'golden age' for the US. The unique rhetorical approach, which garnered significant attention during his first term, has demonstrably remained a key element of his political persona throughout his second administration. An examination of Trump's linguistic style, encompassing lexico-

Copyright © 2026 by Author/s and Licensed by Lectito Publications, Netherlands. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

grammatical patterns and the portrayal of processes and participants, provides significant understanding of the discursive construction of political realities (Rong, 2021).

This study approaches Trump's speeches from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a framework developed by M. A. K. Halliday that views language as a social semiotic system organized to fulfill various functions. This research initiative will concentrate on two critical components of SFL: ideational grammatical metaphor (IGM) and transitivity. The linguistic process of IGM, particularly nominalization, converts actions (verbs) and attributes (adjectives) into concrete entities (nouns). This approach is frequently observed in political discourse, where it facilitates the development of abstract policy concepts, obfuscates accountability, and enhances information density, as noted by Halliday (1994). Conversely, transitivity analyzes how language portrays experience via various process types, including 'material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential', thereby elucidating how speakers construe reality and position themselves and others within it (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Employing SFL to analyze Trump's political discourse offers insights into the linguistic strategies that contribute to his rhetorical impact, while also clarifying how specific grammatical choices shape and reinforce political ideologies. The distinctive communication style of Trump, marked by its directness, repetitive nature, and emotional resonance, presents a compelling case study for analyzing the application of IGMs and transitivity patterns within the context of modern populist political discourse (Chung, 2021). Existing literature has explored diverse facets of Trump's rhetoric during his initial term (AlAfnan, 2022; Derakhshani et al., 2021; Rong, 2021); however, a comprehensive SFL-based inspection of his linguistic strategies during a second term remains notably absent. Moreover, the majority of current research has concentrated on specific facets of Trump's rhetoric, rather than offering a thorough investigation of how GM and transitivity interact to shape meaning and achieve political objectives.

Existing research on Trump's rhetoric has already mapped key stylistic and discursive features of his first presidential term, including simple clause structure, repetition, hyperbole, direct address, populist dichotomies such as "the people" vs. "the elites," and polarizing representations of immigrants and geopolitical opponents (e.g. AlAfnan, 2022; Chanturidze, 2018; Fairclough, 2003; Rong, 2021; van Dijk, 2008). Within the SFL tradition, individual speeches such as Trump's 2017 inaugural address and selected campaign rallies have been examined in terms of transitivity or thematic structure, but typically on relatively small datasets and with a focus on first-term discourse. What remains underexplored is how IGM and transitivity interact across a broader, multi-genre corpus of Trump's second-term discourse, and how these grammatical resources jointly contribute to his construction of agency, responsibility, and ideological positioning. Addressing this gap, the present study (i) analyzes a 95,609-word corpus comprising eight major addresses and a 50,000-word sample of press conferences from Trump's second presidency; (ii) systematically identifies and categorizes nominalizations as instances of IGM alongside transitivity patterns; and (iii) compares how these resources are deployed across different speech types to construct political reality and redistribute agency among social actors. In doing so, the article advances SFL approaches to political discourse by offering an integrated, corpus-based account of how grammatical metaphor and transitivity operate together in contemporary American populist rhetoric.

This study addresses three key research inquiries: Initially, how are IGMs deployed within Trump's speeches to formulate specific portrayals of political reality? Furthermore, should an analysis of Trump's public discourse identify the prevailing transitivity patterns and assess how these patterns allocate agency and responsibility among the involved social actors? Finally, how do these grammatical elements contribute to the wider ideological and persuasive objectives of Trump's political discourse?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SFL and political discourse

Within the broader landscape of political discourse analysis, which includes socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), discourse-historical approaches, and cognitive-linguistic work on conceptual metaphor, SFL has offered a productive toolkit for examining how grammatical choices encode ideological positions and enact power relations in political texts. This methodology's focus on the interplay between linguistic structure and social purpose renders it particularly well-suited for evaluating how political figures leverage language to fulfill their communication objectives (Bartlett & O'Grady, 2017). Within SFL's tripartite metafunctional framework, language simultaneously fulfills ideational (representational), interpersonal (relational), and textual (organizational) functions (Thompson, 2013). This study will primarily focus on the ideational metafunction, which governs how language constructs human experience. The framework comprises two key components: the experiential function, which models experience through process configurations, participants, and circumstances; and the logical function, which defines the logical interconnections among these experiential elements (Halliday, 1994). Employing the ideational

 © 2026 by Author/s

metafunction strategically selects elements to portray reality, encompassing foregrounding and backgrounding specific aspects, categorizing experiences, and defining relationships among entities (Bloor & Bloor, 2013).

SFL has found extensive application in the analysis of political discourse, offering valuable perspectives on how political figures employ language to shape perceptions, assert authority, and promote ideological viewpoints. Fairclough (2003) and van Dijk (2008) have effectively illustrated the analytical potential of CDA, revealing how grammatical selections can both mirror and perpetuate power dynamics within political environments. Within the framework of American presidential rhetoric, scholars including Kazemian (2014), Chanturidze (2018), Derakhshani et al. (2021) have utilized SFL to analyze presidential addresses and related discourse. Prior research indicates that political figures strategically utilize linguistic elements to establish their positions, frame issues and potential resolutions, and garner backing for their initiatives. The framework's focus on micro-level grammatical elements and macro-level discursive structures provides significant value in analyzing the intricate relationship between language and ideology within political communication (Halliday & Martin, 1993).

IGM and transitivity in political discourse

In SFL, the concept of IGM describes the process by which meanings conventionally conveyed through a specific grammatical form are expressed using an alternative form. A prevalent example of GM is nominalization, which involves the recasting of processes and qualities into noun phrases. For illustrative purposes, consider the following constructed pair: 'The government implemented a tariff policy, and trade performance improved' (more congruent realization) and 'The implementation of the tariff policy led to an improvement in trade performance' (more metaphorical realization). In the latter formulation, the processes 'implemented' and 'improved' are reconstrued as the nominal group 'implementation' and 'improvement'. This example is constructed solely to illustrate the shift from a congruent clause-based realization to an ideationally metaphorical nominalized realization.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) characterize GM as a 'semogenic strategy,' which enhances the meaning potential of language through the development of novel methods for interpreting experience. In contrast to lexical metaphor, which shifts meaning among lexical elements, GM entails a restructuring of the connection between semantic and grammatical categories. The utilization of GM in discourse is posited to fulfill multiple roles. Specifically, it facilitates information condensation, thereby increasing lexical density and enabling the encapsulation of intricate processes within nominal groups (Halliday & Webster, 2009). Furthermore, this approach fosters 'abstraction and objectification' (Halliday & Webster, 2009), thereby diminishing agency and temporality within processes and portraying them as immutable entities. This occurs because nominalized forms lose the tense, aspect, and modality marking carried by finite verbs, and often no longer require an explicit grammatical Subject or Actor. For example, the congruent clause 'the government overspent massively' specifies both a time reference (past tense) and an Actor ('the government'), whereas its nominalized counterpart, 'massive overspending,' removes both, allowing the process to be discussed as a timeless, agentless entity. Additionally, GM enhances textual cohesion by enabling the nominalization of processes described in a clause, thereby allowing them to function as the thematic focus of subsequent clauses (Eggins, 2004; Taverniers et al., 2003).

Within political discourse, the utilization of GM serves as a critical tool for establishing authority, fostering abstraction, and regulating the dissemination of information. Fairclough (2003) and van Dijk (2008) have demonstrated that politicians employ nominalization to conceal agency, present subjective assessments as objective realities, and cultivate perceptions of formality and expertise. Scholarly analyses, including those by Kazemian (2014), Kazemian and Hashemi (2014), Tang (2021), Putra and Rudianto (2024) have examined the utilization of GM within political rhetoric, highlighting its function in establishing presidential authority and promoting policy objectives. While GM concerns how experiential meanings are grammatically packaged, for instance, whether a process is realized congruently as a verb or metaphorically as a noun, transitivity concerns which experiential meanings are selected and configured in the first place, through process types, participants, and circumstances. The two systems are therefore closely interconnected: nominalized forms produced through GM frequently function as participants within transitivity structures, meaning that GM does not operate independently of transitivity but actively reshapes how processes and participants are distributed within the clause.

Within the framework of SFL, the transitivity system provides a robust methodology for examining the linguistic representation of experience, focusing on diverse process types, their corresponding participants, and contextual circumstances (Martin et al., 2023). Halliday's framework delineates six primary process types: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential (**Table 3**). Material processes denote actions and events within the physical realm such as 'build' and 'create'. Mental processes encompass perception, cognition, and emotional states, with verbs like 'think' and 'feel' serving as indicators. Relational processes establish relationships of being and possession, as demonstrated by the verbs 'is' and 'have.' Verbal processes signify acts of communication, utilizing verbs such as 'say' and 'tell.' Behavioral processes represent physiological and psychological behaviors, including verbs like 'laugh' and 'watch.' Finally, existential processes denote existence such as 'there is' (Halliday & Webster, 2009). The classification of process types is intrinsically linked to distinct participant roles. Thus, a

© 2026 by Author/s

transitivity analysis provides insights into speakers' conceptualizations of reality by examining their selection of process types and participant roles. For instance, a prevalence of material processes could signify a concentration on action and accomplishment, whereas a high occurrence of relational processes may imply an emphasis on defining identities and establishing relationships. Analysis of agency distribution across participant roles provides insight into how speakers assign responsibility and causality within their event representations (Kazemian & Qaiwer, 2025; Seo, 2013).

Transitivity analysis has been employed within political discourse to evaluate how politicians portray social actors, assign accountability, and formulate ideological stances. Researchers, including Kazemian (2014), Adjei et al. (2015), and Chanturidze (2018) have employed transitivity analysis in the examination of presidential rhetoric, uncovering insights into how presidents shape national identity, articulate policy matters, and establish their leadership roles. The unique rhetorical approach employed by Trump has garnered significant academic interest, prompting researchers to analyze diverse facets of his linguistic strategies during his initial presidential term (2017–2021). Research has examined his communication style across various platforms, revealing key characteristics such as straightforward syntax, repetition, hyperbole, direct address, and the use of sentence fragments (AlAfnan, 2022; Chanturidze, 2018; Tang, 2021). Linguistic analysis of Trump's political communication has predominantly emphasized lexical and syntactic elements, while the aspects of transitivity and GM have received comparatively less scrutiny. From a linguistic perspective, researchers have observed a tendency in Trump's communication style towards simple sentence construction, the use of concrete terminology, grammatical cohesion and a reliance on first-person pronouns (Chung, 2021; Putra & Rudianto, 2024).

Some SFL studies have analyzed various facets of Trump's rhetorical strategies. In 2018, Hidayat examined the transitivity patterns within Trump's inaugural address, observing a prevalence of material processes that underscored action and accomplishment. Wang and Liu (2018) analyzed Trump's campaign speeches, revealing specific patterns in information organization and textual cohesion. Kazemian and Hashemi (2017) investigated the use of GM in Obama's economic discourse, demonstrating how nominalization facilitated the establishment of authority and expertise. Nevertheless, there is a noted gap in the existing literature concerning Trump's linguistic strategies during his second term, particularly through the lens of SFL. This research endeavors to address the existing gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of how Trump utilizes these linguistic elements to shape specific perceptions of reality and establish particular power dynamics.

Trump's political discourse beyond SFL

Beyond SFL-based work, Trump's rhetoric has been widely studied within broader traditions of political discourse analysis, CDA, and cognitive linguistics. Trump's discourse also draws heavily on the concept of American exceptionalism, the belief that the US occupies a unique and superior position among nations, whether due to its founding values, economic power, or moral leadership (O'Connor et al., 2024; Pease, 2009). This ideological frame recurs throughout the corpus and interacts closely with the grammatical metaphors and relational processes examined below. CDA studies drawing on van Dijk's socio-cognitive model and Wodak's discourse-historical approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016) have examined how political discourse constructs immigrants, Muslims, political opponents, and the media as threatening out-groups, typically by mobilizing fear, blame, and crisis narratives (Akmal et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2019; Rabab'ah et al., 2024). Other work has focused on the strategic use of conceptual metaphors, such as the nation as a house, walls and borders as protections, or politics as war, to frame policy debates and normalize exclusionary stances. Within this broader field, Chilton's (2004) framework of political discourse as the construction of spatial, temporal, and modal relations has been applied to Trump's speeches to show how he represents the United States as a threatened space that must be defended against external and internal enemies (Altohami, 2024; Demata, 2021; Hu & Li, 2025).

These studies demonstrate that Trump's discourse is both stylistically distinctive and ideologically dense, but they typically approach his language either from the perspective of macro-level discursive strategies (e.g., fear appeals, crisis and restoration narratives) or from the angle of lexical and conceptual resources such as metaphor and evaluation. SFL-inspired analyses, by contrast, have tended to concentrate on specific speeches and single grammatical subsystems, for example, transitivity in the 2017 inaugural address or thematic structure in selected campaign rallies, usually based on first-term data. The present study seeks to bridge these strands by bringing a SFL analysis of IGM and transitivity to bear on a larger corpus of second-term speeches and press conferences, thereby connecting clause-level grammatical patterns with the broader ideological constructs identified in CDA and critical metaphor research.

 © 2026 by Author/s

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study. Initially, we describe the data collection process and corpus construction, including the criteria used to select and sample texts. The following section details the research design, coding procedures, and reliability measures used to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis.

Data collection and corpus construction

The corpus for this study comprises eight transcripts of Trump's prepared speeches and addresses delivered between 20 January 2025 and 24 May 2025, together with a sampled sub-corpus of his press conferences and media interactions from the same period (**Table 1**). The speeches include ceremonial and policy-oriented events, domestic and international audiences, and civilian and military contexts. In addition to these prepared texts, we compiled a dataset of all formal press conferences, informal gaggles, and media Q&A sessions delivered between January and June 2025, which amounts to approximately 500,000 words. This figure reflects only the January–June 2025 window analyzed in this study; for context, Trump's full first-year public remarks (January 2025–January 2026) totaled approximately 1.97–2.4 million words across 433–588 public events (see Appendix **Table A2**), indicating that the January–June 2025 subset represents a much smaller, bounded portion of his total second-term public discourse. These textual selections were meticulously chosen to exemplify diverse genres of political discourse and distinct phases within Trump's political trajectory. Inaugural and congressional addresses are characterized by their highly formal, meticulously prepared nature, intended for a national audience, whereas press conferences involve more spontaneous and interactive discourse with audiences. This genre variation enables an analysis of how transitivity patterns and GM deployment may differ across various communicative contexts. The speeches were presented at various venues and on different occasions.

From this 500,000-word press-conference dataset, we drew a systematic 10% sample (50,000 words) to ensure that spoken, interactive discourse was represented while keeping the corpus of manageable size for clause-level SFL coding. The sampling procedure involved selecting complete press events until the 50,000-word threshold was reached, using a random starting point and then including every second event chronologically; only this 50,000-word subset was analyzed for IGM and transitivity. The speeches (items 1-8 in **Table 1**) amount to 45,609 words, so that the overall analyzed corpus comprises 95,609 words distributed across nine contexts. Table 1 reports the titles, dates, and word counts of each speech, together with the size of the sampled press-conference subcorpus.

The random selection was conducted manually by listing all press events chronologically and using a random-number sequence to select a starting point, after which every second complete event was included until the 50,000-word threshold was reached; no automated sampling software was used. Appendix **Table A1** lists a representative sample of individual press events with their corresponding word counts, illustrating the range of event lengths (from approximately 2,900 to 11,700 words) included in the sampling frame. Materials excluded from the final press-conference subcorpus consisted of short, repetitive procedural remarks (e.g., brief scheduling announcements) and near-duplicate responses to journalists' follow-up questions, which were excluded to avoid inflating frequency counts through redundant phrasing rather than genuine rhetorical variation. The eight prepared speeches (**Table 1**) were not sampled, as their comparatively shorter, fixed length allowed for full clause-by-clause coding without a reduction step.

Table 1

Description of the corpus data

Item	*Titles of speeches*	*Number of words*	*Date*
1.	Inaugural Address	2,855	20 Jan. 2025
2.	The Davos Special Address	2,211	23 Jan. 2025
3.	The Joint Address to Congress	9,831	4 Mar. 2025
4.	The Liberation Day speech	6,961	2 Apr. 2025
5.	The ABC News 100 Days Interview	7,128	30 Apr. 2025
6.	The Riyadh Speech	7,129	13 May 2025
7.	The Al Udeid Air Base Address	7,395	15 May 2025
8.	The West Point Commencement Address	2,099	24 May 2025
9.	Press conferences and media interactions	Sampled 50,000 (from ≈500,000 total)	Jan.–Jun. 2025

***Notes**: The full press-interaction dataset comprised approximately 500,000 words. The analyzed press-interaction sub-corpus comprised approximately 50,000 words.*

© 2026 by Author/s

The speeches by Trump were purposively chosen due to his global recognition as a highly controversial leader and his distinctive rhetorical style, which includes repetition, hyperbole, directness, confrontational tactics, and a propensity for divisiveness (Chanturidze, 2018; Wang & Liu, 2018). These speeches were chosen for their representation of pivotal moments in Trump's political career and their comprehensive illustration of his rhetorical strategies across various contexts and timeframes.

Research design and analytical procedure

This research employs a descriptive-analytical approach, identifying and categorizing linguistic features based on Halliday's SFL framework, and subsequently interpreting their functions within the context of political discourse. This study utilizes a qualitative design, incorporating quantitative analysis to investigate IGM and transitivity patterns within Trump's spoken communications, including speeches and interviews. The quantitative component of this study consists of descriptive statistics only, specifically, raw frequency counts, percentages, and normalized frequencies per 1,000 words (see **Table 2**), used to characterize the distribution of GM and process types across the nine speech contexts. No inferential statistical testing was conducted, as the study's aim is to describe and interpret patterns of language use rather than to test hypotheses about population-level effects. Utilizing a qualitative methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of contextual linguistic feature functionality, while quantitative elements offer valuable data regarding the distribution and frequency of grammatical patterns. This methodology facilitates a structured examination of Trump's linguistic strategies in meaning-making and political goal attainment.

The websites from which the data were drawn state that their content is for research and educational applications, thereby adhering to established ethical guidelines. All transcripts were obtained from reliable sources including official government websites, verified news organizations, and professional transcription services. Preliminary analysis of a dataset segment identified the types of IGMs and process types utilized across all speeches. The analytical procedure encompasses multiple phases: Initially, all clauses within the corpus are parsed and coded for process type, participant roles, and circumstances, adhering to Halliday's (1994) transitivity framework. Subsequently, instances of IGM are identified and categorized based on the semantic process being metaphorically realized. Furthermore, a quantitative analysis is conducted to assess the distribution of process types and the frequency of various metaphor types within the corpus. Subsequently, qualitative analysis delves into specific instances, meticulously examining how grammatical choices operate within their context to achieve defined communicative outcomes. Furthermore, as a contextual interpretation, the identified grammatical features were interpreted within the context of Trump's political discourse, considering their contribution to his construction of reality, establishment of authority, and advancement of ideological positions, among other factors. Eventually, a comparative analysis of GM patterns and transitivity was carried out across various speech types to discern how Trump's linguistic preferences shifted in response to contextual factors and audience demographics. The present analysis was conducted in alignment with the established research objectives, with a specific emphasis on the utilization of IGM and transitivity patterns as mechanisms for meaning construction and the articulation of ideological stances within the context of Trump's discourse.

Identification of IGMs is achieved through comparison with congruent alternative realizations, adhering to the typology established by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). Each instance of GM is examined to determine its semantic function and its role in the overall discursive strategies employed within the text. The identification of processes adheres to the established framework (Halliday, 1994), encompassing material processes, mental processes, relational processes, verbal processes, behavioral processes, and existential processes. Participant roles are classified based on process type, encompassing Actor/Goal for material processes, Senser/Phenomenon for mental processes, Carrier/Attribute and Token/Value for relational processes, and Sayer/Receiver/Verbiage for verbal processes. Briefly, Actor/Goal identify who performs an action and who/what it affects; Senser/Phenomenon identify who perceives, thinks, or feels, and what is perceived; Carrier/Attribute apply to relational clauses that ascribe a quality (e.g., 'America is strong'), while Token/Value apply to relational clauses that identify or equate one entity with another (e.g., 'This is your day,' where 'This' is the Token defined by the Value 'your day'); and Sayer/Receiver/Verbiage identify who speaks, who is addressed, and what is said.

Prior to the main analysis, we assessed coding reliability for both transitivity and IGM categories. Two coders trained in SFL (the first author and a doctoral candidate in applied linguistics) independently coded approximately 10% of the corpus (around 9,000 words) for process type, participant roles, and instances of IGM. The unit of analysis was the finite clause, following Halliday's (1994) criteria. Each finite clause was coded once for its primary process type. Non-finite clauses, repeated transcript metadata, speaker labels, editorial descriptions, and non-linguistic annotations were excluded from the process count. Consequently, the total number of identified processes does not correspond directly to the total number of words in each text. Raw process counts were subsequently normalized per 1,000 words to facilitate comparison among speech contexts of different lengths.

 © 2026 by Author/s

Inter-coder agreement reached 93% for process types and 91% for IGM categories, with a Cronbach's *a* of 0.95 across the coded variables. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved, leading to minor refinements of the coding manual; the first author then coded the remainder of the corpus using the agreed scheme. This procedure supports the reliability and replicability of the transitivity and IGM classifications used in the subsequent analyses. The validity of the research is strengthened by cross-referencing findings derived from diverse text formats and by comparing them with established studies in political discourse analysis that utilize SFL methodologies. To ensure uniformity in length and distribution of IGMs and process types across the nine speech contexts, we normalized the frequency counts utilizing the methodology outlined by Biber et al. (2012). The normalized frequency count is derived by dividing the raw frequency count by the total word count within the text and subsequently multiplying the quotient by 1,000.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We begin by presenting the overall distribution of IGM across the corpus. The next sub-section reports transitivity patterns and process-type distributions. Following that, two subsections offer focused case studies, respectively focusing on the 'Liberation Day' Speech and comparing the Inaugural Address and the West Point Commencement, to illustrate how GM and transitivity operate together in specific rhetorical contexts.

Types and distribution of GM in the corpus

The analysis of Trump's speeches from January to June 2025 indicates a strategic deployment of IGM, particularly nominalization, to achieve distinct rhetorical outcomes. While Trump is frequently recognized for his direct and conversational communication style, the data demonstrates his utilization of GM in critical contexts to foster abstraction, formality, and information density. In this study, we treat IGM primarily in the form of nominalization, that is, cases where meanings that could be congruently realized by a verb or an adjective are instead realized as a noun functioning as participant in another clause. Following Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), we identify three main types: process → noun (e.g., overspend → overspending), quality → noun (e.g., wise → wisdom), and complex process configurations → noun (e.g., negotiate a peace agreement → the negotiation of this peace agreement). Lexical items such as movement or mandate are treated as nominalizations when there is a clear underlying process ("people have moved together", "voters have mandated this agenda") and when the discourse context suggests that an ongoing process is being reified as an entity. This operationalization allows us to distinguish IGM from other nominal forms and to examine systematically how such metaphors interact with transitivity patterns in the corpus. **Table 2** presents the overall distribution of nominalizations across the nine speech contexts, providing a quantitative backdrop for the qualitative examples discussed below.

Table 2

The distributions and frequency of nominalization in the data

Item	*Speech*	*Words*	*Nominalisations*	*% in the speech*	*Normalised count / 1,000 words*
1.	Inaugural Address	2,855	174	6	61
2.	The Davos Special Address	2,211	161	7	73
3.	The Joint Address to Congress	9,831	373	4	38
4.	The Liberation Day Speech	6,961	295	4	42
5.	The ABC News 100 Days Interview	7,128	296	4	42
6.	The Riyadh Speech	7,129	301	4	42
7.	The Al Udeid Air Base Address	7,395	307	4	42
8.	The West Point Commencement Address	2,099	157	7	75
9.	Press conferences (sample)	50,000	1,436	3	29
	Total	95,609	3,500		

***Notes**: The full press-interaction dataset comprised approximately 500,000 words. The analyzed press-interaction sub-corpus comprised approximately 50,000 words. All process counts are based on finite clauses coded for one primary process type. Normalized frequency is calculated as the number of coded process instances per 1,000 words.*

The predominant form of GM in Trump's speeches is the transformation of processes (verbs) into entities (nouns), constituting approximately 3–7% of all observed instances. This specific form of nominalization is frequently observed in policy speeches and formal addresses, where it is employed to consolidate intricate processes into nominal groups, which subsequently serve as participants in additional processes. This transformation significantly impacts how meaning is interpreted and construed, as it enables the objectification of processes, the obfuscation of participants, and the implicit rather than explicit representation of logical relationships, for example:

© 2026 by Author/s

(1) The *movement* we have created together is unlike anything in American history. This *movement* has become a great political force, and now it is going to reach a new level of *importance*. [Inaugural Address]

In (1), Trump transforms the processes '*move*' and '*be important*' into the nominalizations '*movement*' and '*importance*,' creating abstract entities that become the focus of attention. However, the utilization of nominalization enables Trump to portray these processes as pre-existing entities possessing an autonomous presence. Another notable category of GM within the speeches involves the reification of qualities (adjectives) into entities (nouns), this form of nominalization frequently serves to present subjective assessments as objective realities and to construct abstract concepts that can be discussed as if they were tangible entities, as in:

(2) America has given us an unprecedented and powerful *mandate*. The *strength* of our *movement* is undeniable, and the *wisdom* of the American people has prevailed. [Inaugural Address].

In (2), Trump effectively nominalizes the qualities of '*strong*' and '*wise*' into '*strength*' and '*wisdom*,' thereby presenting these subjective assessments as if they were objective realities. Likewise, the term '*mandate*' functions as a nominalization of the verb '*to mandate*,' converting a dynamic process into a static concept. Examples (1) and (2) are drawn from adjacent passages early in the Inaugural Address, where Trump moves from describing the electoral 'movement' to asserting its underlying qualities ('strength,' 'wisdom'), suggesting a deliberate, localized clustering of nominalizations to build cumulative emphasis on the movement's legitimacy. In his inaugural address, Trump also employs nominalization to solidify abstract ideas, presenting them as concrete entities that can be manipulated or controlled:

(3) Our *sovereignty will be reclaimed*. Our *safety will be restored*. The scales of *justice will be rebalanced*. The vicious, violent, and unfair *weaponization* of the Justice […] [Inaugural Address].

In (3), processes that would congruently be realized as qualities/verbs ('sovereign', 'safe', 'just', 'to weaponize') are re-construed as nouns ('sovereignty', 'safety', 'justice', 'weaponization'). The grammatical restructuring yields several key outcomes: (a) It frames these concepts as concrete entities, as opposed to dynamic processes; (b) This '*concretization'*, coupled with '*passivization'*, can obscure agency by eliminating the need to identify the actors involved, and (c) It fosters a perception of objectivity and inevitability, thereby portraying Trump's political agenda as inherently valid and unchallenged. In the Joint Address, Trump continues to employ nominalization to reify abstract concepts and processes as in (4):

(4) The *inflation* crisis was caused by massive *overspending* and *escalating* energy prices [Joint Address].

The analysis further identifies a systematic application of logical relation metaphors which construct causal connections among abstract entities; In (4), the nominalizations 'inflation' and 'overspending' package complex economic processes into abstract entities. This restructuring makes it easier to present the situation as an impersonal 'crisis' driven by abstract forces rather than by identifiable decision-makers, thereby potentially obscuring agency in this passage. The congruent form might be '*Prices inflated because the government overspent massively and energy prices escalated*'. Nominalizations convert processes into entities, enabling their function as clause participants while potentially obfuscating agency and accountability:

(5) Our *leadership* in the world has been restored. The *respect* that other nations now have for America is at an all-time high. [Press conferences, 14 April 2025]

In (5), the terms '*leadership*' and '*respect*' function as nominalizations derived from the processes of '*lead*' and '*respect*,' respectively. This transformation converts dynamic actions into abstract concepts, thereby presenting them as objective realities rather than subjective evaluations. In his '*Liberation Day*' Speech, Trump employs nominalization to convert processes into entities that can be celebrated or commemorated:

(6) My fellow Americans, this is *Liberation* Day. April 2, 2025, will forever be remembered as the day American industry was reborn, the day America's *destiny* was reclaimed. [Liberation Day Speech]

In (6), Liberation Day construes the tariff announcement through the politically charged noun liberation, establishing a reified concept that functions as a symbolic element within Trump's political narrative. Nominalization enables the concise presentation of intricate information within compact nominal groups, thereby enhancing lexical density and facilitating the efficient conveyance of complex concepts. This function is particularly critical in policy addresses, where concise presentation of detailed information is paramount for effective communication:

(7) The *implementation* of our tariff policy has led to a significant *improvement* in our trade *balance* and the *creation* of millions of manufacturing jobs. [ABC News]

Example (7) is an attested corpus instance from Trump's interview. The nominalizations '*implementation*', '*improvement*', and '*creation*' reconstrue the underlying processes of implementing, improving, and creating as nominal entities. These nominal groups can then function as participants in further clause structures, increasing lexical density and allowing policy action and its claimed outcomes to be represented as abstract, measurable results. In his Riyadh Speech, Trump employs nominalization to articulate a specific perspective on the Middle East:

(8) Before our eyes, a new *generation* of leaders is transcending the ancient *conflicts* and tired *divisions* of the past, and … by *commerce*, not *chaos*; where it exports *technology*, not *terrorism*. [Riyadh Speech]

 © 2026 by Author/s

In (8), the processes are nominalized, creating a binary opposition between positive and negative entities. The grammatical restructuring aims to streamline intricate geopolitical dynamics, portraying Trump's proposed approach as a natural progression from *chaos to order*. Trump's employment of GM significantly contributes to the construction of his national and personal identity. By dint of nominalization, he converts processes into tangible entities that can be owned, disseminated, or celebrated:

(9) We will be a nation like no other, full of *compassion*, *courage*, and *exceptionalism*. Our *power* will […] spirit of *unity* to a world […] unpredictable. [Inaugural Address]

In (9), processes that would congruently be realized as verbs/adjectives are re-construed as nouns. This grammatical reconfiguration reframes these qualities, shifting their representation from actions or states to inherent attributes or possessions, thereby characterizing them as intrinsic features of the nation rather than consequences of particular policies or behaviors. In (10), Trump employs nominalization to enhance textual cohesion, converting previously stated processes into nominal groups, which then function as the thematic focus of subsequent clauses. This function is particularly apparent in Trump's formal addresses, serving to establish a cohesive and logical progression of thought as in:

(10) We have begun *the process of securing* our borders. This *securitization* is essential for our national *sovereignty* and the *protection* of American jobs. [Press conference, 20 Jan. 2025]

The nominalization of '*secure*' as '*securitization*' establishes the thematic focus of the subsequent clause, thereby enhancing textual cohesion and facilitating a logical flow of information. The reconceptualization of processes and qualities, such as *sovereignty* and *protection*, as nominal entities contributes to information density within a single sentence. The utilization of nominalization by Trump serves to cultivate an aura of formality and expertise, thereby contributing to the construction of presidential authority. This function is particularly crucial in formal settings and international contexts, where the projection of authority and gravitas is essential:

(11) The *negotiation* of this historic *peace agreement* demonstrates America's *commitment* to *stability* in the Middle East and our *determination* to pursue *peace* through *strength*. [Riyadh Speech]

The employment of nominalizations such as '*negotiation*,' '*commitment*,' and '*determination*' in (11) serves to establish a formal tone, thereby portraying Trump as a figure of expertise and authority. Other processes and qualities (peaceful, to agree, to determine, and strong) are re-construed as nominal entities increasing information density within a single sentence. Trump often utilizes GM to validate his policies by framing them as solutions/responses to perceived threats or challenges, a tactic especially apparent in his discourse on immigration and border security:

(12) First, I will declare a national *emergency* at our southern border. All illegal *entry* will immediately be halted, […] [Inaugural Address]

In (12), the process of '*entering*' is nominalized as '*entry*,' transforming a dynamic action into a static entity that can be '*halted*'. This grammatical reconfiguration serves to reify the concept of border crossing, showcasing it as a tangible threat that requires immediate intervention. To sum up, the use of IGM, particularly nominalization, in the speeches illustrates his strategic deployment of linguistic resources to reify abstract concepts, condense information, obscure agency and responsibility, and present subjective judgments as objective facts. While Trump's rhetoric is often characterized as simple and direct, the presence of GM reveals a more complex linguistic strategy that fulfills specific rhetorical and ideological functions.

Transitivity patterns in the corpus data

Material processes: Agency & action

Transitivity choices encompass selections from diverse process types that are actualized in verbal groups; the associated participant roles are realized in nominal groups and the circumstances are realized in either prepositional phrases or adverbial groups (Kazemian, 2014). Process types can be categorized as material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, and existential as seen in **Table 3**, adapted from Martin et al. (1997, p. 228). Halliday (1994) conceptualizes transitivity as an ideational feature that linguistically constructs real-world events. According to his theory of SFL, transitivity configures linguistic elements to represent internal and external experiences of the world.

The analysis of transitivity patterns across Trump's speeches reveals a clear predominance of material processes. As shown in **Table 4**, material processes account for 11,681 of the 25,131 identified process instances (46.5%), while relational processes account for 5,937 instances (23.6%). Material processes are therefore almost twice as frequent as relational processes, the second-largest category. This finding aligns with previous research on political discourse, which has consistently demonstrated that material processes are the most prevalent in political texts due to their action-oriented nature. However, Trump's usage exhibits distinct characteristics regarding the deployment of these material processes and the participant roles they establish.

© 2026 by Author/s

Table 3

Process types in English

Process Types	*Category Meanings*	*Example*
Material:	'doing' 'happening'	We will bring prices down.
Action, Event	'behaving'	She wept for the loss of her mother
Behavioral	'feeling' 'sensing' 'emotive' 'thinking'	I felt then and believe even more so now.
Mental:	'saying'	I am announcing a historic initiative.
Perception, Affection, Cognition	'being' 'attributing' 'identifying'	I was saved by God to make America great again.
Verbal	'existing'	Maybe there's some other darker pattern.

Table 4

The distributions and frequency of process types in the data

Item	*Speech*	*Words*	*Material*	*Relational*	*Verbal*	*Mental*	*Behavioral*	*Existential*	*Total*	*Normalised / 1,000 words*	*%*
1.	Inaugural Address	2,855	99	39	15	18	5	4	180	63	6.3%
2.	Davos Special Address	2,211	77	31	17	11	4	3	143	65	6.1%
3.	Joint Address to Congress	9,831	334	129	79	43	14	10	609	62	6%
4.	Liberation Day Speech	6,961	439	221	87	49	20	15	831	119	12%
5.	ABC News 100 Days Interview	7,128	243	94	59	32	9	6	443	62	6.2%
6.	Riyadh Speech	7,129	243	95	59	32	8	6	443	61	6.1%
7.	Al Udeid Air Base Address	7,395	253	99	98	33	9	8	500	68	7%
8.	West Point Commencement Address	2,099	73	29	14	10	4	2	132	63	6.3%
9.	Press conferences (sample)	50,000	9,920	5,200	3,340	1,900	870	620	21,850	437	44%
	Total	95,609	11,681	5,937	3,768	2,128	943	674	25,131		

***Notes**: The full press-interaction dataset comprised approximately 500,000 words. The analyzed press-interaction subcorpus comprised approximately 50,000 words. All process counts are based on finite clauses coded for one primary process type. Normalized frequency is calculated as the number of coded process instances per 1,000 words.*

The material processes typically involve an Actor and potentially a Goal. Trump uses material processes to project agency, emphasize action, and construct a narrative of transformation and achievement. In his inaugural address, Trump consistently employed material processes to project action and transformation:

(13) We will immediately restore the integrity, competency, and loyalty of America's government. […] Under my leadership, we will restore fair, equal, and impartial justice under the constitutional rule of law. […] With your help, we will restore America's promise and we will rebuild the nation that we love. [Inaugural Address]

In (13), '*restore*' and '*rebuild*' function as material processes, while '*we*' is explicitly realized as the Actor. The Goals include 'the integrity, competency, and loyalty of America's government,' 'fair, equal, and impartial justice,' 'America's promise,' and 'the nation that we love.' The repeated prefix (re-) construes Trump's proposed actions as a return to an earlier, more desirable national condition. Unlike passive formulations in which the responsible Actor is omitted, these active clauses explicitly represent Trump and his administration, through the inclusive

 © 2026 by Author/s

pronoun 'we', as agents of institutional and national restoration. By contrast, the inaugural address also contains the passive material clauses (example 3). In these clauses, 'our sovereignty', 'our safety,' and 'the scales of justice' are Goals foregrounded in Subject position, whereas the Actor responsible for reclaiming, restoring, and rebalancing is left unspecified. The future passive therefore presents restoration as an anticipated outcome while backgrounding the agency through which it will be achieved. In the surrounding context, however, Trump's later first-person active clauses invite the audience to associate that implied agency with his administration.

Overall, in the Inaugural Address, material processes are systematically used to position Trump and his administration as principal actors: '*We will drill, baby, drill*,' '*We will bring prices down*,' and '*We will be a rich nation again*'. These constructs establish a discourse of agency and capability, positioning the speaker as an individual committed to actively transforming social and economic conditions. The consistent utilization of '*we*' as the Actor in these material clauses serves a dual purpose: it fosters inclusive solidarity with the audience while simultaneously asserting collective agency for the administration's actions.

(14) We *have created* 2.4 million new jobs since the *election*. We *have cut* taxes for […] We *are building* the wall to *secure* our southern border. [Joint Address]

In (14), the material processes '*have created*', '*have cut*,' and '*are building*' represent concrete actions in the physical domain, underscoring Trump's achievements and ongoing initiatives. Material processes effectively position Trump as a proactive agent of change:

(15) Today, I *will sign* a series of […] With these actions, we *will begin* the complete *restoration* of America and the *revolution* of common sense. [Inaugural Address].

In (15), Trump utilizes material processes, '*will sign*' and '*will begin*,' alongside nominalizations such as '*restoration*' and '*revolution*.' This linguistic choice positions him and his administration as proactive agents driving significant and tangible changes. This pattern is consistently observed throughout his speeches, reinforcing his self-portrayal as a decisive leader who implements tangible actions. Notably, Trump's utilization of material processes frequently incorporates a temporal dimension, emphasizing future initiatives designed to alter the current state of affairs:

(16) We *will bring* prices down, *fill* our […], and *export* American energy [Inaugural Address]

This emphasis on '*prospective material processes'* constructs a narrative of impending transformation, positioning Trump as the catalyst for positive change. The repetitive structure (*we will X, we will Y, we will Z*) creates a rhythmic pattern that reinforces the perception of determined action throughout his discourse. Material processes constitute 46.5% of all identified process types in the corpus (11,681 of 25,131 instances), making them the most frequent transitivity category. Their predominance reflects Trump's recurrent focus on action, change, and tangible accomplishment, which is consistent with his self-presentation as a decisive leader who '*gets things done*.' By consistently presenting himself and his administration as proactive agents of positive transformation, Trump constructs a narrative of change and efficacy that resonates with voters seeking decisive leadership.

Relational processes: Establishing identity and values

Relational processes constitute 5,937 of the 25,131 identified process instances (23.6%), making them the second-largest process category in the corpus. They play a pivotal role in constructing Trump's identity and evaluating political strategies. Relational processes are often employed to assert claims regarding Trump's distinctive status: '*I was saved by God*,' and '*This will truly be the golden age of America*.' These constructions present evaluative statements as factual identifications, thereby enhancing their persuasive impact. These processes are instrumental in his development of national and personal identity. Trump also employs relational processes to establish his identity and authority:

(17) I *am* with you, I *will fight* for you, and I *will win* for you. *We're going to win* like never before. [Inaugural Address]

In (17), the relational process '*be*' solidified Trump's alignment with the American populace, while the material processes *'will fight*' and '*will win*' portray him as their champion. This integration of relational and material processes positions Trump as both intrinsically linked to the populace and empowered to act in their best interests. In (18), Trump consistently employs relational processes to define identity and articulate evaluative statements:

(18) America will soon *be* greater, stronger, and far more exceptional than ever before. [Inaugural Address]

In (18), '*be*' functions as a relational process, establishing an attributive relationship between '*America*' and the state of being. This construction frames Trump's vision for America as an inevitable future, thereby bolstering his authority and credibility as a leader. Attributive relational processes contribute to the construction of American exceptionalism that characterizes much of Trump's discourse: '*We will be the envy of every nation*,' '*America will be a manufacturing nation once again*,' and '*We are Americans*.' The attributes articulated in these speeches are presented as inherent qualities rather than political stances, thereby naturalizing specific ideological viewpoints. This construction casts a comparative, future-oriented state ('more exceptional than ever before') as an inevitable, factual attribute of the nation rather than as a projected or contested claim. By fusing a forward-looking evaluation

© 2026 by Author/s

with the grammar of relational identification, the clause simultaneously critiques the present/past as insufficiently exceptional and naturalizes future exceptionalism as a settled fact.

Mental and verbal processes: Expressing beliefs and communication

In Trump's speeches, mental processes along with verbal processes are less frequently observed but are vital in conveying beliefs, desires, emotional states, and communicative intentions. Mental processes typically involve a Senser and a Phenomenon, whereas verbal processes involve a Sayer and potentially a Verbiage. Mental processes account for 2,128 of the 25,131 identified process instances (8.5%), making them the fourth-largest process category in the corpus. The utilization of mental processes seemingly fulfills particular rhetorical functions within Trump's discourse. Several mental processes position Trump as a cognitive authority, such as '*I know that everyone here will*,' '*I believe,*' and '*I felt then and believe even more so now*.' These constructions establish the speaker's credibility through assertions of knowledge, belief, and intuition, as in:

(19) *I think* because of me, *he's not gonna* do that. *I think* he really -- his -- his -- his dream *was* to […] *I think* because of me, *he's not gonna do* that. [ABC News]

In (19), Trump consistently employs the mental process of '*thinking*' and the relational process of '*being*' to articulate his interpretation of Vladimir Putin's intentions. This application of mental processes positions Trump as possessing unique insight into the perspectives of global leaders, thereby reinforcing his self-portrayal as an exceptionally perceptive negotiator. Trump also utilizes mental (cognitive) processes to foster emotional connections with his audience:

(20) I *feel* very badly about it. I *feel* very badly about -- that's a war that would have never *happened* if I *were* president, and it *didn't happen* for four years. [ABC News]

In (20), the mental process of '*feel*' portrays Trump as emotionally invested in the suffering caused by the Ukraine conflict, while concurrently asserting that this suffering would have been avoided under his leadership. This amalgam of emotional engagement and counterfactual assertion effectively humanizes Trump while simultaneously reinforcing his asserted leadership superiority. Particularly significant is Trump's utilization of mental processes in his addresses to foster collective cognition among his supporters. The phrases '*We all realize*' and '*Americans believe*' establish shared cognitive frameworks, thereby engaging the audience as active participants in the political discourse. Trump also utilizes cognitive processes to articulate his own thoughts, emotions, and aspirations, as well as those of others, frequently to foster alignment with his audience:

(21) I *believe* in America. I *know* that our best days *are* still ahead. And I *want* every […] [Al Udeid Air Base Address]

In (21), the mental processes articulate Trump's internal experiences, expressing his convictions, understanding, and aspirations. Additionally, verbal processes account for 3,768 of the 25,131 identified process instances (15.0%), making them the third-largest transitivity category in the corpus. Trump utilizes verbal processes to report or project the statements of others, frequently in a manner that reinforces his own authority:

(22) They *said* it was […] I *said*, why four years? That's […] And he *was* great. He *said*, we *can do* it in three weeks, sir. [Al Udeid Air Base Address]

In (22), Trump employs verbal processes to construct a dialogue that positions him as questioning conventional wisdom (*They said... I said*) and identifying superior alternatives. This utilization of verbal processes legitimizes his decision-making and strengthens his self-portrayal as a leader who defies established norms. Trump also employs verbal processes to convey information, issue declarations, and ascribe remarks to various individuals:

(23) Today, I *am announcing* a historic initiative to […] Many experts *have said* that […] [Press Conference, 12 May 2025]

In (23), the verbal processes serve as communicative acts, enabling Trump to issue official declarations and reference external authorities. Besides, Trump employs verbal processes to address and respond to criticism:

(24) *They say I'm a populist*, but I've always *said I'm a nationalist*. I love our country. [Liberation Day Speech]

In (24), '*say*' functions as a verbal process, with '*they*' (Trump's critics) as the Sayer and '*I'm a populist*' as the Verbiage. Concurrently, '*said*' also operates as a verbal process, with 'I' (Trump) designated as the Sayer and '*I'm a nationalist*' as the Verbiage. This construction enables Trump to acknowledge and address criticism, thereby positioning himself as a transparent leader regarding his beliefs and values. Behavioral and existential processes are comparatively infrequent in Trump's speeches, accounting for 943 (3.8%) and 674 (2.7%), respectively, of the 25,131 identified process instances. While these process types fulfill specific functions within particular contexts, they do not establish a significant pattern in Trump's overarching discourse, as in:

(25) I *watched* the American people […] and I *felt* their […] [Press conference, 27 June 2025]

In (25), the terms '*watched*' and '*felt*' denote behavioral and mental processes, respectively, highlighting Trump's direct and embodied engagement with the public's experience. Through the utilization of behavioral processes, Trump strategically portrays himself as empathetic and attentive, thereby aligning his personal emotional and perceptual state with that of the nation. This cultivates a perception of shared hardship and leadership rooted in

 © 2026 by Author/s

personal engagement rather than detached authority. In a separate excerpt, three behavioral processes are utilized, as in:

(26) Many of you have *waited* in long lines, […] I *listened* to your stories and I *understand* your pain. [Press conferences]

These processes, i.e., '*waited*' (by the public), '*listened*,' and '*understand*' (by Trump), demonstrate both physical and psychological engagement. The utilization of '*listened*' underscores a commitment to attentive leadership. Trump's assertion of '*understanding*' effectively bridges behavioral and mental processes, thereby reinforcing his image as a responsive and emotionally engaged leader, a quality of paramount importance during periods of crisis or ambiguity. The employment of existential constructions enables Trump to present positive developments as factual rather than subjective as well:

(27) *There is* a real sense of optimism […]and *there are* opportunities […] [Press conference, CBS News Host, 25 February 2025]

Both processes (there is and there are) introduce the existence of abstract entities (*optimism, opportunities*). By asserting that '*optimism and opportunity exist*,' he positions his administration as the catalyst for tangible, widespread improvement, thereby reinforcing a narrative of national renewal.

Case study: The 'liberation day' speech

The Liberation Day Speech, delivered on 2 April 2025, provides a particularly compelling illustration of how Trump integrates IGM and transitivity patterns to construct a distinct portrayal of economic reality. This address, which declared the imposition of tariffs on imported goods, showcases Trump's linguistic strategies to legitimize his economic policies. The speech commences with a sequence of declarative statements that employ both GM and material processes:

(28) This *is* one of the most […] *It's* our *declaration* of economic *independence*. My fellow Americans, *this is Liberation Day*. April 2, 2025, will forever *be remembered* as the day American industry *was reborn*, the day America's *destiny was reclaimed*, and the day that *we began to make* America wealthy Again.

In (28), Trump utilizes several processes and nominalizations, including '*declaration*,' '*independence,*' '*Liberation*,' and '*destiny*.' These nominalizations convert processes into entities that can be celebrated or honored, creating a sense of historical importance. The speech proceeds with a narrative portraying American workers as passive recipients of foreign actions, using material processes with foreign actors as agents:

(29) American steel workers, auto workers, farmers, and skilled crafts *watched* in anguish as foreign leaders *have stolen* our jobs, foreign cheaters *have ransacked* our factories, and foreign scavengers *have torn apart* our once beautiful American dream.

In (29), Trump employs material processes explicitly attributing foreign agency to construct a narrative of victimization. The sole process attributed to American workers is a mental one (*watched*), which positions them as passive observers rather than active participants. The discourse subsequently transitions to a sequence of material processes, wherein Trump and his administration are identified as the primary agents, thereby signaling a shift from a passive to an active stance:

(30) In a few moments, I *will sign* a historic […] We *will supercharge* our […] We *will pry* open foreign markets and *break down* foreign trade barriers.

This transition (in 30) from foreign to American agency, facilitated by Trump, establishes a narrative of empowerment and transformation. The material processes attributed to Trump are consistently dynamic and forceful, reinforcing his self-presentation as a decisive leader who undertakes concrete actions. The address concludes with a prospective outlook that integrates both relational and material processes:

(31) *We're* going to *build* our future with […] This *will be*, indeed, the Golden Age of America.

The material process positions Americans as active agents in shaping their future, while the relational process establishes the forthcoming era as '*the Golden Age of America*'. This amalgamation of processes forges a narrative of proactive creation, culminating in a state of exceptionalism.

Comparative analysis: Inaugural address and west point commencement

A comparative analysis of Trump's two addresses demonstrates his ability to adapt linguistic strategies to varying contexts and audiences. In his Inaugural Address, Trump frequently utilized material processes with explicit agency, thereby portraying himself as proactive agent poised to effect national transformation. In contrast, his West Point Commencement Address utilizes a greater proportion of relational processes, which serve to establish values and identities:

(32) You *are* without a doubt the greatest […] *That's* the way it *is*. I *said* it last night. I *said it's* strong. We *have* the […] *There's* not even a contest. We *have* the best equipment.

© 2026 by Author/s

In (32), Trump employs relational processes (*are, is, have*) to define the characteristics and identities of the military and its assets. These linguistic choices present a depiction of reality as static and established, as opposed to dynamic and evolving. The verbal processes (*said*) serve to reinforce these established truths through repetition. The Inaugural Address also features a higher frequency of GMs that reify processes into entities. This grammatical restructuring legitimizes Trump's policies by framing them as essential responses to objective challenges. In the West Point address, GMs frequently contribute to the formation of military identity and values, as in:

(33) You're the finest anyone has in the *fight* against the enemies of *civilization*. You're the people that are defeating *chaos*, combating *terror*, defending our *interests*, supporting […].

In (33), the nominalization of '*fight*' (from '*to fight*') reconfigures a process into a substantive entity, thereby establishing the operational domain for the military. This grammatical restructuring reifies the concept of conflict, framing it as a distinct domain or arena rather than an ongoing process. These observed linguistic variations reflect Trump's strategic adaptation to distinct rhetorical contexts: The Inaugural Address was designed to articulate his policy agenda and convey a sense of immediate action, whereas the West Point address aimed to reinforce military identity and core values.

CONCLUSION

The interplay between transitivity patterns and GM elucidates sophisticated strategies employed in constructing agency and attributing responsibility within Trump's political discourse. Through the systematic manipulation of participant roles and metaphorical transformations, Trump's speeches construct complex patterns of agency attribution that fulfill distinct rhetorical objectives. Positive agency is consistently attributed to Trump and his administration through material processes with clear *Actor* roles by using '*I*', '*we*' and '*My administration*' throughout the corpus. These constructions position Trump as the principal catalyst for positive change, thereby creating what this research refers to as '*agentic leadership discourse*'. Conversely, negative agency, which is typically attributed to named political opponents, is frequently obscured through nominalization and passivization. This pattern creates a distinct dichotomy between the positive agency attributed to Trump and the negative agency associated with his opponents. The analysis further reveals a sophisticated application of what could be described as *collective agency shifts,* wherein accountability transitions between individual and collective entities based on rhetorical requirements. When attributing achievements, Trump frequently employs the first-person singular pronoun '*I*' as the agent. Conversely, when discussing obstacles or soliciting backing, he transitions to the first-person plural pronoun '*we*' as the agent, as in: '*We will not be conquered.*'

The research indicates that Trump's linguistic strategies contribute to the construction of a specific worldview, portraying him as a proactive agent of change while solidifying the core ideological principles of his administration. This research can enhance our comprehension of political discourse by illuminating how grammatical selections serve as vehicles for conveying ideological messages and shaping identities within modern American political rhetoric. The analysis further reveals notable variations in the application of GM and transitivity patterns (about 33% in total) across diverse categories of Trump's speeches, reflecting an adaptation to varying contexts and audiences. An analysis of formal addresses delivered by Trump demonstrates a high density of GM, specifically nominalization, averaging 38–75 instances per 1000 words. These speeches display a clear predominance of material processes (46.5% of all identified process instances), followed by relational processes (23.6%). Policy speeches that concentrate on particular policy domains exhibit a high density of GM (38–75 instances per 1,000 words) and a prevalence of material processes (46.5%). This pattern underlines the necessity of presenting intricate policy information succinctly and highlighting tangible actions and achievements. Press conferences exhibit a lower density of GM (20–29 instances per 1,000 words) and a higher proportion of verbal processes (about 4–7%) when compared to other speech types (refer to **Tables 2** & **4**). This pattern reflects the more conversational essence of press conferences and their function in responding to inquiries and issuing official statements. Television interviews exhibit the lowest density of GMs (20–29 instances per 1,000 words) and the highest proportion of mental processes (8.5%). This pattern is indicative of the more personal and interactive characteristics inherent in interviews, as well as their role in articulating viewpoints and fostering rapport with the audience.

To conclude, the analysis of IGM and transitivity in Trump's public discourse reveals sophisticated patterns of linguistic choices that serve clear ideological and rhetorical functions. The systematic predominance of material processes positions Trump as an agent of concrete action and transformation, while the strategic utilization of IGMs generates abstract political entities that can be discursively manipulated to support specific worldviews. The analysis further elucidates how Trump strategically utilizes these linguistic features to construct specific representations of reality, establish identity, and enact power dynamics within his political discourse. The research indicates that Trump's political rhetoric, while often perceived as straightforward, utilizes intricate grammatical structures to construct agency, delegate accountability, and frame political narratives. The prevalent application of nominalization creates formal register effects, which imbue political assertions with authority while concurrently

 © 2026 by Author/s

obfuscating the human agency inherent in political processes. The transitivity analysis elucidates distinct patterns in the utilization of various process types to fulfill diverse rhetorical functions. Material processes contribute to the perception of Trump's agency and capabilities, while relational processes assert identity and evaluation as factual rather than political. Mental processes are employed to establish his cognitive authority and foster collective consciousness among his supporters. Mental and verbal processes, though less frequent, are instrumental in conveying beliefs, desires, emotional states, and communicative acts. These patterns are consistent with broader research on political discourse, yet they exhibit distinctive characteristics that reflect Trump's unique rhetorical approach.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to the expanding research domain that applies SFL to the analysis of political discourse. The findings substantiate the value and utility of SFL framework in elucidating the linguistic mechanisms by which political power is wielded and challenged. The research also offers practical implications for comprehending contemporary political communication. The systematic patterns of agency construction and reality representation unveiled in this analysis offer insights into how political discourse can influence public comprehension of complex social issues. The findings indicate that a critical analysis of grammatical choices should be a significant element of media literacy and civic education. Future research could broaden this analysis to encompass additional political figures and contexts, thereby ascertaining whether the observed patterns are unique to Trump's discourse or indicative of wider trends in modern political communication.

In conclusion, this Hallidayan analysis of Trump's political discourse indicates that beyond the apparent directness and simplicity, intricate grammatical strategies are employed to fulfill sophisticated ideological and rhetorical functions. A comprehensive understanding of these linguistic mechanisms is essential for both theoretical progress in political discourse analysis and effective engagement with contemporary political communication.

Funding

This study did not receive any external funding.

Author contributions

BK & SM provided equivalent contributions to the writing, editing and reviewing, data collection and data analysis, and finalization of this manuscript. SNQ is listed in recognition of her contributions to the manuscript's revision.

Ethical statement

This study did not involve research on human participants and therefore is exempt from ethics review procedures.

Competing interests

The authors do not have any competing interests to declare.

Data availability

Transcripts of Trump's speeches are available upon reasonable request.

AI disclosure

No use was made of generative artificial intelligence in the preparation of this article.

Biographical sketch

Bahram Kazemian is an academic researcher who holds a Ph.D. in English Language and Linguistics from Islamic Azad University, Iran. He currently holds the position of managing director at the Unique Language Centre in Tabriz, Iran. His primary areas of expertise include Systemic Functional Linguistics, Critical and Political Discourse Analysis, Metadiscourse Markers, Corpus Linguistics, Pragmatics, AI-mediated studies, E-Learning & Mobile-Learning, Systematic Reviews, Appraisal Framework, TEFL, and TESOL. He also serves as a member of the Editorial Boards and a reviewer for several prominent journals, including *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* (Nature), Springer (*Corpus Pragmatics, Discover Education*), Elsevier (*Discourse, Context & Media & Assessing Writing*), and *Sage Open*.

© 2026 by Author/s

Shafigeh Mohammadian holds a Master of Science degree in Mathematics from Urmia University and serves as an English and Mathematics instructor at the Unique Language Centre. Her primary areas of expertise encompass English Language Teaching (ELT) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

Shatha Naiyf Qaiwer holds a Ph.D. in English Language and Linguistics from the University of Nottingham, UK. Currently, she holds a teaching position at the University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women, the Department of English. Her research interests encompass discourse and language studies.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note

The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Lectito Publications and/or the editor(s). Lectito Publications and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to persons or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.

REFERENCES

Adjei, A. A., Ewusi-Mensah, L., & Okoh, H. (2015). Transitivity in political discourse: A study of the major process types in the 2009 state-of-the-nation address in Ghana. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, *16*, 23–32.

Akmal, S., Zulfikar, T., & Marjan, Z. (2026). Seeing Aceh from afar: A critical discourse analysis of Sharia law in BBC and CNN. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *15*(3), 659–670. https://doi.org/10.17509/nhqtpx84

AlAfnan, M. A. (2022). Public discourse: Systemic functional analysis of Trump's and Biden's inaugural speeches. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *18*(1), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.52462/jlls.162

Altohami, W. (2024). Self-framing and other-(re)framing in institutional political discourse: The case of Donald Trump's final speech before the UN. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *14*(1), 202–211. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1401.24

Bartlett, T., & O'Grady, G. (Eds.). (2017). *The Routledge handbook of systemic functional linguistics*. Routledge.

Biber, D., Conrad, S., & Reppen, R. (2012). *Corpus linguistics: Investigating language structure and use*. Cambridge University Press.

Bloor, T., & Bloor, M. (2013). *The functional analysis of English* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Chanturidze, Y. (2018). Functional and linguistic characteristics of Donald Trump's victory and inaugural speeches. *Journal of Language and Education*, *4*(4), 31–41. https://doi.org/10.17323/2411-7390-2018-4-4-31-41

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Chung, W. (2021). Linguistic features of Donald Trump's political discourse: Focusing on genre differences and change over time. *Language Facts and Perspectives*, *52*, 61–102.

Demata, M. (2021). Keeping the threat out: Trump's discourse, the Wall, and the "Other". *Altre Modernità*, *25*, 270–286. https://doi.org/10.13130/2035-7680/15601

Derakhshani, M., Qaiwer, S. N., Kazemian, B., & Mohammadian, Sh. (2021). Critical discourse analysis and rhetorical tropes in Donald Trump's first speech to the UN. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, *11*(10), 1224–1236. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1110.10

Eggins, S. (2004). *Introduction to systemic functional linguistics*. Continuum.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar* (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Martin, J. R. (1993). *Writing science: Literacy and discourse power*. Falmer Press.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Webster, J. J. (2009). *Continuum companion to systemic functional linguistics*. Continuum.

Hidayat, A. (2018). A transitivity analysis of Donald J. Trump's inauguration speech. *English Language & Literature Journal*, *7*(3), 302–311.

Hu, Y., & Li, H. (2025). Reframing China in US trade policy discourse: A context-deictic space model for ideological positioning. *Frontiers in Communication*, *10*, Article 1598041. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1598041

Kazemian, B. (2014). *Hallidayan ideational grammatical metaphor in specialized texts*. Lambert Academic Publishing.

Kazemian, B., & Hashemi, S. (2014). Nominalizations in scientific and political genres: Systemic functional linguistics perspective. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *3*(2), 211–228. https://ssrn.com/abstract=2514388

Kazemian, B., & Hashemi, S. (2017). A radical shift to a profound and rigorous investigation in political discourse. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *7*(3), 115–128. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v7n3p115

Kazemian, B., & Qaiwer, S. N. (2025). A functional analysis of metadiscourse markers in political discourse: Persuasive strategies in Netanyahu's speeches. *Discourse and Interaction*, *18*(2), 120–143. https://doi.org/10.5817/di2025-2-120

 © 2026 by Author/s

Khan, M. H., Adnan, H. M., Kaur, S., Khuhro, R. A., Asghar, R., & Jabeen, S. (2019). Muslims' representation in Donald Trump's anti-Muslim-Islam statement: A critical discourse analysis. *Religions*, *10*(2), Article 115. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020115

Martin, J. R., Matthiessen, C. M., & Painter, C. (1997). *Working with functional grammar*. Edward Arnold.

Martin, J. R., Quiroz, B., & Wang, P. (2023). *Systemic functional grammar: A text-based description of English, Spanish and Chinese*. Cambridge University Press.

O'Connor, B., Cox, L., & Cooper, D. (2024). The ideology of American exceptionalism: American nationalism's nom de plume. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, *29*(3), 634–655. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2112126

Pease, D. E. (2009). *The new American exceptionalism*. University of Minnesota Press.

Putra, A. A., & Rudianto, G. (2024). An analysis of grammatical cohesion in Donald Trump's speech. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, *7*(5), 1055–1064. https://journal.ikipsiliwangi.ac.id/project/article/view/23028

Rabab'ah, G., Hussein, A., & Jarbou, S. (2024). Hate speech in political discourse. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, *37*, 2237–2256. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-024-10158-8

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2016). The discourse-historical approach (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed., pp. 23–61). SAGE.

Rong, J. (2021). An analysis on stylistic features of Donald Trump's speech. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *11*(3), 11–18. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v11n3p11

Seo, S. (2013). Hallidayean transitivity analysis: The battle for Tripoli in the contrasting headlines of two national newspapers. *Discourse & Society*, *24*(6), 774–791. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513503267

Tang, B. (2021). Analysis of political metaphors in Donald J. Trump's State of the Union Address in 2020. *English Literature and Language Review*, *7*(4), 69–73. https://doi.org/10.32861/ellr.74.69.73

Taverniers, M., Simon-Vandenbergen, A., & Ravelli, L. J. (Eds.). (2003). *Grammatical metaphor: Views from systemic functional linguistics*. Benjamins.

Thompson, G. (2013). *Introducing functional grammar*. Routledge.

van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and context: A socio-cognitive approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Wang, Y., & Liu, H. (2018). Is Trump always rambling like a fourth-grade student? An analysis of stylistic features of Donald Trump's political discourse during the 2016 election. *Discourse & Society*, *29*(3), 299–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926517734659

© 2026 by Author/s

Appendix

Table A1

Examples of examined press conferences and media interactions

No.	Date	Press conference / event	Trump's words	Total words
1	7 Jan. 2025	Donald Trump Holds a Media Event at Mar-a-Lago	11,653	13,127
2	20 Jan. 2025	White House, Washington, D.C.	5,884	6743
3	4 Feb. 2025	Donald Trump Holds a Presser with Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel	4,204	6,208
4	13 Feb. 2025	Donald Trump and Narendra Modi of India Hold a Press Event	3,440	5,532
5	24 Feb. 2025	Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron of France Hold a Press Event	2,955	6,459
6	27 Feb. 2025	Donald Trump and Keir Starmer of the United Kingdom Hold a Press Event	2,862	5,162
7	7 Apr. 2025	Press event with Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel	6,846	8,898
8	14 Apr. 2025	White House, Washington, D.C.	9,058	10,100
9	12 May 2025	Donald Trump Holds a Press Event on Drug Prices	9,112	11,412
10	30 May 2025	Donald Trump Holds a Joint Press Conference with Elon Musk	7,117	9,516
11	25 Jun. 2025	Donald Trump Hosts a Press Event at the NATO Summit	7,114	8,591
12	27 Jun. 2025	Donald Trump Hosts a Press Conference at the White House	7,458	10,322

Note: Videos available at (1) https://www.whitehouse.gov/videos/ ;
(2) https://youtube.com/@whitehouse?si=bjb9kuipwNoIdR1t

Table A2

Approximate word counts of Trump from Jan. 2025 to Jan. 2026

Period	Approx. words	Source/basis
Week of ~ 24–30 Jan. 2025	~81,235 words (in ~7h 44m of remarks)	PBS/Factba.se
First 100 days (20 Jan.–29 Apr. 2025)	9 news conferences, 139 speeches/remarks, 28 interview	CBS News/White House data
Full first year (20 Jan. 2025–19 Jan., 2026)	~1.97 million words across 588 public events (189 hrs onper camera)	Factba.se/Roll Call
Full first year (alt. measure)	~2.4 million words transcribed from 433 open press events	White House Stenographer's Office (via Fox News)

© 2026 by Author/s