

Did he Incite them or not: A Critical Discourse Analysis of U.S. President Trump’s Speech before the 2021 Attack on the Capitol

Alex Dibra

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (Bulgaria)

Алекс Дибра

Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ (България)

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Abstract. The objective of the paper is to analyze the speech Trump delivered ahead of the Jan 6, 2021 U.S. Capitol riot and to establish if it could be argued that the speech may have manipulated people into marching down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Capitol and to have incited violence. The adopted analytical approach is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and more precisely, van Dijk’s critical approach to textual macrostructures, which combines two key aspects: micro- and macro-level analyses. Van Dijk’s approach allows one to pose questions related to lexical and syntactic elements which emerge as salient in Trump’s speech. I examine 20 segments extracted from the former U.S. president Donald Trump’s speech. The analysis demonstrates how his words play a major role in steering people into particular beliefs and in inciting violence.

Keywords: Donald Trump, critical discourse analysis (CDA), manipulation, political speech, Capitol riot, macrostructure

Алекс Дибра. ИМАЛО ЛИ Е ПОДСТРЕКАТЕЛСТВО, ИЛИ НЕ – КРИТИЧЕСКИ ДИСКУРСИВЕН АНАЛИЗ НА РЕЧТА НА ПРЕЗИДЕНТА НА САЩ ДОНАЛД ТРЪМП ПРЕДИ БУНТА В КАПИТОЛИЯ ПРЕЗ 2021 г.

Резюме. Целта на статията е да се анализира речта на Тръмп от 6 януари 2021 г., произнесена преди бунта в Капитолия в САЩ, и да се установи дали неговите думи са подтикнали последователите му да нападнат Капитолията. Използваният аналитичен подход е критически дискурсивен анализ, по-конкретно критичният подход на Ван Дайк към текстовите макроструктури, който съчетава две ключови неща – анализ на микро- и макрониво. Неговите методи позволяват да се поставят въпроси, свързани с лексикални и синтактични елементи, които изпъкват в речта на Тръмп. Изследвам 20 сегмента, взети от речта на бившия президент на САЩ Доналд Тръмп. Анализът

показва как думите му имат ключова роля в насочването на хората към конкретни убеждения и в подстрекаване към насилие.

Ключови думи: Доналд Тръмп, критически дискурсивен анализ, манипулация, политическа реч, бунт в Капитолия, макроструктура

Research/Научно изследване

Introduction

The paper is devoted to the former U.S. president Donald Trump's discursive behavior and the attack on the Capitol from Jan 6th, 2021. The choice of this topic as an object of investigation rests on my assumption that Trump's speech from Jan 6th, 2021 can yield evidence as to the connections between linguistic uses and political reality in general as well as to the specific socio-political problem resulting from that speech. The main objective of the paper is to analyze the speech Trump delivered ahead of the U.S. Capitol riot and to establish if the speech could be argued to have manipulated people into marching down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Capitol and to have incited violence. Such a hypothesis has been publicly presented and accepted as a valid part of the U.S. Senate's impeachment trial against Trump.

Since language can be used as a political tool for manipulation, the approach I intend to follow in my investigation is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), whose central interest lies in revealing manipulative discursive techniques. As a scholarly set of analytical tools, CDA can be used to tackle factors such as power imbalance, ways of achieving conversation dominance, ways of perpetuating inequality, ways of manipulating audiences, etc. In Section 3, I will discuss CDA by paying special attention to the works of Teun A. van Dijk (1995, 1997, 2017, 2022) and his Macrostructures Theory (1980), which combines two key aspects: micro- and macro-level analyses. I will also devote special attention to van Dijk's (1998) 'Ideological Square'. That would also allow me to pose questions related to lexical and syntactic elements that emerge in Trump's speech as well as to cognitive processes related to speaker's – that is, Trump's – discursive intent(s).

In Section 4, I will apply van Dijk's approach and analyze 20 segments from former U.S. president Donald Trump's speech from Jan 6th, 2021. The segments from the speech will be analyzed to establish whether Trump's words could be argued to have manipulated people and incited violence.

Socio-political background to Trump's career and the January 6th U.S. Capitol attack

Prior to the Capitol attack, Trump had been playing the game of politics for years. He supported financially both Republican and Democratic politicians, registered in different initiatives as a Democrat, Republican, and as an Independent, and entertained the idea of running for president in 1988, 2000, 2004, and 2012 (Britannica 2022). On Nov. 8th, 2016, at the age of 70, Donald Trump shocked the world by winning his first election to public office, defeating two political dynasties, Bush and Clinton, and became the 45th president of the United States. In the past, he had never held a political office or served in the military. He is also the oldest and one of the wealthiest individuals to hold the presidential seat (ibid.). Trump claimed that his wealth exceeded \$10 billion when he was running for office. He is the first president in forty years to refuse to reveal federal income tax records, therefore it was impossible to verify the veracity of his assertion. On January 20, 2017, Trump became president with the lowest public approval ratings of any president since polling started due to claims of sexual misconduct during his campaign and transition, as well as Russian interference in the election on his behalf. The next four years would be riddled with various political scandals and mistakes. Arguably, his greatest failure was on Jan. 6th, 2021 (ibid).

At a speech on the Ellipse in Washington, D.C., at noon on January 6, 2021, Trump claimed there had been election fraud and urged Vice President Pence to invalidate the 2020 election results by refusing to certify some electoral votes. Trump declared to the crowd of supporters: 'We're going to walk down to the Capitol' and 'if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore' (Trump 2021). After the speech had concluded, several thousand Trump supporters started marching towards the U.S. Capitol. A mob had gathered and, after the speech, clashed with the police. The police barricades were breached by the protesters at about 2:00 p.m. After that, the mob invaded the Capitol building by breaking some windows and doors (Britannica 2022). The Senate and House of Representatives, which were considering a Republican objection to Arizona's electoral votes, both adjourned shortly after. Vice President Pence and his family were promptly evacuated from the Senate chambers. While some members of Congress were led to an underground bunker, others took refuge in their offices or the House Chamber (ibid). At 8 p.m., the Capitol Complex was cleared of rioters and Vice President Pence reconvened the Senate. Speaker Pelosi followed suit in the House at 9 p.m. The following morning at 3:24 a.m., Congress voted to ratify Joe Biden's victory in the Electoral College (Britannica 2022).

On Jan. 13th, 2021, President Trump was impeached for inciting an uprising a week earlier. In contrast to his first impeachment, ten House Republicans joined Democrats in supporting it. Even though seven Republican senators joined Democrats in voting to convict Trump in the Senate trial, he was declared not guilty.

To look into the January 6 violence, Speaker Pelosi established a bipartisan House select committee in July 2021. This group was fashioned after the commission established following the September 11 attacks (Britannica 2022). Finally, on Jan. 6th, 2022, 700 people were charged with crimes, which made the assault on the U.S Capitol the greatest criminal investigation in American history (ibid).

Theoretical background

Throughout the past decades, CDA has become increasingly influential as the approach can reveal how language is used in social contexts to generate and transform various ideologies (Fairclough 1995: 25). In CDA, discourses and texts are considered to have the potential to produce, reproduce and legitimize social power abuse, dominance and inequality. CDA's strengths in exposing social power abuse make the approach especially relevant to our investigation: it can facilitate our establishing whether Trump really did employ language to instigate social unrest and violence, or not.

As is well known, 'CDA' refers to models and approaches created for the purpose of studying discourse in linguistic ways: special attention in CDA is paid, for example, to the uses of lexis and syntax. What differentiates CDA from other approaches to discourse is the critical element in them, which examines how discourse is implemented to achieve certain political ends and how language can be used to promote and uphold ideological views which enable and foster power abuse (Lafta et al. 2020: 5499).

According to CDA, discourse is meant to serve certain interests, and to minimize and negate others. A main goal in conducting CDA, thus, is to understand the wider social context and examine how social participants' interests are being constructed and upheld. As a consequence, when analyzing any form of discursive practice or text in CDA, important questions which may arise are: 'Whose interests is this discourse/text serving?'; 'What is the purpose of this particular discourse/text?'; 'Whose interests are being undermined?'. As CDA takes into account the speaker's aim and, more precisely, what the speaker seeks to accomplish, analyzing linguistic uses from a CDA perspective can aid us in forming a clearer picture of Trump's actual interests and purpose(s) in The Capitol event.

The label of 'CDA' tends to be frequently equated with Norman Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional CDA model, which focuses on the connection between power, language, and ideology. Fairclough (1995) also puts forward a three-step analysis procedure connected to three inter-related discourse dimensions: linguistic analysis, processing analysis (i.e. interpretation), and social analysis. Regardless of the practical applicability of Fairclough's framework, we do need to note its basically cognition-free character, which does not make the approach the best option when we need to analyze Trump's actual communicative intentions in the

discursive situation which occurred on January 6th 2021. In order to pinpoint a speaker's communicative intent, one must understand the cognitive processes in the speaker's mind as those processes enable the speaker's interpretation of the ongoing socio-communicative situation and dictate the speaker's socio-communicative behavior in the situation. Some of those cognitive processes may be idiosyncratic but, for political communication to take place successfully, a sufficient number of those cognitive processes need to be conventionalized and to be experienced by the audience as socially-acceptable. A political discourse researcher, therefore, needs to base their conclusions on socially-conventional cognitive processes, if they want their analysis of a politician's performance to reach beyond the surface expressions of those cognitive processes in the form of lexical choices and syntactic features.

CDA offers us such a cognitive approach to discourse analysis: van Dijk argues political discourse should be studied as a cluster of linguistic, sociocultural and cognitive process. Van Dijk's perspective (1988, 2017) is crucial here because it can shed light on the cognitive processes involved in Trump's socio-communicative interpretation of the situation as well as his behavior while he delivered his speech. In addition, van Dijk's approach embraces Fairclough's examination of political discourse at linguistic and textual levels, and does not refute it.

Van Dijk's model of analysis comprises two 'levels': macro- and micro-level analyses. The micro-level analysis addresses lexical units chosen to express conceptual meanings. According to van Dijk (*ibid.*), scholars need to explore lexical structures at the microstructure level since the careful selection of one's words and expressive techniques may not only improve the style of a discourse but also act powerfully by appealing to certain audiences (see also Thorne 2014). When it comes to political discourse specifically, lexical structures are considered by CDA scholars to function as crucial tools in a politician's strategic communicative choices. The words selected can be seen as pivotal in a politician's cognitively framing any given circumstances, which in turn can give unique meanings to the specific discursive actions, objects, and social subjects involved (Sun 2007).

Van Dijk's (1980, 2017) macro-level analysis emphatically suggests that thematic structures in a text be examined. Themes, he proposes, can serve as proof as to what/which the key ideas in a discourse are (Van Dijk 1997; Brown, Yule 1983). Theoretically, the discursal notion of themes is systematized and made clear by van Dijk through his using the concept of macrostructure. Macrostructural elements are defined by him in terms of propositions, which are then defined as the conceptual meaning structure(s) in a clause. Macro-structures, thus, can be used in our analysis of Trump's speech to determine cognitive textual elements which can reveal his real communicative and social intentions.

According to Van Dijk, propositions are 'the smallest independent meaning constructs of a language and thought' and they can be 'typically expressed by single sentences or clauses' (Van Dijk 1988: 31). A proposition, therefore, cannot simply

be an idea conveyed by a word; rather, it must be integrated with other assertions and then be expressed through phrases and sentences. This evokes parallels between van Dijk's work and that of de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), who also employ the notion of proposition-based 'macrostructures'. To de Beaugrande and Dressler, too, a text's macrostructure is of cognitive nature and it organizes key concepts evoked through the text to achieve coherence. They term the key concepts 'control centers' and argue control centers vary from primary concepts such as objects, situations, events and actions to secondary concepts such as states, agents, affected entity, attribute, etc. (ibid.). Isolating the control centers in Trump's speech and thus establishing the main macrostructural units in the speech can be especially revealing as to Trump's actual cognitive interpretation of the political situation at the Capitol. Above all, such analysis can unearth his real discursive (manipulative) intentions.

Another of Van Dijk's relevant notions – that of the 'ideological square' (1998) also needs to be paid special attention to. The 'square' describes four characteristics which, when analyzed, have the potential to clarify and confirm the existence of societal inequality and polarization. Van Dijk's ideological square (1998: 67) consists of the following actions:

Express/emphasize information that is positive about us.

Express/emphasize information that is negative about them.

Suppress/de-emphasize information that is positive about them.

Suppress/de-emphasize information that is negative about us.

These actions represent key aspects of a social participant's ideology and emphasize their perceptions of different social groups. Van Dijk (1998: 69) argues that opposing social groups tend to employ cognitively a 'polarisation schema defined by the opposition between Us and Them'. This happens due to the evaluative character of any political discourse. 'Evaluative' in this refers to any judgement on the part of a discourse participant based on their perception of someone's deviating or adhering to socially-conventional cognitive schemas, which can result in the establishment of polarized in-groups and out-groups, and to subsequent perpetuation of societal inequalities and divisions. On the basis of the US vs. THEM distinction, it is possible for an analyst to describe politicians, organizations, and public personalities using politically and ideologically driven ideas and attitudes (Van Dijk 1997).

The cognitive dimension of CDA also concerns analysis of cognitive frames and scenarios, which, in the relevant literature, are postulated as cognitive sets of beliefs associated with the 'typical' aspects of a social or communicative situation (Musolff 2006, 2017, 2019, 2021; Charteris-Black 2004, 2018). Such typical aspects could be situation participants, their roles, the conventional outcomes and the consequences of the communicative exchange, etc. (Musolff 2006: 28). In brief, cognitive scenarios can be described as 'any kind of coherent segment of

human beliefs, actions, experiences or imaginings' (Fillmore 1975: 124), and they are based on stereotypes, that is, they include traditional assumptions, which may be empirically wrong and outdated, but nevertheless may work socially (Putnam 1975, as cited in Mussolff 2006: 27).

Analysis

A political speech is not a text of modest length and complexity, and, as a result, its analysis can face various challenges. To deal with length-related issues, Trump's speech analysed here needs to be segmented into smaller bits. The analysis I offer rests on divisions of Trump's speech into meaningful macrostructural segments; the divisions follow the divisions present in all officially published versions of the text.

In the analysis, following CDA methodology and research techniques, I first focus on the micro-level-relevant uses evident in Trump's speech; then I proceed to the macro-level-relevant ones.

4.1. Micro-level analysis

In segment 1, Trump employs lexical repetition of the past participle 'stolen' in order to emphasize the unfairness of the election results. Also, this same idea is once again evoked in the last sentence, where the noun phrase 'theft' is used. The perpetrator of this 'crime' is clearly pinpointed – those are the Democrats, who are depicted in an unfavorable light due to the use of the pre-modifiers 'bold' and 'radical'. In addition, the relative clause 'which is what they are doing' is part of the first matrix clause in the segment. The proposition it contains is reiterated two more times as evident in the following clause 'that is what they have done and what they are doing'. These two sentences are declarative and thus (speaker-) assertive. From the perspective of Speech Act Theory, the sentences are statements, i.e. Trump basically presents 'which is what they are doing' as factual information. The use of this structure manipulates Trump's followers instilling in them the conviction that Democrats have stolen the election and betrayed the American public. Trump also instills fear and hatred in his supporters towards the media, as evident by the use of the pre-modifier 'fake'. Generally, this kind of vocabulary conveys an idea of extremism and zealotry.

In segment 3, Biden's portrayal by Trump is equally unflattering. The former president refers to his opponent as 'somebody'. Trump's refusal to address Biden by his name is a clear indication of the former's low opinion of him. It basically downgrades Biden, thus creating the impression that the latter is not worthy to be referred to by an individual name. The use of hyperbole in 'our country will be destroyed' reinforces the catastrophic result of a Biden presidency, in Trump's view.

Pursuing this further, the 46th President is described as someone who would allow large groups of immigrants to come into the United States and cause damage

to the country and its citizens. It is worth bearing in mind that Trump's racist and xenophobic ideology was an integral part of both his campaign and term as President. In this respect, claiming that Biden would allow immigrants in, and that they would deface the United States once they are in it, not only maintains the same racist pattern in Trump's political discourse, but it also characterizes Biden as anti-American and an enemy to the people Trump wishes to serve and represent.

The election results are described in a similarly unfavorable manner. In segments 4 and 7, the profanity 'bullshit' and the hyperbolic 'egregious assault on our democracy' is a vivid illustration of how the former president views the outcome of the election. Also, in segment 6, Trump characterizes the certification of the election results as 'the wrong thing', as shown in the conditional clause 'If they do the wrong thing, we should never, ever forget that they did'. These emotive descriptions convey the idea of a serious threat to American democracy, which is meant to arouse greater animosity and hatred in the audience.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are Trump's supporters, who are described in a very flattering way. In segment 5, lexical units such as 'peacefully' and 'patriotically', for example, are notable examples of positive representation. Also, in segment 8, the claim that 'truth and justice' are values associated chiefly with Trump and his followers once again emphasizes their moral superiority, while simultaneously emphasizing their opponents' corruption and degradation.

Finally, the former president characterizes the members of the crowd as 'true patriots', likening them to warriors and defenders of America's freedom and democracy. In segment 8, this is reinforced by vocabulary units such as 'deep and enduring love for America', 'overwhelming pride in this great country', and also by the parallel constructions used in the eighth segment ('We have a deep and enduring love for America in our hearts. We love our country. We have overwhelming pride in this great country and we have it deep in our souls. Together, we are to defend and preserve government of the people, by the people and for the people determined').

In segment 1, Trump's incitement to violence could be located in the following three clauses which also feature syntactic parallelism: 'We will never give up' / 'We will never concede' / 'We will not take it anymore'. These clauses also show a contextual synonymy chain, more precisely, '(never) give up' – '(never) concede' – '(not) take it anymore'. In addition, this could also be interpreted as an example of synonymical repetition, which rhetorically aims to strengthen Trump's statement. What is more, the reiteration of the negator 'never' emphasizes the resolve and determination which Trump and his followers ought to display.

Another clear example of Trump's urge for swift action can be noticed in this compound sentence from segment 3: 'We want to go back, and we want to get this right'. Here the former president not only associates himself with his supporters, but he also calls for immediate rectification. In this respect, these two clauses contain syntactic parallelism which helps Trump hammer the notions from his utterance

in. Through the reiteration of the personal pronoun ‘we’ and the repetition of a similar syntactic structure, Trump essentially tells the crowd what they should want to do and what they have to do. In so doing, he not only controls their thoughts, but he also presents himself as the spokesperson of their wishes and desires. In other words, he not only tells his supporters what to believe, but he also depicts himself as the leader who has a solution to the problem at hand. In addition, the reiteration of ‘We’re going to walk down’ from segment 7 emphasizes and echoes once more the need for physical action. Similarly, Trump affirms his conviction that the crowd would express their dissatisfaction by marching to the Capitol and ‘make their voices heard’. Trump’s rhetoric not only calls for a rejection of the election results and Biden’s victory, but it also fuels his supporters’ animosity and hatred, thus encouraging violence and physical action.

Pursuing this further, in segment 8, the intertextuality in the clause ‘Together, we are to defend and preserve government of the people, by the people and for the people determined’ conceals Trump’s incitement to a major riot behind a façade of moral duty and devotion to one’s country and nation.

In segment 9, the clauses ‘And we fight. We fight like hell’ are especially revealing and straightforward, as they not only feature the lexical repetition of the verb phrase ‘fight’, but also the hyperbolic simile ‘like hell’, which outlines the determination and passion that the former president and his followers ought to have and express. In this respect, the three clauses in segment 9 (‘And we fight. We fight like hell. And if you don’t fight like hell, you won’t have a country anymore’) are basically a call for action, which is repeated a total of three times.

All the segments up to this point of the speech exhibit a loose sentence structure and represent syntactically simple sentences. The use of simplicity in this case allows greater directness and straightforwardness. In addition, it makes Trump’s message and call for action more palpable, easy to understand and follow.

In segment 10, through the reiteration of ‘protect’ in the parallel construction ‘You have to protect our country and you have to protect our Constitution’, Trump maintains the impression that American democracy is under attack. This is actually echoed in the hyperbolic expression from segment 12 ‘under siege’, which again refers to the United States. It is important to note that the segments analyzed so far are littered with military vocabulary, which though used figuratively, are very powerful and manipulative: ‘fight’, ‘assault on our democracy’, ‘under siege’, ‘fight’, ‘fighting’, ‘defend’, ‘preserve’, ‘marching’, ‘protect’, ‘take back our country’, ‘save’. They unambiguously evoke images of war and physical violence.

The ‘us’ vs ‘them’ dichotomy is also explicitly conveyed. In segment 11, the compound sentence ‘We have done a big job on it, but you think it’s easy’ refers to Trump struggling against the alleged injustice created by the ‘Washington swamp’. The referent of this metaphorical expression seems to be the Democratic Party, and by extension, anyone who is against Trump and his followers. In segments

13, 14 and 20, the descriptions which pertain to the Democrats evoke images of corruption and amorality: 'For years, Democrats have gotten away with election fraud and weak Republicans.' / 'They've turned a blind eye, even as Democrats enacted policies that chipped away our jobs, weakened our military, threw open our borders and put America last.' / 'The Democrats are hopeless – they never vote for anything. Not even one vote.' This characterization is likely meant to instigate Trump's followers against Trump's political opponents by creating the impression that the members of the Democratic Party work against the American citizens' best interests. Likewise, Trump draws the crowd's attention to some of his Republican colleagues. The reiteration of the pre-modifier 'weak' depicts the former as incompetent and inadequate public servants, as they have 'turned a blind eye' on the injustices, allegedly committed by the Democrats. Conversely, Trump builds up his image and highlights his political importance by shedding light on the efforts he has made to stamp out the 'corruption', which has taken place in the United States. This can be seen in clauses such as 'We have done a big job on it, but you think it's easy' (segment 11) and 'We've set it on a much greater course' (segment 12). In providing these descriptions, the former president maps out a clear and transparent hero as well as a clear and transparent enemy.

Trump also flatters his followers' egos as is clearly demonstrated in the parallel constructions in segment 15: 'You're stronger, you're smarter, you've got more going than anybody. And they try and demean everybody having to do with us. And you're the real people, you're the people that built this nation. You're not the people that tore down our nation.' In addition to the syntactic parallelism, the clauses also employ several adjectives in the comparative ('stronger', 'smarter'). The former president also describes the crowd as 'the real people' and 'the people that built this nation'. The pre-modifier in the first and the complement in the second one coupled with the adjectives in the comparative form naturally instill feelings of superiority in Trump's followers. Moreover, in segment 20, the clause 'We're going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country' draws attention to the bravery and patriotism which Trump is convinced that he and his followers have. The former president basically portrays himself and the gathered crowd as role models for political representatives who lack the necessary grit to stand up for their country. Also, through this utterance, he not only praises his supporters, but he also identifies with them. Finally, in segment 16, 'We're gathered here today in the heart of our nation's capital for one very, very basic and simple reason: To save our democracy.' In both this clause and the one preceding it, the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy is brought to the fore.

Another feature which also links the two clauses is the former president's tendency to flatter his supporters' ego and boost their self-esteem. Another similar clause which should be examined is 'together we will drain the Washington swamp, and we will clean up the corruption in our nation's capital' (segment 11). The

reiteration of the modal auxiliary ‘will’ showcases deontic or commissive modality, that is, Trump’s commitment to follow through with his promise to ‘make America great again’. What is more, the ‘swamp scenario’ means sinking; it, therefore, implies no escape unless Trump and his supporters act now. This could be linked to the clauses ‘If you don’t fight like hell, you won’t have a country anymore’ (segment 9), where the verb ‘fight’ is used – presumably – figuratively. Both of these expressions reinforce urgency and the importance of immediate action.

Pursuing this further, even though Trump focuses on his political opponents in this set of segments, he does draw the crowd’s attention to the alleged crimes of media outlets, which are unsurprisingly portrayed in a very negative light. Part of the vocabulary which Trump uses includes the pre-modifier ‘fake news’, a term, which has been reiterated in other segments. Another term which Trump attributes to the media is the rather intimidating ‘suppression effort’, which, as stated previously, creates a very grim and conspiratorial atmosphere. The former president does this intentionally to portray the fourth estate as seeking to bend reality in a way that benefits Trump’s political opponents. Through this negative characterization, the press is no longer seen as a fair balance of power in a democratic country, but a fellow conspirator in a clandestine plot to tarnish the former president’s reputation.

In segment 17, Biden again, rather unsurprisingly is given negative characterizations. As in the opening segments, here again Trump refuses to use his opponent’s name. Instead, he prefers the noun phrase ‘illegitimate president’. The use of ‘someone’ again showcases Trump’s disregard of Joe Biden, and creates the impression that the latter’s identity is not important and is inferior to Trump’s.

As can be seen from the analysis, Trump’s portrayal of the election results indicates his refusal to face the current political climate. He uses a variety of lexical, stylistic and syntactic devices to tarnish Biden’s reputation and prompt the crowd to channel their fury into starting an actual, physically-conducted riot. Trump’s positive representation of his followers is meant to strengthen their motivation and resolve even more.

Trump uses a variety of lexical and syntactic devices to fuel his followers’ frustration. Throughout the segments, the former president employs different lexical units to label the political outcome. These naturally reinforce his discursive control over the situation. The labelling technique can also be seen in the cohesive chain of ‘theft’ – ‘explosions of bullshit’ – ‘wrong thing’ – ‘assault on our democracy’ – ‘fraud’. This cohesive chain contains words which are all negatively related to the situation concerning the election results.

Macro-level analysis

As the analysis in the previous section suggests, Trump’s speech centers around several main ideas and characters. Those can be interpreted as elements in cognitive scenarios (discussed in Section 3). Below, following van Dijk’s approach (1980),

I re-formulate them in terms of macro-propositions that can be isolated from the individual segments. Next to each macro-proposition, I provide the number of the samples where each can be located.

Macro-proposition 1: The election was stolen. – Segment 1, 10, 13, 16, 17.

Macro-proposition 2: The election results are unjust, unfair, illegal, unconstitutional. – Segments 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 16, 17.

Macro-proposition 3: Trump supporters must not accept the election results. – Segments 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9.

Macro-proposition 4: Trump supporters must protest the election results. – Segments 2, 3, 5, 7, 9.

Macro-proposition 5: Trump supporters must fight against the election results. – Segments 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 16, 17, 20.

Macro-proposition 6: The United States/American democracy is in danger. – Segments 3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

Macro-proposition 7: Trump and Trump supporters are true patriots/defenders of the United States – Segments 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20.

Macro-proposition 8: Biden/Biden Presidency is a threat to America. – Segments 9, 17, 18.

Macro-proposition 9: The Democrats and the ‘weak’ Republicans are the enemy. – Segments 11, 13, 14, 19, 20.

Macro-proposition 10: The media which does not support Trump are the enemy. – Segment 1, 18.

As evident from the list, the macro-propositions appear multiple times and tend to reiterate common elements and features. For this reason, they could be further generalized into what van Dijk terms ‘higher-level macro-propositions’ (see 3. above), which sustain the macro-structure of these segments:

Higher-level macro-proposition 1: The election was stolen.

Higher-level macro-proposition 2: Biden, the Democrats and the ‘weak’ Republicans are a threat to the United States.

Higher-level macro-proposition 3: Trump and his supporters love America and try to make it a better country.

Higher-level macro-proposition 4: Trump encourages his supporters to fight (physically) for American democracy.

The first higher-level macro-proposition clearly suggests that the election was effectively stolen by the Democratic Party and some media which do not support the former president. Likewise, as can be seen from the second higher-level macro-proposition, the election results and – by extension – a Biden presidency would

be catastrophic for the United States. For this reason, in the third higher-level macro-proposition, Trump prompts his supporters to reject the election results and fight against ‘the enemy’ because, as can be seen from the final higher-level macro-proposition, they are and need to be the ones who love America and strive to defend justice. Therefore, based on the higher-level macro-propositions, the macro-structure can be argued to be constructed in the following way:

THE ELECTION WAS STOLEN BY THE DEMOCRATS AND THE FAKE NEWS MEDIA, SO TRUMP’S SUPPORTERS, WHO DEFEND AMERICA AND ITS PRINCIPLES, HAVE TO FIGHT AGAINST THE ELECTION RESULTS BECAUSE A BIDEN PRESIDENCY WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC FOR THE UNITED STATES.

Throughout the speech, the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ dichotomy is repetitively evoked. The in-group (‘us’) is represented by Trump and his supporters, who, as discussed already, are patriots and committed to protecting their country and its principles. As such, they are given positive characterizations. The out-group (‘them’), on the other hand, are represented by Biden, the Democrats and the ‘fake’ news media, who are consequently given negative characterizations.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an analysis of a socially-salient instance of Donald Trump’s discourse from the perspective of van Dijk’s CDA approach. As the analysis reveals, Trump’s speech delivered ahead of the U.S. Capitol riot is imbued with diverse linguistic devices which have the potential to work as effective and powerful manipulation tools. Those devices are employed extensively and repeatedly to construct cognitive structures in which the U.S. DEMOCRATS and the U.S. MEDIA are represented as ENEMIES. In parallel, TRUMP’S SUPPORTERS are represented as DEFENDERS of AMERICA and of its MORAL PRINCIPLES. This cognitive scenario is also projected onto THE FUTURE of the U.S., where A BIDEN PRESIDENCY is presented as A FUTURE CATASTROPHY. Against the background of the multiple reinforcements of these social roles, the key notions of FIGHT and DEFEND also appear repeatedly in connection with TRUMP and TRUMP’S SUPPORTERS.

In brief, there seems to be more than enough cognitive-linguistic evidence to conclude that Trump’s words did play a major role in manipulating people into marching down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Capitol and in inciting violence.

APPENDIX
TRUMP'S SPEECH SEGMENTS 1–20

1. All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by bold and radical left Democrats, which is what they are doing, and stolen by the fake news media. That is what they have done and what they are doing. We will never give up. We will never concede. It doesn't happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved.

2. Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore, and that is what this is all about.

3. We want to go back, and we want to get this right, because we're going to have somebody in there that should not be in there, and our country will be destroyed. And we're not going to stand for that.

4. These explosions of bullshit, and all of the sudden — (APPLAUSE) — all of a sudden, it started to happen.

5. I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard.

6. Today, we see a very important event, though, because right over there, right there, we see the event that's going to take place, and I'm going to be watching because history is going to be made. We're going to see whether or not we have great and courageous leaders or whether or not we have leaders that should be ashamed of themselves throughout history, throughout eternity. They'll be ashamed. And you know what? If they do the wrong thing, we should never, ever forget that they did. Never forget.

7. Now, it is up to Congress to confront this egregious assault on our democracy. And after this, we're going to walk down, and I'll be there with you, we're going to walk down, we're going to walk down.

8. But now, the caravans, I think Biden's getting in, the caravans are forming again. They want to come in again and rip off our country. Can't let it happen. As this enormous crowd shows, we have truth and justice on our side. We have a deep and enduring love for America in our hearts. We love our country. We have overwhelming pride in this great country and we have it deep in our souls. Together, we are to defend and preserve government of the people, by the people and for the people determined

9. And we fight. We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore.

10. Well, I say, yes it does, because the Constitution says you have to protect our country and you have to protect our Constitution, and you can't vote on fraud.

11. Together, we will drain the Washington swamp and we will clean up the corruption in our nation's capital. We have done a big job on it, but you think it's easy. It's a dirty business. It's a dirty business. You have a lot of bad people out there.

12. Our country has been under siege for a long time. Far longer than this four-year period. We've set it on a much greater course. So much, and we, I thought, you know, four more years. I thought it would be easy.

13. For years, Democrats have gotten away with election fraud and weak Republicans. And that's what they are. There's so many weak Republicans. And we have great ones. Jim Jordan and some of these guys, they're out there fighting. The House guys are fighting. But it's, it's incredible.

14. The weak Republicans, and that's it. I really believe it. I think I'm going to use the term, the weak Republicans. You've got a lot of them. And you got a lot of great ones. But you got a lot of weak ones. They've turned a blind eye, even as Democrats enacted policies that chipped away our jobs, weakened our military, threw open our borders and put America last.

15. If this happened to the Democrats, there'd be hell all over the country going on. There'd be hell all over the country. But just remember this: You're stronger, you're smarter, you've got more going than anybody. And they try and demean everybody having to do with us. And you're the real people, you're the people that built this nation. You're not the people that tore down our nation.

16. We're gathered together in the heart of our nation's capital for one very, very basic and simple reason: To save our democracy.

17. You will have an illegitimate president. That's what you'll have. And we can't let that happen.

18. These are the facts that you won't hear from the fake news media. It's all part of the suppression effort. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want to talk about it. In fact, when I started talking about that, I guarantee you, a lot of the television sets and a lot of those cameras went off. And that's a lot of cameras back there. But a lot of them went off.

19. Did you see the other day where Joe Biden said, I want to get rid of the America First policy? What's that all about? Get rid of. How do you say I want to get rid of America First? Even if you're going to do it, don't talk about it, right? Unbelievable what we have to go through. What we have to go through. And you have to get your people to fight. And if they don't fight, we have to primary the hell out of the ones that don't fight. You primary them. We're going to. We're going to let you know who they are. I can already tell you, frankly.

20. The Democrats are hopeless — they never vote for anything. Not even one vote. But we're going to try and give our Republicans, the weak ones because the strong ones

don't need any of our help. We're going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country.

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Alex Dibra, PhD Student

alexdibra@abv.bg
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
15 Tzar Osvoboditel Blvd., Sofia 1504
Bulgaria

Алекс Дибра, докторант

alexdibra@abv.bg
Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“
бул. „Цар Освободител“ 15, София 1504
България