

Constructing Migrants as Threats: A Linguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis of Trump's Rhetoric

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Abstract

This paper critically examines U.S. President Donald Trump's immigration discourse between 2023 and 2025. It will pay particular attention to the way migrants are represented within the president's broader populist communication. The analysis will draw on Critical Discourse Analysis, systemic functional linguistics, and political communication theory and it will aim to investigate how immigration is discursively constructed by Trump. Twelve campaign rallies, policy addresses, and international conferences will be taken into consideration and the focus will be the identification of five interrelated strategies in public speaking: securitization, criminalization, threat amplification through metaphor, populist moral polarization and globalization of the threat strategies. These five strategies will be discussed in five separate analytical sections of the paper and they will lead to the linguistic and discourse interpretation that follows each of them. The extended excerpts chosen for the study reveal how predication and nominalization, numerical inflation, metaphorical framing (invasion, contamination, destruction), and intertextual repetition elevate public threat perception, amplify perceived risks and justify state policy interventions towards immigration. In addition, the study demonstrates how Trump's rhetorical discourse is spread across the national borders of the United States since the excerpts selected for analysis are taken from different countries and cities in the United States. It also shows that the use of threatening language places normative pressure on the sovereignty of the nations. Trump's anti-migration discourse is famous for his way of criminalizing illegal immigrants and proposing hard laws and regulations against them. Thus, the combination between "micro-language" and "macro politics" will enable this paper to contribute in the continuous discussion about massive communication and migration discourses.

Keywords: political discourse analysis; immigration; populism; securitization; metaphor; identity.

1. Introduction

Immigration is one of the hottest debated issues in politics today, especially as the populist and nationalistic rhetoric rises across Western democracies. Political actors frequently use migration to draw social boundaries, justify exclusionary policies, and shape public opinion far beyond actual policy (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, 2021; Krzyżanowski, 2018).

Political speeches, in particular are high-visibility moments where politicians articulate ideological positions and set the terms for media coverage and public understanding. When public speakers talk about immigration, they are doing several things at the same time. They are defining problems, blaming their opponents, dividing people into “deserving” and “undeserving groups” and pushing to find solutions that may involve suspending normal legal protections (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Charteris-Black, 2018). This isn't just talk. It shapes what policies seem reasonable, influences the behavior of border officials and police and it affects the lives of the immigrants and their families (KhosraviNik, 2017; Wodak, 2021).

President Donald Trump is a powerful example. His immigration rhetoric relies on treating migration as a security threat. He continuously makes sharp moral judgments driving populist divides by using metaphors, exaggerated numbers and repeated messages (Charteris-Black, 2018; Musolff, 2016; Wodak, 2021).

Nevertheless, most research up to now has been focused on Trump's presidential rhetoric during the period 2016–2020, but less on his campaign speeches between 2023 and 2025. This period surely matters. What can be easily noticed is that political polarization has worsened and immigration still remains a top campaign issue. As a result, the focus of this study will be the analysis of 12 speeches delivered by Trump about the topic of migration during these important years. Some important discourse analysis elements that will be described are how the speaker names migrants, what qualities he gives them, the threatening emotional language and the metaphorical framing he makes use of. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, systemic functional linguistics, and political communication theory, the study explores how political rhetoric turns immigration into a problem and moralizes it by utilising it as a political tool. Trump repeatedly employs a nativist and populist framework that describes unauthorized border crossing as an existential threat to American stability. In his speeches he also focuses on the way that immigrants will damage the American cultural identity and safety. Militaristic metaphors, such as describing migration as an invasion or the claim that migrants are poisoning the blood of the country are present in his discourse to make appeals to fear and national sovereignty. Finally, Trump's rhetoric tries to solidify his political base by positioning himself as the defender of the land and the protector of democracy, social trust, and vulnerable people. Following the previous mentioned ideas in the introductory section, the paper will be organized in four other parts: methodology, literary review, findings and discussion and in the end, conclusions.

2. Methodology and Data Selection

This study adopts a qualitative discourse and analytical approach, integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), pragmatic analysis, systemic functional linguistics,

and rhetorical analysis to examine the discursive construction of immigration in recent political speeches by Donald Trump. Language is conceptualized as a socially constitutive practice. Through its use ideological, social and political meanings are constructed, negotiated, and legitimized or delegitimized in the eyes of diverse audiences (Fairclough, 2015; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; van Dijk, 2008). This theoretical orientation carries important methodological implications. Language is not considered as a passive tool for expressing already developed social realities, but as an active means that serve to shape social and political environments.

The corpus consists of twelve carefully selected speeches delivered between 2023 and 2025, a period characterised by increased activity in terms of electoral campaigning and border discussions. Speeches were delivered across campaign rallies, party conventions, policy-focused addresses, and international conferences. The variety of communicative practises and target audiences leads to multifaceted and diverse linguistic means used, yet reming loyal to the theme of amplification and threat. The selection of the speeches was guided by four primary criteria: thematic relevance to the topic of immigration, discursive richness in terms of linguistic and rhetorical features, diversity of genres and formats and availability of verified accurate transcripts taken either from official websites or reliable media sources. In all transcripts I tried to preserve original lexical, syntactic, pragmatical and rhetorical choices to allow for systematic linguistic analysis.

No.	Date	Venue/Location	Event type
1.	March 4, 2023	National Harbor, Maryland	Conservative Political Action Conference
2.	May 10, 2023	St. Anselm College, New Hampshire	Town Hall
3.	December 16, 2023	Durham, New Hampshire	Campaign Rally
4.	January 19, 2024	Concorde, New Hampshire	Campaign Event
5.	June 22, 2024	Temple University, Philadelphia	Political Rally
6.	July 18, 2024	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	Republican National Convention Speech
7.	August 18, 2024	Yuma, Arizona	Campaign Rally
8.	August 28, 2024	New Hampshire	Campaign Rally
9.	September 29, 2024	Erie, Pennsylvania	Campaign Rally
10.	October 11, 2024	Aurora, Colorado	Political Rally
11.	October, 12, 2024	Coachella, California	Campaign Rally
12.	September 2025	New York City	United Nations General Assembly Address

Table 1: Corpus of Speeches Analyzed

The analytical procedure followed an inductive–deductive design characteristic of qualitative discourse analysis. It will combine theoretical categories derived from CDA frameworks and populism research based on the themes of the material analysed. Core analytical categories included securitization moves, criminalization strategies, threat amplification mechanisms, moral evaluation patterns, identity construction processes, populist polarization techniques, and policy legitimization devices (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, 2021; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Particular attention will be devoted to nomination and predication.

Pragmatic and rhetorical analysis will focus on speech acts, modality, evaluative language, and metaphorical framing. A series of directive and commissive speech acts will be analyzed. Metaphorical patterns, especially those related to war, natural disasters, invasion, disease, criminality etc., will be explored (Charteris-Black, 2018; Musolff, 2016; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Finally, the analysis also shows intertextual connections across speeches. It will trace how particular formulations are found in different contexts, revealing the systematic nature of the discursive strategies used.

3. Theoretical Framework

Analyzing political discourse on immigration requires knowledge from several academic fields such as critical discourse studies, political communication, populism research, and metaphor analysis.

First, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as the main framework for depicting how language carries elements of power, ideology, and social control. It emphasises the link between texts, social practices and political contexts (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak, 2021; van Dijk, 2008). As a result, discourse is defined as both a product and a producer of social relations. It shapes perceptions of social groups and legitimizes policy choices. At the same time, it constructs narratives of threat or protection. CDA emphasizes the necessity of interpreting linguistic patterns that help researchers to analyse hstrtaegic manipulations embedded in public communication.

Second, the discourse-historical approach, developed by Reisigl and Wodak (2016), adds analytical precision by specifying five discursive strategies for building in-group/out-group distinctions: nomination (how persons are named and referred to), predication (what traits they are given), argumentation (the justifications used), perspectivation (the point of view taken), and intensification/mitigation (how forceful utterances are). This framework is especially valuable for studying immigration discourse, where labelling migrants as “illegal,” “criminal,” “threatening,” or “vulnerable” directly shapes which policies seem appropriate.

Third, political communication theory complements this perspective by highlighting the importance and role of speeches as performative acts that construct reality, establish authority, and mobilise audiences (Charteris-Black, 2018; Edelman, 1988). Framing theory, developed by Entman (1993) and further refined across decades of communication research is relevant here too. Speakers selectively emphasise certain aspects of an issue, such as threat, security, or cultural preservation. They do that to influence the way audiences interpret it and what policies they prefer.

Fourth, within the theory of populism, language is central to creating in-group/out-group distinctions and moral polarization. By so doing, it constructs a unified “people” standing against a threat that damages their interests (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Laclau, 2005). Populist discourse uses emotionally charged narratives and strategic repetition to affect the people in general. Immigration often becomes a privileged site for securitisation and criminalisation.

Fifth, metaphor theory, as developed within cognitive linguistics by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and subsequently applied to political discourse by scholars such as Charteris-Black (2018) and Musolff (2016), adds another crucial layer. According to these scholars, metaphors are not just decoration; they are basic cognitive tools for understanding abstract phenomena through concrete experiences. When speakers use metaphors of war, flood, or invasion, they are actively shaping how audiences conceptualise migration and what responses seem reasonable.

Previous research on Trump’s political communication shows that his discourse consistently emphasises securitisation, moral threat, and national identity construction (Ott, 2017; Charteris-Black, 2018; Wodak, 2021; Kreis, 2017). These strategies have been shown to be remarkably effective in mobilizing supporters, shaping public debate, and influencing policy discussions, while simultaneously reinforcing populist ideologies through the construction of clear symbolic boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders.” These strategies have been effective at mobilising supporters and shifting public debate. The present study builds on this literature by extending the analysis to Trump’s speeches from 2023 to 2025, critically analysing and discussing how his discursive strategies operate in a new political context.

4. Results and Discussion

The twelve speeches analyzed reveal four interrelated discursive strategies that construct immigration as a multifaceted existential threat requiring urgent, exclusionary action. Rather than isolated phrases, Trump’s rhetoric demonstrates structural coherence across diverse settings, audiences, and temporal contexts. The analysis that follows will be based upon: Securitization as dominant interpretive frame; Criminalisation through nomination and predication; Threat amplification via metaphor and Globalisation of threat narratives.

4.1. Securitization as Dominant Interpretive Frame

Securitization refers to the discursive process through which political actors construct an issue as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures, thereby legitimizing interventions that would otherwise be unacceptable in democratic governance (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Wæver, 1995). In Trump's immigration rhetoric, securitization constitutes the main lens through which all other discursive strategies are organized. Time after time, he refers to the messy, complicated reality of migration and turns it into an impactful crisis: one that supposedly threatens the nation's very survival, its borders, its public safety, and even its cultural identity.

A paradigmatic example occurs in Trump's CPAC 2023 address (Speech 1):

"Millions of illegal aliens are stampeding across our border. Interior enforcement has been shut down. Everyone is overstaying their visas. Nobody even thinks about reporting it anymore. Our country is being destroyed from within, and the people responsible don't care because they want to fundamentally change our nation." (Trump, 2023a)

This passage illustrates how fear builds through language. The repetition of "millions" boosts quantity and value, producing what van Leeuwen (2008) terms quantification as legitimation. The verb "stampeding" transforms people to animals, evoking panic and uncontrolled movement. Suddenly, migrants are not people anymore; they have become a natural disaster heading straight for the system.

This securitizing logic intensifies in Trump's Campaign Event in Concorde, New Hampshire January 19. (Speech 4):

"The drug cartels are waging war in America, and we will destroy those cartels. They're going to be destroyed. And I will use Title 42 as we did for four years to end the child trafficking crisis by returning all trafficked children to their families in their home countries." (Trump, 2024a)

In the statement, Trump declares that "the drug cartels are waging war in America" and promises to "destroy those cartels" while appealing the use of Title 42 to address child trafficking. The war metaphor is not only a rhetorical embellishment; it functions to describe immigrants as criminal organizations and hostile forces. By framing migration and trafficking as forms of warfare, his discourse focuses on national security. He also tries to find a justification for his national policy responses towards migration. Securitisation theory grounds the shift from law enforcement to national security. The reference to "trafficked children" introduces an immediate humanitarian emergency that makes the public more willing to accept any extraordinary measures against immigration. Ultimately, the statement illustrates how political rhetoric, through the use of metaphors, actively constructs immigrants as security threats. Again, referring to securitization theory, political actors might transform an issue into a matter of security

through speech acts that frame it as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures (Buzan et al., 1998).

In Arizona on August 18, (Speech 7) Trump further declared:

“I will seal the border, shut down the invasion of millions and millions of people coming into our country. I will declare a national emergency on day one, I will use the military if necessary, I will do whatever it takes to protect our country because that’s what a president is supposed to do.” (Trump, 2024d)

This statement illustrates the third component of securitization: proposed extraordinary measures. The verb “seal” suggests complete closure; the nominalization “the invasion” turns migration into a single unified enemy. As Balzacq (2011) argues, securitization achieves persuasive force when it mobilizes emotion and shared belief.

Across these speeches, a clear pattern of semantic escalation is evident, crisis becomes invasion, invasion becomes destruction and destruction becomes national disappearance. This escalation is not accidental. It transforms policy disagreement into survival emergency.

4.2.Criminalization through Nomination and Predication

Criminalization means portraying a certain group of people as inherently deviant and dangerous. Once they are framed like that, excluding them or controlling them by force is somewhat reasonable. In Trump’s rhetoric, this operates through nomination, naming migrants as criminals, and predication, attributing morally negative characteristics.

At the 2024 Republican National Convention (Speech 6), Trump stated:

“The entire world is pouring into our country because of this very foolish administration. The greatest invasion in history is taking place right here in our country. They are coming in from every corner of the earth, not just from South America, but from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. They’re coming from everywhere. They’re coming at levels that we’ve never seen before. It is an invasion indeed, and this administration does absolutely nothing to stop them... They’re emptying out their insane asylums. And terrorists are coming in at numbers that we’ve never seen before. Bad things are going to happen...” (Trump, 2024c)

Through the use of nomination and predication strategies, Trump constructs a simple powerful opposition. Migrants are described as the dangerous outsiders whereas the nation is the threatened insider. The anaphoric repetition “They’re coming...” structures the utterance rhythmically and ideologically. He uses vague sweeping labels like “the entire world,” “they,” and “people coming from every corner of the earth” to refer to them. This way he erases individual identities and depicts migrants as a single “faceless” mask. Furthermore, the prepositional phrase “from insane asylums”

associates migrants with institutionalized deviance, reinforcing their madness and danger. From a transitivity perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), migrants become the active force in an endless process.

At the same time, the statement nominates other actors to structure a clear opposition between the national community and the immigrants. The possessive adjective “our” at “our country” constructs the United States as a unified national community that must be protected. Moreover, “this administration” is nominated as a responsible political actor for the experienced failure. Thus, three roles emerge: the migrant threat, the threatened nation, and the blamed government.

This criminalizing frame also appears in Trump’s August 2024 Arizona border speech (Speech 7):

“... Shield violent criminal aliens. This is what they want to do. And give every illegal alien on the planet earth a free ticket to invent an asylum claim, and gain automatic admission into our country.

...the crime was incredible what happened. They allowed criminal gangs to menace, maim and terrorize innocent citizens. They came in. They would maim and terrorize, and we have done something with our border patrol...

...But if Biden wins, it will be a giant jail break for MS-13 and vicious criminal gangs” (Trump, 2024d)

In this passage, Donald Trump continues to construct migrants through other negative labels such as “violent criminal aliens,” “illegal alien” and “criminal gangs”. Nomination here does more than describe, it defines. A diverse group of people is flattened into a single threatening mass. The phrase “every illegal alien on the planet earth” further universalizes this category, suggesting an endless flood of people trying to enter the country by fraud. The reference to MS-13 symbolically ties migration to gang violence. At the same time, the discourse constructs an in-group through expressions such as “innocent citizens” and “our country”.

Predication strategies intensify this polarization by attributing negative qualities and actions to migrants, who are described as “violent,” “criminal,” and “vicious,” and depicted through verbs such as “menace,” “maim,” and “terrorize.” These predications frame migrants as direct threats to public safety. The metaphor “a giant jail break” further portrays migration as the mass release of criminals into society. Political opponents are also described negatively as people who “shield violent criminal aliens” and offer a “free ticket” for fake asylum claims. Together, these nomination and predication strategies construct migrants as a dangerous out-group and citizens as a vulnerable in-group requiring protection. As Theo van Leeuwen (2008) notes, this kind of essentialising language pushes aside broader social contexts and structural causes.

A prominent example is found at Trump's rally, Durham New Hampshire (Speech 3):

"Drugs, criminals, gang members and terrorists are pouring into our country. They're running wild in our Democrat run cities while Christians and conservatives are persecuted. And thanks to crooked Joe's breathtaking weakness, he is bad" (Trump, 2023c)

Through nomination, Donald Trump constructs migrants as a criminalized collective by grouping them as "drugs, criminals, gang members and terrorists". In contrast, the in-group is implicitly constructed through "our country," "Christians," and "conservatives," form a morally and culturally defined community. Another interesting case is the way that political opponents are delegitimized through labels such as "Democrat run cities" and "crooked Joe."

Predication then adds action and blame. Migrants and democratic led cities are described as "pouring into our country" and "running wild", suggesting invasion and chaos. Meanwhile, "Christians and conservatives" are predicated as victims who are "persecuted". Political leadership is further weakened with phrases like "breathtaking weakness" and "crooked Joe," signalling incompetence and corruption.

The same pattern appears in the Campaign Rally in Erie, Pennsylvania on September 29, 2024 (Speech 9) and in Trump's New Hampshire rally on August 28, 2024 (Speech 10):

"We will stop the invasion, end migrant crime, strengthen our military, build a missile defense shield over our country, keep critical race theory and transgender insanity out of our schools. And we will keep men out of women's sports. We will defend the second amendment, protect religious liberty, restore free speech, and we will secure our elections once and for all..." (Trump, 2024f)

"We have countries emptying out their prisons, sending their criminals, their drug dealers, and people from mental institutions into the United States, and nobody has ever seen anything like it. We are not going to let this happen to our country any longer." (Trump, 2024e)

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Across both speeches, Trump combines nomination and predication strategies to construct migrants as a dangerous out-group. Through nomination, migrants are categorized as “criminals,” “drug dealers,” and people from “mental institutions”. These negative labels reduce human identities to criminalized and pathological categories. The phrase “migrant crime” further reinforces the association between immigration and violence, making criminality appear inseparable from migration itself.

Predication strategies intensify this threat construction through highly charged verbs and metaphors. Expressions such as “stop the invasion” and “countries emptying out their prisons” portray migration not as ordinary movement but as a coordinated attack against the United States. The metaphor of “invasion” militarizes migration discourse, legitimizing defensive and exceptional responses such as strengthening the military and building “a missile defense shield.” Simultaneously, the repeated use of “our country” constructs a unified national in-group whose safety, morality, and identity are supposedly under assault.

Importantly, immigration is discursively linked with broader culture-war issues such as “critical race theory,” “transgender insanity,” religious liberty, and election security. Through this accumulation of threats, Trump creates what Wodak (2015) describes as a politics of fear in which different social anxieties are merged into a single narrative of national decline.

Overall, nomination and predication combine to produce a sharply polarized discourse in which migrants and opposing political spaces are constructed as chaotic and dangerous, while the in-group is portrayed as morally superior yet under threat. Reiteration exists across multiple speeches. It draws the link between migration and criminality, which starts to feel natural and almost automatic.

4.3. Threat Amplification via Metaphor

Metaphor constitutes one of the most powerful cognitive mechanisms through which political actors structure perception and shape emotional response. In Trump’s immigration discourse, metaphor operates as a central mechanism of threat amplification.

A salient instance emerges in Trump’s rally, Durham New Hampshire (Speech 3):

“Illegal immigration is poisoning the blood of our country. It’s poisoning the blood of our nation, and nobody wants to say it, but it’s true. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime, they’re bringing disease, and they’re poisoning the blood of our country. We have to stop it before it’s too late.” (Trump, 2023c)

The metaphor “Poisoning the blood” draws on embodied understandings of contamination and disease. BLOOD IS A POWERFUL SYMBOL; it stands for life, purity,

and survival of nation. By describing immigration as toxin entering the nation's bloodstream, Trump constructs migrants as internal contaminants. This metaphor activates the body-politic schema (Lakoff, 1996), conceptualizing the nation as living organism that can be ill. From a transitivity perspective, the clause makes immigration as the active force and the nation's blood as the thing being harmed, the on-going process of damage.

This contamination frame is reinforced intertextually. Trump Rally at Coachella (Speech 11):

"Wrecked the standard of living and brought crime, drugs, misery, and death. Now, over the past four years, border czar Harris has delivered the same nightmare invasion to every state in America as your vice president." (Trump, 2024h)

The term "border czar" is a politically loaded label that carries authoritarian and autocratic connotations. It derives from "tsar", meaning absolute ruler. Metaphorically, it maps governance onto autocratic rule. The political actor is not framed as a democratic administrator but as a centralized authority figure. It would be metaphorically described as somebody who does political work (Kövecses, 2010).

At the St. Anselm College for CNN's Town Hall, (Speech 2) Trump employed hydraulic metaphor:

"They're just letting people flow into our country. Look, a country has to have borders. There's never been anything like is happening to our country right now." (Trump, 2023b)

The construction "letting people flow into our country" activates the metaphor MIGRATION AS A NATURAL FORCE / LIQUID MOVEMENT, in which migrants are conceptualized as an uncontrollable fluid. The verb *flow* suggests absence of agency, regulation, or containment. This metaphor constructs migration as chaotic and dangerous, legitimizing calls for restrictive border control.

Another interesting example for metaphor analysis is Trump's Campaign Rally in Aurora, Colorado (Speech 10):

"They come from the dungeons, think of that, the dungeons of the third world, from prisons and jails, insane asylums, and mental institutions. And she has had them resettled beautifully into your community to prey upon innocent, American citizens. That's what they're doing. And no place is it more evident than right here because in Aurora, multiple apartment complexes have been taken over by the savage Venezuela prison gang known as Tren de Aragua." (Trump, 2024g)

This passage pulls together several charged metaphors DEHUMANISING, SPATIAL and PREDATORY. These metaphors construct that construct migrants as subhuman, dangerous, and invasive.

The phrase “they come from the dungeons of the third world” activates the metaphor ORIGIN AS MORAL DEPTH. *Dungeons* mean darkness, imprisonment, filth, and barbarism. Migrants aren’t just coming from another country. They are emerging from a space of moral decay. Thus, their individuality is being stripped away. They do not have names, origin and rights. The metaphor is also building a civilizational ladder in which “the third world” stands on the bottom and “the West” sits on the top.

4.4. Numerical Inflation and Populist Moral Alignment

Numerical inflation operates in Trump’s immigration rhetoric as a mechanism of populist moral urgency. Large, often disputed figures function as symbolic amplifiers of crisis, intensifying threat and emergency of the situation.

In his speech at Temple University in Philadelphia (Speech 5), Trump declared:

“These people are drug dealers, gang members, killers in so many different ways. No. And we probably have 18 million. We’ll have 20 million by the time we get this guy out of there. But we got to get them out fast. We got even bigger problems. We got to get -- we got to get them out fast. The biggest problem is what he’s saying to Russia, China, to Kim Jong Un, North Korea, what he’s saying to these countries, they’re laughing at us. They can’t believe this has happened to America.” (Trump, 2024b)

The quantification in twenties of millions serves as prosodic intensifier. They are not just numbers. They serve emotional intensifiers transmitting the idea that immigration is really hard to be managed. The repetition of “we got to get them away” creates rhythmic panic. Then, the presence of foreign leaders laughing at America further boosts the impact that migration has on the nation.

This pattern appears consistently across the corpus. Again, in his March 2023 CPAC address (Speech 1):

“We have millions and millions of people pouring into our country. We have never seen anything like it. It is a disgrace what’s happening at our border—a complete and total disgrace. Our country is being destroyed, and nobody in Washington wants to do anything about it because they don’t care about you, they care about themselves.” (Trump, 2023a)

“Millions and millions” constitutes numerical amplification through reduplication, functioning as what van Dijk (2008) terms a symbolic number. It does not refer to just a verifiable statistic, it only emphasizes enormity. The evaluative clause “It is a disgrace” shifts utterance from description to judgment. Furthermore, from a populist perspective, numerical escalation facilitates moral polarization. The pronoun “we” constructs collective agency; numerical inflation portrays the out-group as large, magnifying the heroism of the in-group.

4.5. Globalization of Threat Narratives

In his United Nations General Assembly address in September 2025 (Speech 12), Trump extended his securitizing discourse to the international stage, framing migration as global civilizational threat:

“Not only is the U.N. not solving the problems it should, too often, it’s actually creating new problems for us to solve. The best example is the number-one political issue of our time: the crisis of uncontrolled migration. It’s uncontrolled. Your countries are being ruined. The United Nations is funding an assault on Western countries and their borders. In 2024, the U.N. budgeted \$372 million in cash assistance to support an estimated 624,000 migrants journeying into the United States. Think of that. The U.N. is supporting people that are illegally coming into the United States, and then we have to get them out.” (Trump, 2025)

This passage brings together crisis, warfare, and conspiracy metaphors, to produce a strongly securitized and antagonistic framing. The phrase “the crisis of uncontrolled migration” draws on the metaphor SOCIAL CHANGE AS NATURAL DISASTER. Migration is conceptualized as a chaotic, destructive force beyond human control. The repetition of *uncontrolled* intensifies chaos, emergency, and institutional failure. The claim that “your countries are being ruined” activates the metaphor NATION AS A PHYSICAL STRUCTURE. Countries become buildings or containers that can be destroyed by migration. Thus intervention becomes an urgency again.

From an interpersonal metafunction perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), Trump positions himself as someone with special knowledge: “I am telling you this because someone has to say it” establishes epistemic authority while suggesting that the other leaders are negligent or cowardly. The directive “Act now, or face consequences that history will not forgive” operates as moralized command. Only restrictive responses, the passage implies, are ethically legitimate.

Another segment from the same speech demonstrates explicit normative pressure:

“The best example is the number one political issue of our time, the crisis of uncontrolled migration. It’s uncontrolled. Your countries are being ruined.” (Trump, 2025)

The use of catastrophic verb “ruin” serves as an appeal to the other countries. The direct address to leaders positions Trump as morally responsible and authoritative. By extending the issue of migration internationally, the speech demonstrates that the struggle is projected globally to audiences (Bigo, 2002). This shows how populist narratives remake politics and morality at every level — not just at home, but across borders.

Conclusion.

This study has examined the discursive strategies employed by Donald Trump in his speeches on immigration between 2023 and 2025. The goal was to show how language is an important tool for building moral lines and shaping identity. Across different settings, at home or even in an international arena, Trump makes use of his rhetoric to construct threat against migrants. He depicts them as outsiders, groups of people defined by criminality and illegality. In contrast, in his speeches, he also constructs an insider group composed of lawful citizens and sovereign states.

Four main linguistic strategies emerged from the analysis of his public discourse: securitization, criminalization, threat amplification through metaphor, and populist moral alignment through numerical inflation. These strategies do not function in isolation. Instead, they combine with one another forming a closed system. Securitization creates the emergency that justifies extreme measures whereas criminalization supplies the moral reason for harsh responses. Metaphors make abstract threats feel immediate and physical whereas inflated numbers boost the effect of the so-called unprecedented crisis caused by migration.

Using critical discourse analysis and systematic functional grammar, the paper showed that features such as transitivity, speech acts, agency, modality etc. are used a lot by Trump to assign blame and social responsibility. Migrants are represented as collective agents of harm that destabilize society; citizens and compliant states are constructed as protective actors. This asymmetry is not accidental. It reflects the core logic of populist discourse: you need a clear enemy to define and mobilise "the people" against.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of discursive construction to contemporary political communication. In this corpus, immigration is not just a policy problem. It is a securitized and globalised issue whose meaning is reproduced through rhetorical choices. This study contributes to understanding how populist leaders use linguistic devices to produce emotional resonance and claim authority.

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