

UDC 811.161.2

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2522-4077-2026-216-6>

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF POPULISM IN DONALD TRUMP'S RHETORIC

СТРАТЕГІЇ ПОПУЛІЗМУ В ІДІОДИСКУРСІ ДОНАЛДА ТРАМПА

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This article focuses on the complex study of Donald Trump's political rhetoric during his presidencies. It gives a brief overview of modern research in this area. The politician's rhetoric is understood as a unique personalized system of idiolect and idiostyle, as an inseparable complex of lexical, grammatical, stylistic, and pragmatic means employed to construct and entrench ideologically charged meanings aimed at influencing the audience. Drawing on a corpus of speeches, debates, and interviews from the current decade, the study analyzes the individual characteristics of Donald Trump's political discourse that distinguish it from the discursive practices of other Republican politicians. The analysis identifies a set of semantic, grammatical, stylistic, and pragmatic markers of the politician's rhetoric, including ideologically loaded vocabulary, the use of informal colloquial language, fragmented and simplified syntax, highly expressive stylistics dominated by evaluative and affective markers, as well as the frequent use of directive, commissive, and expressive speech acts. Taken together, these features testify to the dominance of populist strategies in Donald Trump's political discourse.

This present study also argues that Donald Trump's rhetoric may be characterized as a specific form of *rally-style political rhetoric*, that is an emotionally charged, performative mode of communication employed at large public gatherings to establish strong affective bonds with the audience, mobilize supporters, and present the politician as an authentic and charismatic leader. Trump's narratives are cognitively and linguistically simplified, often lacking logical coherence and exhibiting a high degree of theatricality; they appeal primarily to shared identity rather than to detailed policy debate, foregrounding spectacle and direct emotional engagement with the audience.

Key words: emotional expressiveness, ideological meaning construction, idiolect and idiostyle, political rhetoric, populism, simplification, theatricality.

Ця стаття присвячена комплексному дослідженню політичного ідіодискурсу Дональда Трампа періоду його президентств. У ній подано стислий огляд сучасних наукових досліджень у цій галузі. Ідіодискурс

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політика тлумачиться як унікальна персоналізована система ідіолекту та ідіостилу – нерозривно пов'язаних лексичних, граматичних, стилістичних і прагматичних засобів конструювання та укорінення ідеологічних смислів, спрямованих на здійснення впливу на аудиторію.

На матеріалі промов, дебатів та інтерв'ю поточного десятиліття здійснено аналіз індивідуальних характеристик політичного дискурсу Дональда Трампа, які відрізняють його від дискурсивних практик інших політиків-республіканців. У результаті дослідження виявлено семантичні, граматичні, стилістичні та прагматичні маркери ідіодискурсу політика, зокрема: ідеологічно навантажену лексику, чітко виражену неформальну розмовну лексику, фрагментований і спрощений синтаксис, високоекспресивну стилістику з домінуванням експресивних маркерів, а також частотне використання мовленнєвих актів директивного, комісивного та експресивного типів. Сукупність цих ознак засвідчує домінування популістських стратегій у політичному дискурсі Дональда Трампа.

Дослідження доводить, що ідіодискурс Дональда Трампа можна кваліфікувати як своєрідну *мітингову політичну риторіку*, тобто емоційно заряджену перформативну комунікацію, що використовується під час масових зібрань з метою встановлення тісного емоційного зв'язку з аудиторією, мобілізації прихильників та репрезентації політика як автентичного й харизматичного лідера. Наративи Дональда Трампа характеризуються когнітивною і мовною спрощеністю, частою відсутністю логічної послідовності та високим рівнем театральності; вони апелюють передусім до спільної ідентичності, а не до розгорнутого обговорення політичних програм, акцентуючи видовищність і безпосередній емоційний контакт з аудиторією.

Ключові слова: емоційність, ідіолект та ідіостиль, конструювання ідеологічних смислів, політичний ідіодискурс, популізм, спрощеність, театральність.

Problem statement. The institutional sphere of contemporary public communication in Europe and the United States is undergoing profound transformations driven by manipulation, disinformation, and populism. Emerging actors, influential figures, and social media bloggers disrupt traditional information flows and introduce changes in the lexicon, pragmatics, and stylistics of official discourse, underscoring the relevance of examining these phenomena. The distinctive features of Donald Trump's speech, which contribute to his unique and recognizable rhetoric, further highlight the urgent need for a systematic study of the lexical-semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic properties of his discourse.

Literature review. Trump's rhetoric has attracted significant scholarly attention in cultural studies, political science, and psychology [1]. Within linguistics, various aspects of his discourse, including verbal, non-verbal, and paraverbal ones, have been investigated using diverse methodological frameworks, such as cognitive, semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic approaches. Previous research has demonstrated that Trump's political discourse is characterized by impoliteness [2], sentence fragmentation and communicative efficiency [3], lexical-grammatical simplification [4], repetition [5], and logical inconsistency [6]. Scholars have addressed his stylistic idiosyncrasies [6; 7], gestural patterns [8], typical conceptual metaphors [9], and sociolinguistic features of communicative behavior [10]. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in understanding Trump's rhetoric as an integral system reflecting his idiolect, idiostyle, and pragmatics within personal discourse.

The study is grounded in both theoretical and empirical considerations, guided by the principles of explanatory analysis, neo-functionalism, and anthropocentrism. A comprehensive analytical approach was employed, integrating general scientific methods (systematization, induction, deduction, observation, and description) with theoretical-empirical methods (analysis, synthesis). The framework also includes semantic analysis of lexical units, discourse analysis to identify strategies, speaker's intentions, and the role of linguistic elements in their representation, contextual analysis to interpret stylistic features, and pragmatic analysis to examine typical speech acts.

Purpose of the study. This research aims to identify and analyze Donald Trump's rhetoric with particular focus on its lexical-semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and pragmatic features. The corpus consists of his official speeches, debate transcripts, and interviews of the current decade, as published in the media.

Findings and discussion. In this study, a politician's rhetoric is conceptualized as a unique personal system of idiolect and idiostyle, which is an inseparable combination of lexical, grammatical,

stylistic, and pragmatic resources used to construct and embed ideological meanings, aimed at influencing the electorate. Trump's rhetoric is notable for its frequent use of simple sentences, such as «*Make America great again*» and «*Build the wall*», and the repetition of key lexical items, including *win*, *sad*, and *great*. The data of oral content from Donald Trump's first presidential term indicate that his speech corresponded to a fourth-grade reading level, whereas Barack Obama's communication approximated a ninth-grade level [4]. Trump's simplified syntactic structures make his speeches easily comprehensible and memorable for the average American voter, which may partly explain their resonance with his campaign audience.

On the one hand, Trump's speeches frequently employ derived words and abstract nouns to confer weight and perceived depth to his statements. Many of these derivatives in political discourse refer to states, actions, qualities, or causes. Nouns derived from verbs constitute a stylistic feature of Trump's public speech, examples of which include *transition*, *establishment*, *triumph*, *celebration*, *movement*, *decision*, *immigration*, *protection*, *prosperity*, *goodwill*, *disagreement*, *renewal*, *regulation*, *enforcement*, *integrity*, *devotion*, etc. The use of abstract nouns creates a contrast with everyday talk, while the broad thematic range (including education, Iran's ballistic missile program, immigration, reform policies, and the like) renders Trump's speech more formal and substantive, portraying him as thoughtful and informed and thereby enhancing audience trust.

On the other hand, Trump's lexical-semantic repertoire relies on a repeated set of high-frequency, everyday lexical elements *dream*, *hope*, *wealth*, *great again* that are immediately intelligible to voters: «*Your voice, your hopes, and your dreams will define our American destiny. And your courage and goodness and love will forever guide us along the way*» (Donald Trump's inaugural address, January 20, 2017). This combination of simplicity, repetition, and concrete vocabulary contributes to the accessibility, memorability, and emotional impact of his rhetoric.

Trump's rhetoric is characterized by colloquial and informal vocabulary (*folks* etc.), and a predominant use of first-person singular and plural pronouns (*I*, *we*, *us*), which function as markers of his idiosyncrasy and as effective means of promoting himself. The plural forms, in particular, are typical of Trump's rally-style political rhetoric: «*We love the Second Amendment, folks. Nobody loves it more than us...*» (Remarks at the NRA Annual Leadership Forum, 2016).

Trump's language, much like his political style, reflects zero tolerance and an overt disregard for established rules and norms of the use of language. He deliberately flouts the conventions of political correctness, which in American political discourse serve to prevent interethnic, racial, gender, age-related, and other forms of discrimination. Notably, Trump exhibits sexism and undermines the intellectual and professional capacities of women: «*Look at that face! Would anyone vote for that? Can you imagine that, the face of our next president?*» (referring to presidential candidate Carly Fiorina) or «*Rosie O'Donnell is disgusting – both inside and out. If you take a look at her, she's a slob*» (Interview with Rolling Stone Magazine, September 9, 2015).

Trump's deliberate violation of politically correct norms also extends to the interethnic domain, as evidenced by his direct insults to Mexican immigrants: «*When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people*» (Presidential campaign announcement speech, June 16, 2015). Such discourse strategies serve as markers of Trump's idiolect and reinforce the aggressive, populist dimension of his rhetoric.

A grammatical hallmark of Trump's idiolect is his use of fragmented sentences. According to Lakoff, such paratactic structures allow the speaker to be more intelligible: by leaving sentences unfinished he invites listeners to complete them mentally [11]. This technique fosters empathy and a sense of closeness, prompting automatic acceptance of Trump's ideas and positive affect toward him. For example: «*We've created associations, millions of people are joining associations. Millions. That were formerly in Obamacare or didn't have insurance. Or didn't have health care. Millions of people. That's gonna be a big bill, you watch. It could be as high as 50 percent of the people. You watch. So*

that's a big thing.» (M.S. Schmidt of The New York Times' interview, December 28, 2017). When Trump's listeners complete his sentences for him, they often fill the gaps with sentiments that resonate with their own experiences [12]. Thus, fragmentation emerges as a core element of Trump's charisma, facilitating interpretative flexibility and allowing diverse audiences to «hear what they want to hear».

Institutional forms of communication, including political discourse, are grounded in specific social rules and rituals consecrated by tradition and validated by historical experience [5]. The systematic violation of these norms, which is a distinctive marker of Trump's idiostyle, elicits an emotional response from the audience. Specifically, Trump's speeches are marked by pronounced «inconsistencies» [6]. Stylistically, they conform to the conventions of oral speech, deliberately deviating from the patterns of written political discourse. Key markers of this divergence include frequent repetition, ellipsis, and a lack of logical linearity, for example: «*I didn't wait long. I didn't wait long. I didn't wait long. I wanted to make sure, unlike most politicians, that what I said was correct. Not make a quick statement. The statement I made on Saturday, the first statement, was a fine statement...*» (The news conference, August 15, 2017).

Trump's idiostyle is further characterized by abrupt thematic shifts [11]. Specifically, Donald Trump departs from the primary topic more frequently than the average speaker [6]. A prime example of this is his tangential transition from the subject of nuclear weapons to his uncle at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and subsequently to the Wharton School of Finance: «*Look, having nuclear – my uncle was a great professor and scientist and engineer, Dr John Trump at MIT; good genes, very good genes, OK, very smart, the Wharton School of Finance, very good, very smart...*» (Presidential Debates, October 19, 2016).

The lexical markers of Trump's idiostyle include hyperbole, which manifests itself through linguistic exaggeration and the frequent use of intensifiers, such as the adverbs *really*, *extremely*, and *enormously*. Typically for the politician, nominations consistently contain semes of exaggeration, while evaluative descriptors are framed in extremes of *best* or *worst* [12]: *very, very; many, many; super-duper*. The following declarative sentence contains several markers of hyperbolization simultaneously: «*The American economy is by far the largest in the world and we've just enacted the most significant tax cuts and reform in American history.*» (Speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, January 26, 2018).

Multiple repetitions also serve as stylistic markers of Trump's speech. While some observers have interpreted these repetitions as a «manifestation of his madness» [12], they actually fulfill critical functions: fostering solidarity with the audience, providing discursive cohesion, and enhancing the mnemonic retention of his primary theses. Most frequently, Donald Trump employs the pragmatic marker *you know* to establish common ground with the listener. Despite their outward appearance of being misplaced, his repetitions are strategically calculated to emphasize specific pieces of information [6].

Within his discourse, Trump frequently employs parallel structures, such as anaphora. A notable example is the repeated use of *Thank you*: «*Today, I am inviting all of you to become part of this incredible future we are building together. Thank you to our hosts, thank you to the leaders and innovators in the audience but most importantly, thank you, to all of the hard-working men and women who do their duty each and every day, making this a better world for everyone. <...> Thank you and god bless you all. Thank you very much.*» (Speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, January 26, 2018). In this example, the use of parallelism (*each and every day*) together with intensifiers (*most, very much*) facilitates the construction of an image of the United States as a global superpower.

Typical invocations of the Divine and Trump's high-impact closing statements have the capacity to energize audiences profoundly, leaving a lasting impression and exerting influence: «*Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States.*» Accordingly, Trump's idiolect functions not merely as an expressive medium but as a strategically organized system for emotional influence on both opponents and the audience.

The individual specificity of Donald Trump's pragmatics is manifested in the strategies and tactics of his discourse, his repertoire of speech acts, and his interdiscursivity; together, these features contribute to the politician's distinctive charisma. Trump's political discourse typically mirrors advertising, privileging emotional persuasion over rational argumentation. He relies on vivid imagery, interspersed with striking words, and a style of language more characteristic of salespeople than statesmen [12]. Many of the politician's most famous catchphrases, such as «*Believe me*» and «*Many people are saying*», are adaptations of established verbal sales techniques. Lakoff [11] explains that when Trump says «*Believe me*», he employs a principle known as justified belief, emphasizing that he possesses the necessary experience and knowledge to render subsequent persuasion credible. This subtext is powerful because it shapes the listener's subconscious. The phrase «*Many people are saying*» often precedes statements that are factually unsubstantiated, making his speech appear more credible to listeners than a mere assertion of an unverified claim. Thus, Trump's claims of direct personal experience function as an effective manipulative strategy [11] because individuals are more likely to believe what seems to be shared knowledge.

Among the speech acts in Donald Trump's discourse, expressives and commissives predominate, while declaratives and directives also occur with high frequency. Expressives (following Searle's classification) convey the speaker's psychological state, attitude, or emotions. For instance, Trump expresses a sense of shared joy: «*This week, the United States celebrates the 230th Anniversary of the signing of our remarkable Constitution.*»

Commissives indicate the speaker's intention or bind the speaker to some future action, encompassing promises, commitments, oaths, offers, refusals, and threats. In Trump's discourse, future-oriented promises addressed to the American electorate are among the most frequent: «*Under my plan, I'll be reducing taxes tremendously, from 35 percent to 15 percent for companies, small and big businesses.*» (Presidential Debates, October 19, 2016).

Declaratives pertain to the state of affairs being reported, including acts such as blessings, dismissals, resignations, sentencing, etc. A characteristic feature of Trump's declaratives is their categorical and non-negotiable nature.

Directives express the speaker's desire to prompt the addressee to act, encompassing commands, requests, invitations, pleas, orders, and prohibitions. For example, «*So let us pledge allegiance to our flag, devote our hearts to our country, and demonstrate our love for one another – as Americans, as Patriots, and as the children of God.*» (Weekly presidential address, September 15, 2017).

Trump's rhetoric implements a range of strategies for conveying information. Of particular importance are strategies that draw attention to how candidates position themselves («positive» campaigning) or their opponents («negative» campaigning). The use of positive or negative campaigning typically depends on the candidates' relative standing; negative campaigning predominates when a candidate considers it more advantageous to highlight the opponent's weaknesses rather than their own strengths. However, Donald Trump completely disregards these conventional expectations of communicative behavior. In nearly all situations, he resorts to self-praise and positive evaluations of his own role, even where such claims may be unwarranted or misaligned with reality. For example: «*Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why I alone can fix it*» (Republican National Convention acceptance speech, July 21, 2016).

This strategy functions as a mechanism of self-presentation, where linguistic aggressiveness becomes a symbol of honesty, directness, and decisiveness. Consequently, political incorrectness in his discourse is transformed into a pragmatic tool for constructing the image of an «anti-establishment» leader. Thus, the discursive strategies and speech acts in Trump's rhetoric are both marked and contingent upon his personal world construal.

Conclusions. The results of this analysis indicate that Donald Trump's rhetoric represents a distinct type of political discourse, grounded in charismatic self-assertion and combining elements of populist rhetoric, mass communication, and performative speech. It is characterized by unpredictabil-

ity, extravagance, and the deliberate violation of linguistic norms and logic. Trump's rhetoric exhibits features of *rally-style political rhetoric*: it is emotionally charged and performative, deployed at large gatherings to mobilize supporters and present the politician as a strong, authentic leader. His narratives tend to appeal to emotions rather than engage in detailed policy debate.

Trump's idiolect demonstrates extreme syntactic simplification, frequent repetition, and paratactic structures that mimic natural spoken language. The semantic structure of his idiolect relies on a limited but strategically significant vocabulary, creating the illusion of closeness to the people as a hallmark of populism. His idiostyle is further characterized by hyperbole, anaphora, and parallelism, which serve not only as expressive devices but also as mechanisms for emotional contagion and mobilization of supporters.

The pragmatic potential of Trump's discourse is rooted in the predominance of directive, commissive, and expressive speech acts, reflecting the manipulative nature of his communication, which is oriented toward emotional rather than rational persuasion. Within this framework, political incorrectness in his statements functions as a deliberate rhetorical strategy, constructing the image of an «anti-establishment» leader and thereby reinforcing the speaker's charismatic authority.

Ultimately, these results suggest that a future inquiry lies in the multimodal analysis of political discourse, treating it as a multidimensional phenomenon where verbal, paraverbal, and visual elements converge.

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Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 07.01.2026

Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 16.02.2026

Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 14.04.2026