

Analyzing Trump and Pence's CRT Speeches Using the Ideological Square

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ABSTRACT

The research analyzed how Donald Trump and Mike Pence applied van Dijk's Ideological Square to portray their group positively and CRT negatively in political speeches. This research demonstrates how language can influence public opinion and obscure key facts about racism and justice. The study employed descriptive qualitative methods, utilizing van Dijk's Ideological Square, to analyze speeches by Donald Trump and Mike Pence regarding Critical Race Theory (CRT). The data were obtained from the official transcript, and the analysis involved categorizing words and sentences to reveal ideological strategy and public influence. They praised their group, criticized the opponents, concealed America's faults, and overlooked the positive aspects of CRT. Through this strategy, they built a positive image of their group while forming a negative public opinion of CRT. Language was used to influence emotion, trust, and public understanding. This research contributed to an understanding of political language and ideology in speech.

Keywords: *Ideological Square, Critical Race Theory, Political Rhetoric*

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INTRODUCTION

The debate over Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become one of the most polarizing topics in American political discourse, particularly since 2020. Political figures, such as Donald Trump and Mike Pence, often used rhetoric that frames CRT as a threat to American values. The political statements become a powerful instrument to influence public opinion, mainly through language that divides society into opposing ideological camps. Therefore, this research investigated how their speeches applied van Dijk's Ideological Square to represent their group positively and portray opposing groups negatively.

The research topic is significant as it helps us understand how political leaders apply language to influence public opinion. By examining Donald Trump and Mike Pence's speeches, we can gain insight into how they influence people's perceptions of history, race, and education. This is useful for students and teachers who want to see how language can support certain beliefs and reject others. When we analyze political speech by using a certain method as van Dijk's Ideological Square, we become more aware of how words can be used to show power and control ideas in society.

The issue of the research was the way Donald Trump and Mike Pence spoke about Critical Race Theory (CRT) and American history. In their speech, they exposed that “our” group (America and conservatives) is good and “their” group (CRT supporters and progressives) is bad. They did not talk about racism history in America or the positive purpose of CRT. This made the public see CRT as something dangerous, even though CRT is designed to help people understand the injustice of racism. Those speeches were only showing one side and ignoring the other, which could cause misunderstanding and escalating divisions in society.

This research was unique as it focused on Donald Trump and Mike Pence’s speeches by applying Van Dijk’s Ideological Square to study how they talked about Critical Race Theory (CRT) and racism. While the other research had examined political speeches or CRT, only a few had combined both in one study. In addition, most previous research employed complex language; this study fills the gap by demonstrating how Ideological Square is applied in recent, controversial, and widely broadcast political speeches in America.

A related study also applied van Dijk’s CDA to analyze how President Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin used language in four speeches about the conflict Russia-Ukraine 2022. The research showed that Biden used discursive instruments such as disclaimers, euphemisms, and national pride, while Putin used authority and comparison. The research also figured out that Biden was more focused on hiding the bad sides of his group, while Putin was more focused on showing the bad sides of others and hiding their good sides, showing their different ideology (Kauthsar n.d.). To support this research, another study also examined President Joe Biden’s speech related to the Russia-Ukraine war using van Dijk’s Ideological Square Model. This research found that Biden employed language to portray America and its allies as the good side and Russia as the bad side. These words helped him explain why strong actions, like sanctions, were required against Russia (Kadwa and Alshenqeeti 2020). Another study also displayed how politicians often applied discourse to support their power and beliefs. Critical Discourse Analysis helps reveal the connection between language and power. By using this approach, researchers compared speeches of Turkish presidents, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. That was to show ideological differences. This research found out that Atatürk’s out-groups were other countries, while Erdoğan also saw the media and his political rivals as out-groups. These research results explain how political ideology and power can be conveyed through words and various strategies in speech (Pedagogy 2023).

Additionally, research related to the topic discussed is about how women were still threatened unfairly, as many people believed that men were more important than women. This research applied van Dijk’s Ideological Square to analyze how language in *The Handmaid’s Tale* showed suppression. This research revealed that this novel applied men and women characters to show a negative view of women and a positive view of men, and it gave a clear picture of patriarchal society (Al-shammari and Al-Khazraji 2021). In line with the previous results, some researchers analyzed a speech by Imran Khan at the UN and how he used language to speak about the West and Muslims through van Dijk’s Ideological

Square. The study figured out that instead of fighting Islamophobia, Khan also applied the “Us versus Them” idea to show that the West was different from Muslims (Javaid et al. 2022).

Furthermore, an important research revealed how Donald J. Trump applied tweets during the 2016 campaign to show that Syrian refugees were a dangerous group and not worth it to be accepted. This research presented that negative Trump messages about refugees not only became his political speech, but also became a real policy, such as the travel ban in 2017. This research utilized van Dijk’s theories of Ideological Square and proximization to explain how Trump exploited language to make refugees seem like a threat and to support his campaign (Kazzaz 2020). Another critical research analyzed how Nigerian politicians managed language in the media to control people’s thinking. This research put into operation Critical Discourse Analysis and Ideological Square from van Dijk to examine how two big parties, APC and PDP, talked about each other in news articles about corruption. This research found out that two parties used language to expose that their part was good while the other was bad to get power and stop people from thinking critically (Krisagbedo, Eze, and Mamah 2021). Another study explored how news headlines in Pakistan and India presented different political views about the Pulwama attack in Kashmir. This research analyzed 10 news headlines and sub-headlines of newspapers from 14 February to 28 March 2019. By applying Ideological Square theory and Clusivity from van Dijk, this research facilitated society to think more critically and understand how news can shape political ideas (Ahmed and Habib 2023).

In a different context, yet the same topic, a study analyzed how ninth-grade textbooks in Iran taught political values and religion through language. It was found that the books often displayed that their group was good while others were bad. The Farsi book exploited emotional stories, while social science books mostly framed foreigners in a negative point of view (Naseri 2021). Lastly, a research study analyzed the Gaza attack and how the attack was reported in political news. This study applied Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze how Israeli and Palestinian newspapers implemented van Dijk’s Ideological Square. The results revealed that the two sides displayed themselves as good while the other was bad. This research also analyzed an interview with an Israeli politician to demonstrate how language was applied to support political goals and influence public opinions (Ahmed, Irum, and Jahngir 2023).

This research utilized van Dijk’s Ideological Square, which consists of four main strategies: emphasizing our good properties/actions, emphasizing their bad properties/actions, deemphasizing our bad properties/actions, and deemphasizing their good properties/actions. These strategies are useful to identify how language reflects ideology, especially in political texts.

The objective of this research is to analyze how Donald Trump and Mike Pence use language in the objective of the research was to analyze how Donald Trump and Mike Pence use language in their speeches to influence the way society thinks about Critical Race Theory (CRT) and American history. This research wanted to investigate how the speakers of their group as a good one and the opposite group as a bad one. This research was also to

understand how certain ideas were made to be seen in a positive light, while others were ignored or seen in a negative light. This research applied Van Dijk's Ideological Square to analyze the speeches. The main objective was to help the readers see how political speeches form opinions, supporting certain beliefs, and hiding important facts about racism and history.

Van Dijk's Ideological Square is suitable to analyze American Political Discourse about CRT, as it focuses on how political actors strategically position themselves and their opponents. Unlike Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough, which emphasizes social structure and power relations broadly, van Dijk's model is more explicit and systemic in identifying linguistic strategy that reflects ideological bias. This model enables researchers to examine closely lexical choices, sentence structure, and the thematic emphasis that reveals the dichotomy "us vs. them". In the context of Trump and Pence's speeches, this model enables the investigation to focus on how their rhetoric builds opposition of the CRT group as a group that is morally superior, morally, while delegitimizing the other supporters of CRT. Every speech was examined to identify its linguistic elements that reflect the four Ideological Squares. The attention was given to the word choice, sentence construction, repetition, metaphor, and references through national identity and morality. The analysis is focused on how language is used to portray CRT negatively and to build a positive image and political stance of the speakers.

On the other hand, Ideological Square is very relevant in the study of political polarization as it helps reveal implicit messages that are embedded in the discourse. This is very crucial in American politics, where speeches are often made carefully to influence emotion and perception without confrontation. Therefore, the framework of van Dijk not only reveals ideological bias but also reveals how language can build public ideology softly and public policy. Based on this idea, this research asks: How do Donald Trump and Mike Pence use Van Dijk's Ideological Square in their speeches to talk about Critical Race Theory (CRT)? Also, what language strategies do they use to show their group in a good way and the other group in a bad way?

This research was based on some significant assumptions. First, it was assumed that political speeches were not neutral; those speeches were made to influence how people think about important issues such as race and history. Second, it was assumed that Donald Trump and Mike Pence used language to show that their group was better and the others worse, especially when they spoke about Critical Race Theory (CRT). Third, it assumed that Ideological Square from Van Dijk could help explain how their speeches worked to build the ideas.

The benefits of this research were very clear. It helps students and readers to comprehend how the political leaders applied words to build trust. It is also showing how some important facts about racism and justice can be hidden or ignored in public speeches. This research can also help people become more critical when they listen to or read political messages.

METHODS

This research applied a qualitative method by using a descriptive method. The researcher studied how Donald Trump and Mike Pence used language in their speeches to speak about Critical Race Theory (CRT). The analysis method was based on van Dijk's Ideological Square. The researcher selected two speeches: one was from Donald Trump and the other was from Mike Pence. The speeches were chosen as they contained strong opinions about CRT and were broadcast on many mass media outlets, which influenced public thinking and education policy.

The researcher applied van Dijk's theory to analyze how speakers spoke about "us and them". The theory has four main parts: (1) speaking good things about us, (2) hiding bad things about us, (3) speaking bad things about them, and (4) hiding good things about them. The researchers analyzed words, phrases, and sentences employed in the speeches to figure out which ones were suitable for the four strategies. These steps helped to see how ideology was built in the speeches.

To make the analysis clearer and systematic, the researcher made tables to help categorize data. For every part of the speeches, the researcher marked. This was to make them easier to understand and to help reduce subjectivity.

The researcher also added more supporting data to strengthen the research results, such as attaching public reactions and news reports about the speeches to compare and examine the results. This process is called triangulation, and it helps give more accurate and reliable results.

This method is suitable as it enables the researcher to explore deeply about language and ideology in speech. Van Dijk's model was used because it helped explain how language can build group identity, support power, and form public opinion. Another model, such as Fairclough or Wodak, could be useful; however, van Dijk's Ideological Square is more focused on how the speakers perform themselves positively and others negatively, which was suitable for the research objectives about CRT discussion and polarization politics in America.

This study applied a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Van Dijk's Ideological Square as the analytical instrument. The primary data consists of selected speeches from Donald Trump and Mike Pence delivered on September 17, 2020, during the White House Conference on American History. The speeches were transcribed and segmented into meaningful units for analysis, specifically parts where they talked about Critical Race Theory (CRT) and American history. The research viewed how these two speakers applied language to support their group and reject the others' point of view. It focused on words, phrases, and messages they used to speak about America, race, and education.

The data for the research came from the official transcript of the speech delivered by Donald Trump and Mike Pence at the American History Conference in the White House. The conference was held on September 17th, 2020. The transcript was publicized on a trusted website called Rev.com. The transcripts include the detailed speech employed in this research. The researcher utilized the words and sentences of the transcript to analyze

how the speakers talked about Critical Race Theory (CRT), American values, and national identity.

This research applied a method called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the speeches. The main instrument used was Van Dijk’s Ideological Square. The instrument helped the researcher to understand how the speakers used language to show the group of “us” as a good group and the group of “them” as a bad one. Ideological Square had four parts: (1) showing our good sides, (2) showing their bad sides, (3) hiding our bad sides, and (4) hiding their good sides. By applying this method, the researcher could view how Donald Trump and Mike Pence used words to support their ideas and reject the others’ ideas.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

Sub-section 1: Emphasizing “Our” Good Things

In their speech, Donald Trump and Mike Pence used many positive words to describe America, the political group, and their supporters. They talked about America as a great country with freedom, strong values, and a proud history. They wanted the children to learn that they live in the greatest country in world history. The speakers also praised patriotic parents and teachers who wanted their children to grow up with a love of country. These words helped build a strong national identity, making the audience feel proud and united. This illustrated the first part of van Dijk’s Ideological Square, which aims to portray “our” group as positive.

Table 1: Quadrant 1 – Emphasize "Our" Good Things

Element	Content
Quadrant	1 – Our Good
Key Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • America was described as free, strong, and proud • Leaders and parents were shown as patriotic • Builds a strong national identity
Strategy	Show the positive qualities of "our" group (USA, conservatives, supporters)
Example in Speech	<p>“We teach our children to love America.”</p> <p>“Most exceptional nation in the history of the world.”</p>
The Goal	To make the audience feel proud, united, and loyal to their group and values.

Sub-section 2: Emphasizing “Their” Bad Things

The speeches used many negative words to talk about people who supported Critical Race Theory (CRT) and other progressive ideas. These people were called “Radical”, “Marxists”, and “Indoctrinators”. Trump and Pence said that these people were trying to erase American history and to divide the country, and to teach the children to hate their

nation. These words made the audience feel that the other group was dangerous and wrong. Part of the speech was in line with the second part of van Dijk’s Ideological Square: to show “their” group was bad.

Table 2: Quadrant 2 – Emphasize "Their" Bad Things

Element	Content
Quadrant	2 – Their Bad
Key Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CRT supporters were labeled with strong negative words like "radical" and "Marxist." • They were blamed for erasing history and causing division • The language created fear and distrust toward the other group
Strategy	Show the other group (progressives, CRT supporters) as harmful, dangerous, and un-American
Example in Speech	<p>“The radical left is brainwashing students.”</p> <p>“They want to erase our history and divide our nation.”</p>
The Goal	To make the audience fear, reject, and oppose the other side’s ideas, and to strengthen loyalty to the speaker’s group

Sub-section 3: De-emphasizing “Our” Bad Things

In the speeches, there was almost no discussion about racism history, slavery, and injustice in America. The speakers spoke about slavery just to say that the problem has already been solved. They were not talking about the recent issues, such as discrimination and inequality. This helped create a picture of a nation that had issues in the past, but nowadays is perfect. By not discussing “our” faults, the speakers avoided mistakes and responsibilities. This was in line with the third part of van Dijk’s model: hiding and minimizing the bad side of “us”.

Table 3: Quadrant 3 – Hide “Our” Bad Things

Element	Content
Quadrant	3 – Our Bad (Hidden)
Key Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism, slavery, and injustice were barely mentioned • Slavery was treated as something from the past only • No mention of current issues like discrimination or inequality
Strategy	Hide or minimize the negative actions or history of “our” group (America, leaders, conservatives)
Example in Speech	“America’s founding set in motion the unstoppable chain of events that abolished slavery...” (ignores long-term effects and current racism)
The Goal	To create a perfect image of the nation, avoid responsibility for past or present problems, and protect the group’s positive reputation

Sub-section 4: De-emphasizing “Their” Good Things

The speeches also did not talk about good reasons why some people supported Critical Race Theory (CRT). They did not explain that CRT was applied to help students understand racism and promote justice. By hiding the good side of the opponent group, the speakers made it easier to attack them. Audiences never listened to the real purpose of CRT, only the bad ones. This matched with the fourth part of van Dijk’s Ideological Square: hiding “their” good sides.

Table 4: Quadrant 4 – Hide “Their” Good Things

Element	Content
Quadrant	4 – Their Good (Hidden)
Key Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The speeches did not explain the real goals of CRT • CRT aimed to promote fairness and understanding were not mentioned • Only negative views about CRT are presented
Strategy	Ignore or hide the good intentions and positive contributions of the opposing group (CRT supporters, progressives)
Example in Speech	Only says CRT was “Marxist” or “toxic,” without explaining that it promoted justice and equity
The Goal	To make it easier to attack the opposing group, prevent the audience from sympathizing with them, and block critical understanding of their ideas

Summary Diagram: Summary of All Four Sub-sections (The Ideological Square)

The previous four diagrams displayed how Donald Trump and Mike Pence strategically applied language. They showed “our” group as a good and strong one, while “their” group as a bad one and dangerous. They ignored speaking about the bad side of their group and hid the good side of the other one. This helped them control messages and influence audiences.

Table 5: Summary Diagram: All 4 Quadrants of the Ideological Square

Quadrant	Strategy	Key Points	Example in Speech	The Goal
1. Our Good	Emphasize the good side of “our” group	America was described as great, strong, and free; speakers praised patriotic parents and leaders	“We teach our children to love America.”	Make the audience feel proud, united, and loyal to their group
2. Their Bad	Emphasize the bad side of “their” group	CRT supporters were called radicals, accused of dividing the nation and	“The radical left is brainwashing students.”	Make the audience fear, reject, and distrust the opposing group

Quadrant	Strategy	Key Points	Example in Speech	The Goal
		brainwashing students		
3. Our Bad (Hidden)	Hide or minimize our faults	No deep discussion of racism, slavery, or inequality; problems were treated as already solved	“America’s founding set in motion the chain of events that abolished slavery...”	Avoid blame, protect group image, and pretend all problems are in the past
4. Their Good (Hidden)	Hide the good side of the opposing group	CRT’s real goal of promoting justice and fairness was never explained	CRT was only described as “Marxist” or “toxic.”	Prevent understanding or support for the other side’s ideas

DISCUSSION

Political speeches frequently aim to influence how people perceive significant issues, including history, race, and national identity. In Donald Trump and Mike Pence’s speeches, they were talking about Critical Race Theory (CRT) strongly and negatively. They were also speaking about American history with pride and trying to build a positive image of their group. This phenomenon is called ideological polarization. This meant that the speakers divided people into two groups: “us” (patriotic, conservative, traditionalist) and “them” (progressive, CRT loyalists, left-wing group). This strategy was portrayed clearly by using van Dijk’s Ideological Square, where the speakers showed their side as a good side while the other group as a bad one, while hiding every negative thing about themselves or any positive thing about the other group.

The result of the speech strategies had some consequences. Firstly, this could create a strong group identity and make people feel loyal to one side. On the other hand, this also escalated the division and misunderstanding among groups. By only displaying the positive aspects of their group and hiding its weaknesses, Trump and Pence presented a one-sided view. By only showing bad things about CRT and hiding the real purposes, they made people afraid of ideas meant to promote honesty and justice. This kind of speech could hinder honest discussions about racism and prevent meaningful change. In the long term, this could slow social progress and could complicate efforts to build unity in society.

The analysis of this research is based on van Dijk’s Ideological Square, which focuses on how people use language to create an “us vs them” mindset. This theory is different compared with Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, which looks more at power and how power is built into daily language. Although these two theories are studying language and power, van Dijk’s model is very useful to demonstrate obvious examples of group bias in political speeches. Another theory, Framing Theory, shows how issues are formed through certain words or pictures. Trump and Pence also used Framing when they mentioned CRT as “radical” or “Marxist”, so that sounds scary to their listeners.

This topic is also important recently, as CRT is still being debated widely in schools, media, and politics. In some places, regulations have been made to ban teachers from using CRT or similar ideas. This indicates that political speeches like Donald Trump and Mike Pence

can have a real impact on public policies. This also shows how language can be used to restrict education about racism and justice. The strategy that applies “us vs them” is still applied until now in many public arguments, not only in America but also all over the world. In another study, researchers figured out that even political language translation can display ideology. This study observed Chinese political discourse and its translation into English. This research revealed how words like “should” and “will” were modified to add, reduce, or enhance the meaning. The change did not happen randomly, but it was related to political goals and how speakers wanted to be heard by international readers. This research applied van Dijk’s Ideological Square and ideas of social gap to explain how language was utilized to support certain political messages (Lijuan and Afzaal 2024).

A similar issue also happened in Indonesia. A study analyzed how a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives utilized social media to make derogatory comments about a minority ethnic group. The research found many racial statements on YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. This research employed van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis and Ideological Square to explain how these politicians used language to show that they were good people and that a certain ethnic group was bad. They employed several negative strategies, including prejudice, blaming others, and using metaphors to portray the minority ethnic group in a negative light (Cicilia and Irawan 2023).

On the other hand, some political speeches were employed to unite people. For example, Nelson Mandela’s speech utilized Positive Discourse Analysis to promote peace and unity. A study revealed that Mandela did not apply the “Us vs. Them” strategy. He used good language to talk about others, making his words softer through grammar, and substituting strong words with peaceful words. The goal was to stop racial divisions to bring unity among the South African people. The study concluded that the use of language smartly and well by Mandela promoted him to be a symbol of peace and facilitated South Africa to become more democratic (Shamshad, Hashmi, and Authors 2022).

Similarly, another study examined how President Biden applied euphemistic expressions in his speeches to handle local and international issues. This study found that the softer and polite use of language by Biden helped him show his leadership from a good point of view and make other groups look less positive. This language strategy also enabled him to inspire people and share messages of change and power in careful ways (Humood and Faisal 2024).

Lastly, a related study explored how CNN and Al-Jazeera applied language in news reports about Saudi female Olympians. By using van Dijk’s Ideological Square, the study figured out that the two media channels supported the athletes and portrayed them positively, while they presented those who opposed the female athletes negatively. The reports used strong, long, and detailed words, completed with rhetorical instruments to support women's empowerment and to challenge stereotypes (Ajeel, Tan Ai Lin, and Abdul Fatah 2025).

This research only analyzed two political speeches, one from Donald Trump and the other from Mike Pence, which were delivered on the same occasion. The limited data

may not fully represent the all discourse of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in American politics. The analysis only focused on linguistic content.

The results of the research reveal that language plays a central role in building public opinion and ideological polarization. Comprehending how political figures, such as Trump and Pence, built “us vs. them” through speeches can help educators, researchers, and society to be more critical when involved in political discourse. This also implies that Critical Discourse Analysis, especially van Dijk’s Ideological Square, is a useful and practical instrument to analyze power and ideology in public communication. Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of balanced discourse and equality about race and education to avoid divisions and misinformation in society.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that Donald Trump and Mike Pence employ language in their speeches to support their group and reject others. They demonstrate that America and its loyalists are good people and patriotic, while the supporters of Critical Race Theory are described as threatening and not patriotic. They applied four strategies of van Dijk’s Ideological Square: (1) showing their good sides, (2) showing bad sides of others, (3) hiding their bad sides, and (4) hiding good things of others. The strategies create a strong group identity, yet escalate the division and misunderstanding. Those speeches make CRT look dangerous without explaining the real reasons, namely justice and honesty.

This research contributes to political language study by using van Dijk’s Ideological Square in real-life examples from political speeches. This research helps students, teachers, and researchers comprehend how language can build ideas and trust in society. This research also displays how Critical Discourse Analysis can be applied in simple ways to find out meanings in texts. This research is also advantageous for people who want to study how ideology, race, and history are delivered in speeches to the public.

For future researchers, it is suggested to study other political speeches by using the same method to compare different speakers and countries. Future researchers can also take notice of how media and textbooks use the same strategies. It is really helpful if it includes an interview or survey to observe how people respond to the speeches. The other suggestion is learning how students and teachers understand CRT and how they are influenced by political speeches. This research in the future can combine van Dijk’s theory with other methods, such as visual analysis or media framing.

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