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LINGUISTIC FRAMING OF UKRAINE IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

The present article examines the linguistic representation of Ukraine in the political speeches of Kamala Harris and Donald Trump delivered between 2022 and 2025, a period defined by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its consequences for transatlantic political communication. The study addresses a gap in existing scholarship, which has analysed the rhetorical strategies of each speaker individually but has not subjected their representations of the same geopolitical subject to systematic contrastive linguistic analysis. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and framing theory, the article offers a three-level comparative analysis (lexical, grammatical, and stylistic) of a corpus comprising 6 speeches totalling approximately 40,000 words. The analytical framework identifies 13 linguistic mechanisms, quantified across 62 Harris fragments and 44 Trump fragments. The quantitative data demonstrate that the two speakers construct fundamentally divergent discursive frames. Harris's discourse instantiates a Solidarity-based Frame characterised by value-laden vocabulary, sustained agency language that represents Ukrainians as active historical subjects, and an elevated register marked by metaphor. Trump's discourse represents Ukraine within a Pragmatics-based Frame defined by transactional vocabulary, personalised I-constructions, and a confrontational register. The data confirm that these differences are systematic across the entire corpus and structurally inverted at every analytical level, demonstrating that political discourse actively constructs geopolitical reality.

Keywords: Kamala Harris, Donald Trump, linguistic representation, Ukraine, discursive framing.

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ЛІНГВІСТИЧНА РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЯ УКРАЇНИ В СУЧАСНОМУ АМЕРИКАНСЬКОМУ ПОЛІТИЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

У статті досліджується мовна репрезентація України в політичних промовах Камали Гарріс і Дональда Трампа, виголошених упродовж 2022–2025 років, періоду, що позначається повномасштабним вторгненням Росії в Україну та його наслідками для трансатлантичної політичної комунікації. Дослідження доповнює наявні студії в науковій літературі, що аналізують риторичні стратегії кожного з політиків окремо, однак не вивчали їхні стратегії репрезентації одного й того самого геополітичного об'єкта через системний зіставний лінгвістичний аналіз. Спираючись на критичний дискурс-аналіз і теорію фреймінгу, стаття пропонує трирівневий (лексичний, граматичний і стилістичний) порівняльний аналіз корпусу, що охоплює 6 промов загальним обсягом близько 40000 слів. Аналітична модель передбачає виокремлення 13 мовних механізмів, кількісно верифікованих на матеріалі 62 текстових фрагментів з промов К. Гарріс і 44 фрагментів з промов Д. Трампа. Результати дослідження підтверджують, що обидва політики конструюють принципово відмінні дискурсні фрейми. Дискурс К. Гарріс реалізує фрейм солідарності, що характеризується ціннісно навантаженою лексикою, стійкою репрезентацією українців як активних історичних суб'єктів, та позитивним стилем мовлення із переважанням метафори. Дискурс Д. Трампа репрезентує Україну в межах прагматичного фрейму, що відрізняється транзакційною лексикою, персоналізованими конструкціями з займенником I та конфронтаційним стилем мовлення. Дані підтверджують, що ці відмінності є системними в межах усього корпусу та структурно протиставленими на кожному аналітичному рівні. В цілому, аналіз результатів дослідження демонструє, що політичний дискурс активно конструює геополітичну реальність.

Ключові слова: Камала Гарріс, Дональд Трамп, мовна репрезентація, Україна, дискурсний фреймінг.

Introduction. Political discourse is one of the primary mechanisms through which international events are interpreted and evaluated for domestic and global audiences. The way political actors name and describe a foreign country in conflict determines what political responses to it are rendered legitimate or necessary. This problem acquires particular practical urgency in the context of ongoing armed conflict, where the discursive framing of a country at war by external political actors directly influences public opinion, legislative decision-making, and the allocation of military and financial support.

Theoretical Framework. The study draws on two interrelated theoretical frameworks. The first is *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), which treats language not as a neutral medium of communication but as a site where “social and political meanings are actively constructed and contested” (van Dijk, 2002: 208). Within this framework, political speech is understood as a form of institutional discourse whose primary function is not to describe reality but to shape how audiences perceive, evaluate, and respond to it. The second is *Framing Theory*, which holds that speakers selectively emphasise certain aspects of a complex reality while backgrounding others, thereby guiding audiences toward particular interpretations (Entman, 1993). In political discourse, framing simultaneously operates at several levels: lexical – through evaluative vocabulary and naming strategies; grammatical – through the distribution of agency, transitivity, and pronominal reference; and stylistic – through rhetorical devices that amplify or attenuate particular meanings (van Dijk, 2008). Political meaning, therefore, is understood as constructed through the interaction of lexical choices, grammatical structures, and stylistic devices, each contributing to the overall communicative effect.

Recent scholarship has addressed adjacent dimensions of this problem from several directions. Studies of Trump’s political language have examined its populist rhetoric, syntactic simplicity, hyperbole, and polarising us-versus-them structure (Kraiev & Valiarenko, 2024), while analyses of Harris’s discourse have focused on its inclusive pronominal strategies, narrative structure, and expressive speech acts (Ariska & Yanti, 2022). Ukrainian political discourse has received growing attention in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, with researchers examining the linguistic construction of identity, resistance, and solidarity in Ukrainian institutional speech (Molek-Kozakowska et al., 2024; Chiluwa & Ruzaite, 2024). At the same time, the representation of Ukraine specifically within American political discourse has not been systematically investigated.

Research Aim. The present study aims to identify and describe the linguistic mechanisms through which Ukraine is represented in the political speeches of K. Harris and D. Trump delivered between 2022 and 2024. The study further seeks to establish, through comparative analysis, whether the observed differences in representation are incidental to individual speeches or constitute consistent, speaker-specific patterns traceable to broader communicative strategies.

Results and Discussion. The present study analyses the linguistic representation of Ukraine in 6 political speeches delivered by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump in 2022–2024. The material comprises 3 speeches by K. Harris and 3 by D. Trump, totalling approximately 40,000 words. The comparative analysis of the speeches by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump is conducted at three interconnected levels: lexical, grammatical, and stylistic. Each level comprises a number of strategies that frame Ukraine differently.

1. Lexical Level

The most immediate and revealing difference between the two speakers lies in their lexical choices for describing Ukraine within a broader political argument. Both K. Harris and D. Trump use 3 framing mechanisms that represent Ukraine (see Table 1).

Table 1

Distribution of instances across three lexical mechanisms

Lexical mechanism	Dominant lexemes	Harris (n*=62)	Trump (n=44)
L1 Value-laden vocabulary	<i>sovereignty, freedom, territorial integrity, democracy, liberty, independent, just peace</i>	11	5
L2 Naming Russian aggression	<i>unprovoked, invasion, atrocities, war crimes, brutal, aggression, unjustified, appalling, savage, horrific, senseless</i>	14	10
L3 Representing Ukrainians as people	<i>resilience, resolve, bravery, heroically, achieved, regained, stood strong, willingness to fight</i>	19	2
Total		44	17

*n is the number of the analysed text fragments from the speeches

L1 Value-laden vocabulary. Harris consistently represents Ukraine using the language of international law, democratic values, and moral obligation. It is associated with terms such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, freedom, liberty, independence, and justice. For example: “*More than 140 countries voted at the United Nations to condemn Russia’s aggression and to support Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in defense of the core principles of the U.N. Charter*” (Harris, 2023). The same cluster of value-laden lexis recurs across all five speeches: “*The American people, you see, are in awe of the resolve of the people of Ukraine, in awe of their resilience and righteousness, their willingness to fight for freedom and liberty, and the extraordinary tenacity and leadership of President Zelenskyy*” (Harris, 2023).

Trump’s lexical choices operate within a different register. Where Harris reaches for freedom and justice, Trump reaches for money spent and deals, foregrounding the financial and transactional dimension of the war in Ukraine. A number of text fragments substantiate this argument. For example: “*The United States has sent hundreds of billions of dollars to support Ukraine’s defense with no security, with no anything*” (Trump, 2024); “*Can’t keep spending hundreds of billions of dollars protecting people that don’t even like us*” (Trump, 2023).

The contrast becomes especially sharp when both speakers describe the same basic reality – American support for Ukraine. Harris lists three categories of principled assistance: “*The United States has provided significant support to Ukraine: security assistance, humanitarian assistance, and economic assistance. And we will continue to support the people of Ukraine*” (Harris, 2022).

Trump quantifies the same support in dollars and immediately frames it as a failed transaction: “*The United States has sent hundreds of billions of dollars to support Ukraine’s defense with no security, with no anything*” (Trump, 2024).

L2 Naming Russian aggression. A second key lexical contrast concerns how each speaker names and evaluates Russia’s actions. Harris employs a legally precise cluster of negatively charged vocabulary that remains consistent across all 3 speeches. The adjective *unprovoked* is particularly insistent in: “*And we will target those who are complicit and those who aid and abet this unprovoked invasion*” (Harris, 2023) and “*First, from the starting days of this unprovoked war, we have witnessed Russian forces engage in horrendous atrocities and war crimes*” (Harris, 2023).



Trump's 2022 speech does employ strong condemnatory language directed at Russia: *"It's an outrage and an atrocity that should never have been allowed to occur"* (Trump, 2022). However, this vocabulary does not persist across his later speeches. By 2024, the dominant focus has shifted from condemning Russia to frustration with the war itself: *"Millions of Ukrainians and Russians have been needlessly killed or wounded in this horrific and brutal conflict with no end in sight"* (Trump, 2024)

Essentially, this vocabulary condemns the war rather than its perpetrator, a subtle but consequential redistribution of moral weight.

L3 Representing Ukrainians as people. A third revealing contrast concerns how each speaker represents Ukrainians themselves. Harris builds a sustained portrait of Ukrainian agency: *"The American people are in awe of the resolve of the people of Ukraine, in awe of their resilience and righteousness, their willingness to fight for freedom and liberty"* (Harris, 2023). Over the course of her speeches, this portrait intensified through cumulative lexical effect, representing Ukraine not as a passive victim but as an active historical subject. *"Yet, the skill and the bravery of the people of Ukraine, along with the leadership of President Zelenskyy and the 50-nation coalition the United States has led, has allowed Ukraine to achieve what so many thought was impossible"* (Harris, 2024)

Trump's References: to Ukrainians as people are fewer and more static. His 2022 speech offers genuine sympathy: *"We are praying for the proud people of Ukraine"* (Trump, 2022). However, by 2024, the narrative has shifted: *"Nobody wants peace more than the Ukrainians"* (Trump, 2024). Ukrainians are now defined by their desire for peace, which repositions them as prioritising negotiation over resistance.

2. Grammatical Level

Politicians' grammatical choices play no less important a role than vocabulary, since they determine how the content is structured: who acts and who is acted upon. Grammar distributes attention and encodes political positioning in ways that often go unnoticed because they feel natural to this type of formality. This section examines 3 framing mechanisms (see Table 2).

Table 2

Distribution of instances across three grammatical mechanisms

Grammatical mechanism	Feature	Harris (n=62)	Trump (n=44)
G1 Agency and transitivity	Ukraine as an active grammatical subject	14	5
	Russia as grammatical subject (aggressor)	8	6
G2 Pronominal contrast	Collective <i>we</i> pronoun	16	6
	<i>I</i> in a personal achievement	2	6
G3 Future constructions	Collective future commitment	14	0
	Personalised future	0	5
Total		54	28

G1 Agency and transitivity. These are one of the most productive tools for analysing political discourse. The choice of the agent that occupies the grammatical subject position in a sentence is rarely neutral because it highlights that entity as an active agent and implicitly assigns it responsibility for what follows. Across the speeches of both politicians, Russia is consistently placed in the subject position when aggression is being described: *"Since Russia launched its proxy war against Ukraine nearly eight years ago, the people of Ukraine have suffered immensely"* (Harris, 2022); *"Russia is decimating Ukraine"* (Trump, 2022)

Here, both speakers place Russia in the grammatical subject position, and Ukraine, correspondingly, occupies the object position. This asymmetry is the grammatical foundation of the *aggressor/victim framing* shared by both speakers.

However, the two speakers diverge sharply in later speeches. Harris systematically and repeatedly repositions Ukraine as an active grammatical subject, constructing a portrait of a state that not only suffers but also acts: *"Ukraine has achieved significant success against an adversary on an imperialistic quest"* (Harris, 2024). This sentence places Ukraine in the subject position with a semantically strong active verb, *achieved*. The effect accumulates across Harris's subsequent speeches: the image of Ukraine shifts progressively from a state under threat in 2022 to one that has demonstrated its capacity to resist in 2024.

In Trump's speeches, Ukraine does appear as a grammatical subject in several instances: *"Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible"* (Trump, 2024). However, the verbs attached to Ukraine as the subject are different from those in Harris's speech. Grammatically, Ukraine is active, but its activity is oriented toward negotiations rather than the battlefield.

G2 Pronominal contrast 'we' vs 'I'. Personal pronouns are among the most politically loaded grammatical resources in any language, and the contrast between speakers in their use of *we* and *I* is one of the most visible structural differences.

In Harris's speeches, *we* is the dominant first-person form, and its reference is consistent, encompassing the United States, its allies, NATO, the transatlantic community, and at times the entire democratic world: *"We, the United States and Europe, have come together and demonstrated our strength and our unity, just as we do today, as we stand in this decisive moment, with all eyes on Ukraine"* (Harris, 2022); *"Together, we have provided historic assistance to Ukraine. Together, we have dealt Russia a strategic failure. Together, we have imposed unprecedented cost on Russia"* (Harris, 2023). The pronoun *we* here dissolves the boundary between the speaker, the institution she represents, and the alliance of which that institution is part. Ukraine, in this construction, is never alone.

Trump's pronominal strategy is the structural inverse. The first-person singular *I* is far more prominent than in Harris's speeches and is usually attached to the most decisive verbs in the text: *"I will get the problem solved, and I will get it solved in rapid order, and it will take me no longer than one day"* (Trump, 2023); *"I'm also working tirelessly to end the savage conflict in Ukraine"* (Trump, 2024). In the fragments above, major actions are attributed to Trump's *I*. It potentially means that the outcome depends on the person holding power, not on a durable institutional relationship. Notably, Trump does use *we*, but its function differs from Harris's. In his speeches, the pronoun *we* typically refers to the United States as a financial contributor in contrast with European allies who have

not matched that contribution: “*We put up \$140 billion and they put up just a tiny fraction of that*” (Trump, 2023). Here, *we* is not a marker of solidarity but of American expenditure.

G3 Future constructions. The way each speaker uses tense and modal constructions encodes not just temporal reference but also the nature and degree of their intention. Harris’s use of future constructions is characterised by repetition and collectivity: “*If Russia further invades Ukraine, the United States... will impose significant and unprecedented economic costs*” (Harris, 2022); “*We will work to secure critical weapons and resources that Ukraine so badly needs [...] for as long as it takes*” (Harris, 2024). The phrase *for as long as it takes* appears in multiple speeches. It grammatically signifies an open-ended pledge of support that explicitly refuses to place a time limit on American engagement.

Trump’s future tense works very differently: “*I will get it solved in rapid order, and it will take me no longer than one day*” (Trump, 2023). This sentence displays individual decisiveness and speed. At the grammatical level, the war in Ukraine is reframed as a problem only a capable individual can solve, reducing a complex geopolitical conflict to a managerial task.

Regular counterfactual constructions reframe the present situation as the result of otherse failures: “*Ukraine would’ve been thriving [...] Russia never would’ve pulled the trigger*” (Trump, 2023). Such statements shift responsibility for the conflict away from Russia and onto the Biden administration, which once again subordinates Ukraine’s representation to a political argument.

3. Stylistic Level

Stylistic devices are the mechanisms that make linguistic representations of Ukraine more emotionally compelling and memorable. This section examines 4 stylistic mechanisms in the speeches of both politicians (see Table 3).

Table 3

Distribution of instances across four mechanisms

Stylistic mechanism	Harris (n=52)	Trump (n=41)
S1 Metaphor	14	6
S2 Anaphora	14	11
S3 Antithesis	6	6
S4 Rhetorical questions	2	5
Total	36	28

S1 Metaphor. Harris’s metaphors consistently elevate Ukraine to a position of world-historical significance and frame the conflict as a struggle between fundamental forces. The conceptual metaphor of *falling* and *standing* is one of the most sustained image patterns in her speeches that encodes the entire essence of the conflict in two opposing verbs: “*Many thought Kyiv would fall within days [...] Today, Kyiv stands free and strong*” (Harris, 2024). *Fall* and *stand* map the binary onto Kyiv: the city becomes a symbol of resistance that chose to remain upright.

A related metaphor frames Russian aggression as a premeditated script: “[...] *it was to foreshadow the Russian playbook for the world and to outline the steps the United States [...] would take in response to their aggression*” (Harris, 2024). It attributes cynicism to Russia’s actions and simultaneously implies that the democratic world knows how to read it.

Harris also uses metaphor to frame the stakes of inaction: “*The failure to do so would be a gift to Vladimir Putin*” (Harris, 2024). The word *gift* reframes political hesitation as active complicity. A similar idea is reflected in the following example: “*Russia invaded Ukraine, an outrageous attempt to subjugate a free people and an attempt to wipe a sovereign state off the map*” (Harris, 2024). This sentence evokes the visual metaphor of erasure, making the threat to Ukrainian statehood tangible.

Trump’s metaphors operate in a lower register and serve a different purpose. Rather than elevating the conflict to world-historical significance, they obscure political opponents and highlight the war’s futility: “*Putin is playing Biden like a drum*” (Trump, 2022). Here, the metaphor *playing drum* reduces the complexity of great-power relations to a humiliating performance.

Another fragment shows a common metaphor of sliding: “*At the top of my list, we’ll be stopping the slide into costly and never-ending wars, we got to stop it*” (Trump, 2023). It frames military engagement as an accidental loss of control.

Overall, Trump’s metaphors consistently redirect attention away from Ukraine, whilst Harris’s metaphors keep Ukraine in the frame.

S2 Anaphora. It is the dominant stylistic device for both politicians, but its function differs. In Harris’s speeches, repetition operates at the level of commitment: “*We have put concrete proposals on the table. We have encouraged and engaged Russia [...] We have engaged in good faith*” (Harris, 2022). The repeated ‘*we have*’ constructions emphasise sustained collective action.

The anaphoric *together* in the following example sounds effective: “*Together, we have provided historic assistance to Ukraine. Together, we have dealt Russia a strategic failure. Together, we have imposed unprecedented cost on Russia*” (Harris, 2023). Each repetition of the word reinforces the idea of the collective international *we* that stands behind Ukraine.

A similar function is served by the repeated *Think of* construction: “*Think of the image of the pregnant mother... Think of the images of Bucha... Think of the four-year-old girl*” (Harris, 2023). Repetition commands the audience to hold specific images in mind, preventing the abstraction of suffering into statistics.

Trump’s repetition serves a sharper, more polemical function. The most structurally elegant instance in the corpus is the triadic anaphora of presidential names: “*Under Bush, Russia invaded Georgia. Under Obama, Russia took Crimea. Under Biden, Russia invaded Ukraine*” (Trump, 2022). The grammatical parallelism here is exact: the same structure, three times, each iteration adding a new layer to the Democratic and Republican failures, leaving the implicit conclusion unspoken: under Trump, none of this happened.

The same logic governs the triple repetition of *It’s time*: “*It’s time to stop this madness. It’s time to halt the killing. It’s time to end this senseless war*” (Trump, 2025). Each clause intensifies the demand.

The triple rhetorical question in the following fragment demonstrates how repetition carries ironic as well as sincere force: “*Wouldn’t that be beautiful? Wouldn’t that be beautiful? Wouldn’t that be beautiful?*” (Trump, 2024)

S3 Antithesis. It is a more prominent device in Trump’s speeches than in Harris’s. Trump uses antithesis to construct binary contrasts: “*With Biden, they’re trying to take everything. And with me, they took nothing*” (Trump, 2023). The antithesis is employed

to showcase the contrast between Trump's leadership and that of his predecessors or opponents. Ukraine functions as the terrain on which this contrast is played out.

Harris also uses antithesis, but her contrasts keep Ukraine at the centre: *"In Munich two years ago, many thought Kyiv would fall in a matter of days. Yet... Kyiv stands free and strong"* (Harris, 2024); *"He is not calling for negotiations, he is calling for surrender"* (Harris, 2024). The last example is particularly sharp: Harris uses antithesis to expose what she characterises as the bad faith behind Putin's peace proposals.

S4 Rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions appear in both corpora but serve different purposes. Harris uses them to dramatise the historical weight of the moment and draw the audience into a shared recognition of what has been accomplished: *"Could Russia be stopped? Would NATO come together? Would NATO break apart? And would Ukraine be prepared?"* (Harris, 2023). These questions recreate the anxiety of early 2022, producing a narrative shift from uncertainty to vindication.

Trump's rhetorical questions are more confrontational, directed outward at opponents and allies rather than at collective memory: *"Why isn't NATO putting up dollar for dollar with us?"* (Trump, 2023); *"Do you want to keep it going for another 5 years?"* (Trump, 2024). These questions do not invite reflection but make accusations, and the audience is not asked to remember but to agree.

Collectively, the quantitative data in Figure 1 map the discourse profiles of both speakers across all 10 mechanisms identified in the three-level analysis, drawing directly from Tables 1–3. Each axis represents one mechanism; values correspond to raw instance counts within each corpus.

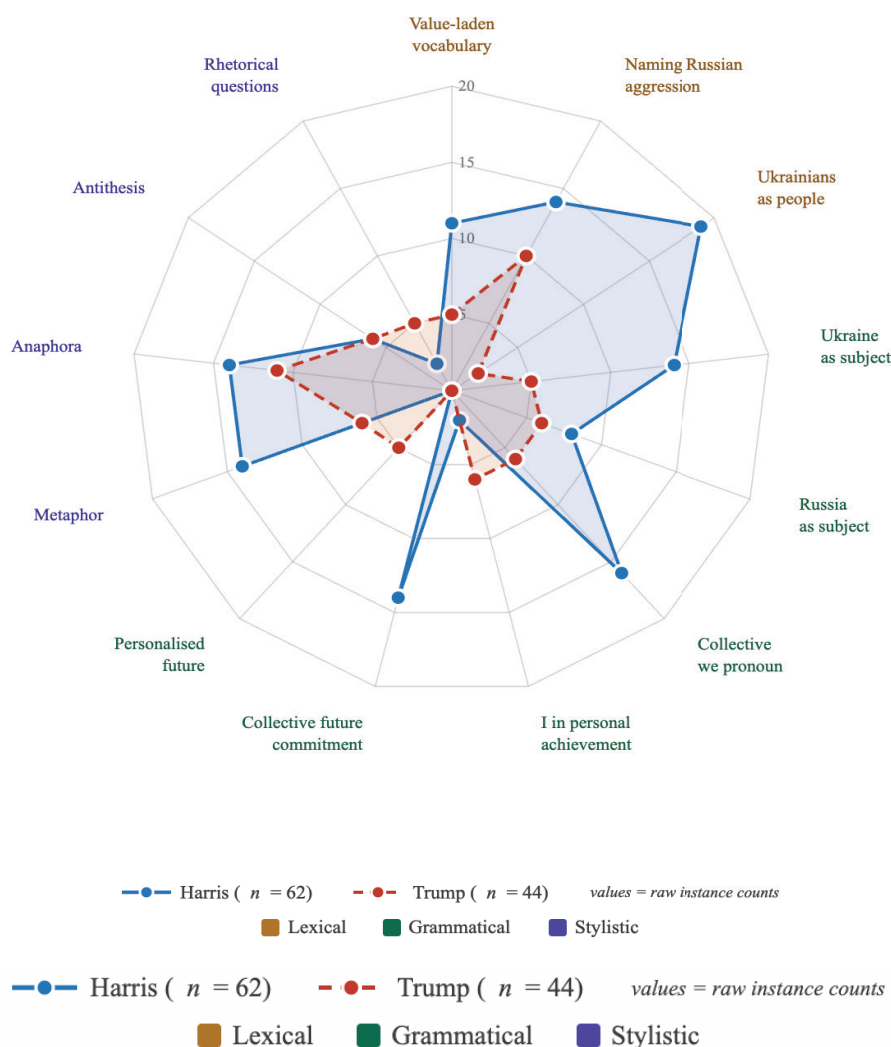


Figure 1. Comparative discourse profiles of K. Harris and D. Trump according to the 3 analytical levels

The data and analysis obtained show that two politicians frame Ukraine differently:

1) Harris's discourse profile employs a **Solidarity-based Frame** to represent Ukraine as both a victim of aggression and an active agent of resistance, and as a carrier of democratic values. It is characterised by a dominant value-laden vocabulary, resilience language directed at Ukrainians, collective *we* pronoun use, future commitment constructions, and an elevated stylistic register.

2) Trump's discourse profile presents Ukraine within the **Pragmatics-based Frame**: the war is the consequence of others' failures, and its resolution is a managerial problem awaiting the right individual to solve. It is defined by transactional lexis, numerous personalised *I* constructions, near-absent agency language for Ukrainians as a nation, compressed future forms, and a confrontational register.

The quantitative data confirm these differences: the most diagnostic single contrast is in *Representing Ukrainians as people*: it yields 19 instances in Harris's speeches against 2 in Trump's. At the grammatical level, the mirror structure of *Future constructions*,

with Harris's 14 against Trump's 0, counts for collective commitment, which provides further evidence that the two frames are structurally inverted.

Conclusions. The present study has examined the linguistic representation of Ukraine in 6 political speeches by K. Harris and D. Trump (2022–2024) through a three-level analysis of lexical, grammatical, and stylistic mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that the two speakers construct divergent discursive frames around the same geopolitical reality. The study confirms that political discourse actively constructs geopolitical reality: the same war and the same country produce two different representations depending on the speaker's political goals.

Prospects for further research. The methodology applied in this study may be extended to a broader corpus encompassing other American political actors, European leaders, or media discourse.

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