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Construal Operations: An Analysis of the Political Discourse regarding COVID-19

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Abstract

Women are underrepresented in high positions in many fields. Taking the example of politics, this unequal social representation may have an impact on the discourses of the relevant sexes in choosing a specific discourse type as an effect of power. The COVID-19 pandemic required political leaders to communicate to their nations directly through official speeches to make them conversant about the day-to-day varying situation. The speeches of the leaders during the catastrophe may reveal their manifested gender. The aim of the research is to explore how they position or are positioned as leaders in the conventions of the political discourse differently. The research takes on Fairclough's (2015) notion of power behind discourse to explore the dynamic relationship of power, discourse and gender. As far as methodological framework is concerned, cognitive linguistic-critical discourse analysis is employed to analyze the qualitative data which includes political speeches of different leaders. The data analysis reveals that male leaders do not change their conventional discourse pattern. It is the females who keep on changing linguistic techniques to communicate effectively keeping in view the demand of the situation. The implication of the study is that the reader will be assisted in examining how language that deviates from known and customary patterns can build new ways of reality. The study's considerable focus is on the discursive construction of gender representation in political discourse which will help understand that language is a rich resource to develop and shape their unique identities.

Keywords: COVID -19, CL-CDA, gender, political discourse

Introduction

Human history is characterized by conflicts and disputes. In different contexts, people have been engaged in conflict and have attempted to establish their dominance. Humans are divided into groups according to a number of characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religion.

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When used ethically, classification can have advantages. However, human history shows it is rather employed negatively by those in authority to augment profit, prestige, and power at the expense of the vulnerable. In any form of overt and covert use of force or coercion, discourses are enacted and exploited in subtle ways.

Patriarchy and Gender Inequalities

The issue of gender perpetuated to downplay one group at the expense of the other is persistent in the human history and it was after centuries of manipulation that women realized the need to change their situation. Although social changes have brought important modifications in gender relations with the passage of time, patriarchy continues to exist in subtle ways. This social dimension holds relevance for social interaction and it has created gender stereotypes.

The nineteenth century saw the beginning of an enormous conflict known as the suffrage movement which started as a fight to provide women the right to vote on political issues. It paved the way for their representation on the front lines of the political and socioeconomic spheres and since then there has been no end to the gains they have made and the controversies linked to the gains too; all however enabling them to learn from their past, tackle their present better and prepare for their future well. Now females are not confined to domestic life; they are also contributing in all spheres of life. However, they face more "complex and nuanced" (Carli & Eagly, 2016, p.1) challenges than their male colleagues. "…full equality is still a somewhat distant goal, and women have the burden of overcoming obstacles that men do not face" (Carli & Eagly, 2016, p.1). There are varied factors which impede women progress. One of the major hindrances in their professional growth is the glass ceiling (McDowell et al., 2001). Consequently, rarely do they reach the top positions. Women make up half of the world's population but are rarely represented in accordance with their numbers; this underrepresentation is pervasive in all socioeconomic aspects globally; regardless of geographical location, women are constantly discriminated, especially in the political sphere (Khayyam & Tahir, 2019).

In the contemporary world, men and women equally contribute to the development of a nation. But women are still underrepresented in high positions in the bureaucracy, business and politics (Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020). According to data from UN Woman (the United Nations

Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women), merely 24.3% of national parliament seats in the world are held by women (Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020). This unequal social representation may have an impact on the discourses of the relevant gender in choosing a specific discourse type as an effect of power.

The Outbreak of COVID-19 Virus

In December 2019, an infectious disease known as COVID-19 first surfaced in a Chinese city, Wuhan and spread in approximately 210 countries (Anwar et al., 2020). The lethal pandemic required political leaders to communicate to their nations directly and instantly through official speeches day to day varying situation and the steps initiated by the government to control the pandemic. The gender of the respective leaders also has a strong bearing in these unprecedented circumstances. The speeches of the leaders during the catastrophe may reveal their performed gender (identity) and how they position (themselves) or are positioned as leaders in the conventions of the political discourse (or how they choose a particular discourse type over the other). Furthermore, the speeches reveal how this gender-based positioning of leaders can be seen as an effect of power in manifesting their gender.

Rationale of the Study

Both males and females are gifted with intellect without discrimination of gender. There are a number of signifiers that point to gender identity. The research under question focuses on one signifier, that is, language use of men and women and how it forms as well as affects the gender identity as chief executives of the state. Investigating whether and how the presence of women in leadership positions affects discourse patterns in the workplace is appropriate given that the current research's main focus is on the relationship between language, gender, and identity of males and females.

Purpose Statement

The study focuses on the investigation of the portrayal of identities of politicians in position of authority through their discourse from a gender perspective. This research intends to comprehend how societal norms and stereotypes influence the formation of political discourse.

Thus the present study includes a gender perspective in the light of cognitive linguistic-critical discourse studies (CL-CDS) of the political

speeches of the selected chief executives from across the globe to explore how male and female heads of state communicate and manifest their identity as leaders and as males or females.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to find ways in which male and female political leaders enact their identity (gender) through the use of language in discourse. The study intends to analyze the construal operations to discuss the role of gender as a determining factor in the use of structural configuration, identification, positioning and framing strategies in the political speeches by the selected male and female chief executives.

- This research looks into the speeches of selected chief executives on the basis of construal operations in the backdrop of COVID-19.

- The research intends to compare how male and female leaders employ language in terms of realization of construal operations.

- The purpose of this study is to highlight the role of gender as a determining factor in the realization of construal operations.

Research Questions

The above stated objectives lead to pertinent areas to be studied that form the following research questions:

- In what ways the speeches of selected statespersons show the realization of construal operations of discourse to manifest the identity as leaders of state in the backdrop of COVID-19?

- How are positioning, framing, identification and structural configuration strategies employed by the political leaders in discourse?

- How do male and female leaders of state employ language comparing with one another in terms of realization of construal operations (identification, positioning, framing and structural configuration)?

- To what extent is gender a determining factor in the use of construal operations?

Significance of the Study

This study is a useful contribution in the existing body of knowledge due to its relevance to the contemporary world. The breakout of COVID-19

has opened new arenas of research across the globe as the issue was not limited to one region so the broad spectrum of the study crosses the spatial boundaries. In addition, the issue of gender has always been pertinent in different parts of the world.

Secondly, the research in the domain of political discourse is significant as political speeches are highly powerful in addressing the whole nation. These speeches not only inform the masses but they also have the ability to change their beliefs and ideologies in an imperceptible manner. Norman Fairclough states, "people internalize what is socially produced and made available to them" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 24).

Thirdly, the current study is important as the recent development in the field of CDA, CL-CDA is apt to work with "monologic texts", for instance, policy documents, websites, newspaper reports and political speeches (Hart, 2020a, p. 103). In addition, the focus of the present research is the comparison of linguistic practices of male and female politicians of authority. Hart posits "comparative analysis is conducted over real-life instances of discourse" (Hart, 2020a, p.103). Moreover, the reader will also be assisted in examining how language that deviates from known and customary patterns can build new ways of reality.

Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited as it presents its findings and conclusion based on data collected from selected six political speeches and it focuses on linguistic features of the speeches; other features of communication such as body language and non-verbal communication are not part of this research.

Literature Review

This section provides a detailed review of the relevant literature sketching the dominant notions as well as previous research which provide the theoretical underpinning for this study. The review of research studies centering on the methodological framework of the present research is also stated.

Gender and Discourse

Hall et al. (2021) quote Lakoff (1973) who attributed discrepancies between men and women's speech, predominantly in English language, to a patriarchal system that places women in an inferior status in relation to men in his paper "Language and Woman's Place" (p. 2). Women are thus placed

in a difficult linguistic situation: if they utilize women's language traits, they are steadily deprived of access to power (Lakoff 1973), but if they don't, they risk losing power.

Holmes (2005) cites that there are two types of discourse strategies; 'masculine' discourse strategies of men and "polite discourse strategies" of women. These "gendered discourse patterns" (p. 49) stereotypically accentuate the power and leading role of the men on one hand and underscore the supportive role of the women in official interactional practices on the other. These deep-rooted ways of communication function in the backdrop of every workplace interaction.

The past century brought a gradual transformation in managerial and administrative sectors, with women reaching high positions (French, 2001). This change brought the researchers' attention towards the issue and they started exploring how men and women use language in these workplace settings to carry out their professional responsibilities and to manifest their identities. In a study, Zoon (2019) portrays gender dynamics to explain how males and females in leadership positions in academia use language as a resource to construct gender identities.

Eruption of the Pandemic as a Spring of Research in Various Avenues

The breakout of COVID-19 has hit the world hard upsetting the whole human race (Anwar et al., 2020). It has substantially affected every sector in all walks of life. Hence, the emergence of the pandemic created room for research in the fields of medicine, sociology, psychology, languages, and education and researchers paid attention to the concerns leading to a sizable body of research on this worldwide issue. In the same vein, numerous studies have examined the rhetorical techniques and communication styles of male and female leaders.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough incepted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the late 1980s. The notion provides foundation for theoretical framework of this study. Later, the notion acquired admiration and many discourse analysts such as Wodak (2001), van Dijk (2009) and Lazar (2007) added further in the movement. Since then, it has become a leading and noticeable branch in discourse studies (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Recently, Christopher Hart has added further in the field by giving Critical Discourse Analysis a cognitive turn (2020a).

Review of Related Research Studies

The following section provides the review of the related researches in the realm of politics, gender, language and political leadership in the milieu of COVID-19.

Thematic Side

In a study, Johnson and Williams (2020) posit that the conception of a leader has been transformed from having typical male attributes of bravery and aggression into incorporation of empathy and politeness in the descriptive type of research. The article also sheds light on the fact that media gave more coverage and appreciation to female leaders than their male equals. In another study, Aldrich and Lotito (2020) also claim that media networks have reported that female political leaders globally are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic better than their male equivalents.

In another research Piazza and Diaz (2020) emphasize that gender equality is not only fair on moral and ethical grounds but it is also a pre-requisite for betterment on social economic and political levels. Another study highlights the differences based on language as well as content between male and female leaders in discussing the pandemic. The researchers found that women leaders used language in a way to appeal sentiments (Dada et al., 2021). Another study focused on the speeches of US state governors during the pandemic and analyzed the linguistic properties of their speeches while examining their relationships to COVID-19 case rates (Mandl & Reis, 2022). A strand of research endeavors to delve into the implicit ideology that underlies the employment of metaphor in the political discourse of the United States and the United Kingdom using critical metaphor analysis (Gulzar et al., 2021). Another article examines the practices of code-switching and the growing use of African languages by African parliamentarian ministers in official COVID-19 speeches (Rudwick et al., 2021).

The political rhetoric used by national leaders during the COVID-19 outbreak is mapped out in another research and a notable difference has been found between nations that have used populist versus cosmopolitan rhetoric (Montiel et al., 2021). Furthermore, Parmanand (2022) using CDA, compares Filipinos President Rodrigo Duterte and former president of the US, Donald Trump's public speeches, social media posts and press conferences in reaction to the pandemic with a feminist's perspective

(Parmanand, 2022). Another line of research analyzes US President Trump's speeches and discovers that he has used a great deal of dysphemistic expressions with derogatory connotations for a variety of purposes, including justifying political decisions regarding U.S. protective measures to lessen the threat (Olimat, 2020). Yet another research in the domain, highlights such gender differences and concludes that leaders combined discourse strategies typically associated with the other gender. So leaders employed "both masculine and feminine rhetoric" (Yarchi & Shitrit, 2023, p.14).

Methodological Side

This section provides a review of the research carried out using Christopher Hart's model, CL-CDA which has been applied by Hart himself and one more researcher, Julios-Costa.

The first research in the said field was conducted in 2013 when Hart's model of CL-CDS was in its initial stage. The first construal operation is employed to analyze news reports of two newspapers about the violence in two events of political protests (Hart, 2013). In another research, Hart (2017) analyzed the news about 1984–1985 British Miners' Strike, which was an industrial action but was treated as a war connecting it to historical knowledge of World War II, between the government and National Union of Miners. Hart accentuated the effect of framing, particularly metaphor, which construed strike as a war. In a study, Julios-Costa (2017) focuses on linguistic construction of minors in Uruguayan newspapers using construal operation of framing, through which teenagers are discursively placed within the frame of crime. The next study strand, taking British media discourse as corpus, reports experiments analyzing the framing effects of fire metaphors in the discourses of disorder.

Research Gap

Traditional research supports assumptions about gender roles, which include women communicating more emotionally and gently while men acting more gregariously, preferring to make logical arguments. In recent times, a lot of research has looked at the communication styles and rhetorical devices used by both males and females, especially male and female leaders, with startling new findings.

It can be perceived that some of the earlier research studies focused on the discourse patterns of political leaders without taking gender into

consideration. Some other studies paid attention to public opinion polls, social media surveys or the media representation of the political leaders. There might be an emphasis on the language used by political leaders, yet those particular research works dealt with this notion with a different perspective and with a different methodology. In addition, these studies are limited in number. Thus, the goal of the present study is to ascertain if during a crisis the leaders communicate conforming to gender stereotypes or whether the language conventions associated with particular leadership roles show altogether new emphases.

On the methodological side, CL-CDA framework has not been applied comprehensively to any text yet. The present research applies all four of its construal operations to political discourse.

Research Methodology

Study Sample

Like many other CDA projects that tend to select data from elite social actors, agencies and institutions like politicians and media because of their influence over the society (Sealey, 2020). This research has also selected the discourse of influential elites. The present research focuses on scrutinizing the linguistic features of six political speeches by three male and three female statespersons who have addressed their people to inform about the existing situation of coronavirus. The selected speeches are delivered by heads of New Zealand, Finland, Germany, China, the United States of America and the United Kingdom during the first wave of the pandemic.

The data collection is based on random sampling technique, however, it was also considered to take sample from different parts of the world to make the results generalizable.

Research Approach

The current study is qualitative in nature where the role of the researcher is considered to be of radical nature in which one identifies discriminations and injustices in society and endeavors to contest "the status quo" (Mertens, 2007, p. 212).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the proposed study is Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which perceives the use of "language as a form of social practice" (Fairclough, 2015, p.20). CDA subsumes a range of dimensions of the intricate relationship of language, power and society. Critical Discourse Studies explore the complex inseparable relationship of language with the society, where language use (discourse) is "socially determined" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 21). Hence, discourse is shaped and established by societal norms and conventions (Fairclough, 2015). Fairclough further asserts that there are various dimensions of the relationship of language and power (Fairclough, 2015). He further claims that power resides in discourse. Therefore the aim of CDA is to highlight the role of discourse in society and to underscore how power is enacted through discourse.

Fairclough highlights various facets of the intricate correlation of power and language. Two main sides of the language and power link have been emphasized here, power in discourse, and power behind discourse. In power in discourse, the exercise of power is usually manifested in the face-to-face interactional practices. Whereas power behind discourse, also called hidden power, unlike face-to-face discourse, lies in written text and media discourse, where the speaker and the receiver are not in direct contact. They are "separated in space and time" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 49) in the contemporary society. Thus, in power behind discourse, the discourse producers have power inherent with them to encode the messages and ideologies, and receivers are merely passive. The interlocutors are in a dominant position as subjects and viewers have to build their relationship with this 'ideal subject' (Fairclough, 2015, p. 58).

The present research focuses on the aspect of power behind discourse of male and female heads of states. The administration of a country has the authority of taking decisions in times of a calamity and it also "exercises power by consent" (Fairclough, 2015, pp. 33–36). Politicians are, thus, powerful interlocutors controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants (subjects/masses) in discourse. Simultaneously, the power effect whereby the chosen discourse practices (by male and female leaders) come to be imposed upon them by society, politics, political institutions or the system itself as well as the power holders in the institutions. Fairclough illustrates the dialectical relation of power and

discourse as discourse is embodied in power and power is embodied in discourse (Fairclough, 2015). "Power relations are always relations of struggle" and this social struggle takes place between different groupings encompassing male-female dichotomy in societal institutions (Fairclough, 2015, p. 34). Thus, the position of the discourse producer may be 'problematized' in myriad aspects including the "social identity of the producers" (Fariclough, 2015, p. 171). In addition, these power relations are highly complex. There is "no simple transparent connection" between them (Fairclough, 2015, p. 34). They are responsible for the "conservative or transformatory nature of reproduction in discourse" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 40). The current study hence focuses on these power relations and how they come along with the gender of the leaders, making the leaders position themselves with the specific discourse practices.

CDA predominantly emphasizes on the link of power relations and its role in producing and sustaining social wrongs and inequalities (Fairclough, 2015). In this regard, Hart (2018) states, Critical Discourse Analysis examines the "role of discourse structures in constituting social inequality" (p. 91). While concerning power and gender norms, this research is an examination of the discursive construction and negotiation of gender identities through spoken discourse of the leaders in the political arena. Thus, "CDA approach can make a useful contribution to the analysis of the construction of power relations at work" (Holmes, 2005, p. 57).

Methodological Framework

The methodological framework of the research under question is Cognitive Linguistic-Critical Discourse Analysis. The latest development in the field of CDA is about the relationship between Cognitive Linguistics and CDA proposed by Christopher Hart (2020a). Cognitive Linguistic-Critical Discourse Studies (henceforth CL-CDS) stresses on the notion of cognition as a necessary negotiator in the relationship between texts and social action (Hart, 2020a, p.186).

Cognitive Linguistics is an approach to language study based on the assumptions that our linguistic abilities are firmly rooted in our cognitive abilities and meaning is basically conceptualization. It views the dynamic process of meaning construction also called "semiosis" as a conceptual process in which language works with background knowledge to convey "meaning in discourse" (Hart, 2020a, p. 188).

Construal Operations

CL-CDA puts emphasis on many conceptual parameters which he named "construal operations" (Hart, 2020a, p. 188). Hart states that the process of conceptualization is realized through a set of construal operations (2016, p. 338). "Construal is a technical term, within cognitive linguistics, for the facility whereby the same situation can be linguistically encoded in multiple ways". Construal operations, (the tool-kit) depend on cognitive system as well as on discursive strategies. In this framework, Hart (2020b, p.10) categorizes construal operations as manifestation of four general cognitive systems: Gestalt, Comparison, Attention, and Perspective which are presented horizontally in the figure given below. The ideological workings of these construal operations can be scrutinized in terms of their realization of four 'discursive strategies' including structural configuration, framing, identification, and positioning tabulated vertically in the figure (2020b, p. 10).

Figure 1

Construal Operations

System / Strategy	Construal Operations	Gestalt	Comparison	Attention	Perspective
Structural Configuration		Schematization			
Framing			Categorization Metaphor		
Identification				Profiling Scanning	
Positioning					Point of view Deixis

Structural Configuration Strategies (Gestalt). Structural configuration is the elementary-level strategy which establishes the most basic understanding of the content. It is realized through schematization, by means of which an image schema is chosen as an exemplary to depict the target scene holistically.

Cognitive linguistics asserts that most of the meanings encoded by language are represented in the mind in the form of image schemas (Hart, 2019, p. 181). They provide the meaningful basis to linguistic units through semantic elements in discourse (Hart, 2020b, p. 99). There are four basic domains of image schema: 'ACTION', 'FORCE' 'SPACE' and 'MOTION' (Hart, 2020a, p.189). To explain MOTION schema, Hart uses the examples from media discourse, from two newspapers, *The Mirror* and *Daily Telegraph* wherein the situation is migration. These newspapers encode it as 'coming into' and 'getting into' the country. The former choice of lexicon encodes a free unimpeded motion whereas the later encodes the target scene as a force-dynamic construal (Hart, 2020a, p. 190).
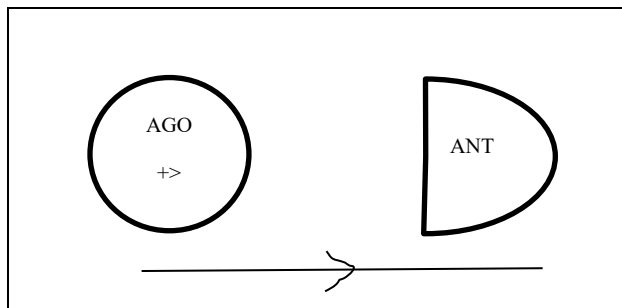
Figure 2
Free Motion Schema
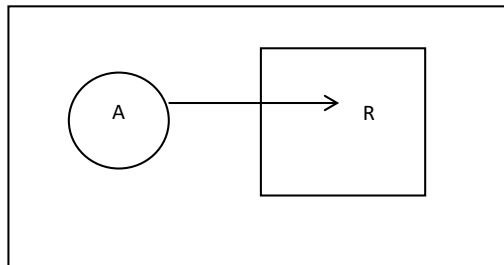

Figure 3
Force-Dynamic Schema

Additionally included is the FIGURE schema, which schematizes numerous items as "a single mass" (Hart, 2020b, p. 110). In order to clarify this concept, Hart cites Talmy who makes distinction between uniplex and multiplex structures. The plural forms of countable nouns encode multiplex structure construing "individual entities as individuals". On the contrary,

collective nouns evoke uniplex structures, construing a group of individuals as a mass component which acts as a single entity (Hart, 2020b).

Figure 4
Multiplex versus Uniplex
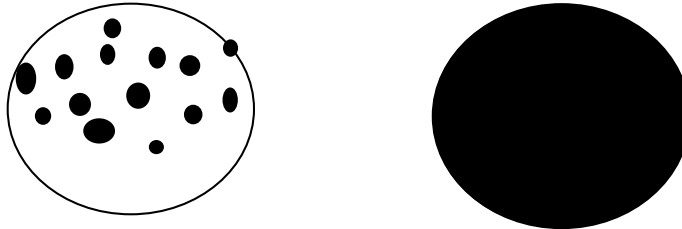
Framing (Comparison). Frames are stereotyped conceptual structures representing sociocultural knowledge and experience. Framing strategies rely on a basic cognitive ability to compare real world phenomena with idealized models. Framing strategies are realized through metaphor. Metaphors construe the target situation in particular ways profiling and promoting certain desired aspect while back grounding other facets of the situation. For instance, a metaphor frequently used in immigration discourse is the COUNTRY AS CONTAINER metaphor wherein "the country is construed as a container and the population as its contents". It entails two kinds of entities: the container is the "landmark" (LM) and its contents are the "trajector" (TR)" (Hart, 2011, p. 179).
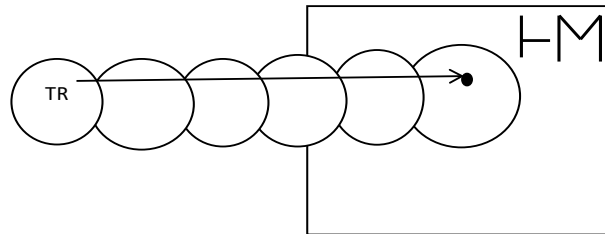
Figure 5
Container and Content Metaphor
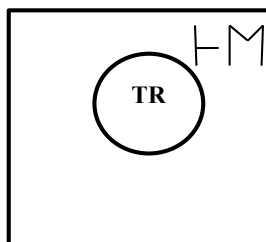
This CONTAINER/CONTENT schema implies two concepts that the contents belong to the container and secondly the container has a restricted capacity. The first notion deduced is the imposition of 'us' versus 'them' polarization and the second inference is the justification of "restrictive immigration policies" (Hart, 2011, p. 179).
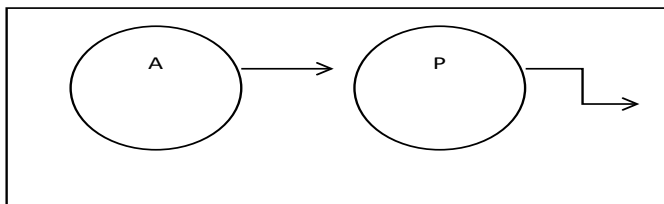
Figure 6
Immigration


The figure shows the lexical item 'enter'.

Identification (Attention). Identification strategies concern the presence and relative salience with which actors, actions or events are represented in the text. They are realized through profiling and scanning. They focus on the ideological potential of different kinds of grammatical constructions, including active and passive construction foregrounding or back grounding the subject/the responsible/agency.

While perceiving any scene, it is the basic characteristic of cognition to have one entity stand out relative to another. Words and grammatical constructions make certain aspects of a given conceptual structure prominent. To exemplify; passive voice profiles PATIENTS only, leaving AGENTs in the background sometimes even negating them altogether. There are two types of profiling: full profile and partial profile (Hart, 2015).

Figure 7
Full profile
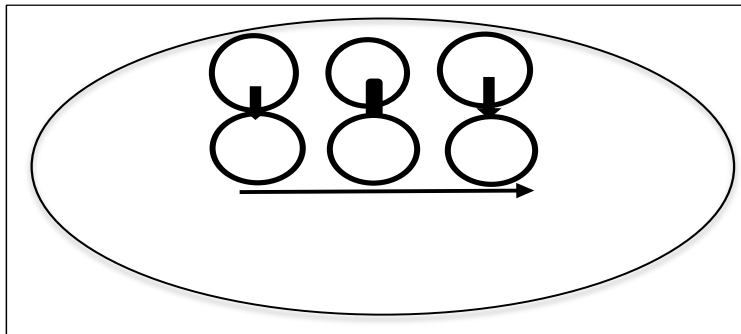

Figure 8
Partial Profile
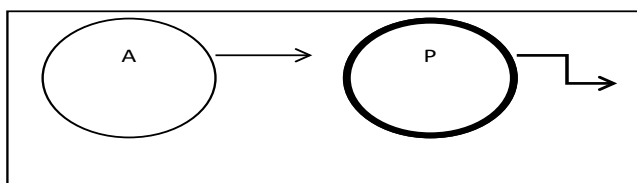
In the full profile figure, all entities involved in the described event are brought to equal light. On the other hand, in partial profile one participant's presence is augmented with passive sentence structure, while the other partaker is inevitably overlooked.

Proceeding toward scanning, when there is a series of events we conceptualize them by mentally scanning the series of relations. There are two modes of scanning: sequential scanning and summary scanning. In sequential scanning, we perceive a situation as a series of interactions or processes serially. Contrarily, in summary scanning, we examine an event as an object to cohere as a single gestalt (Hart, 2015).

Figure 9

Sequential Scanning

Figure 10

Summary Scanning
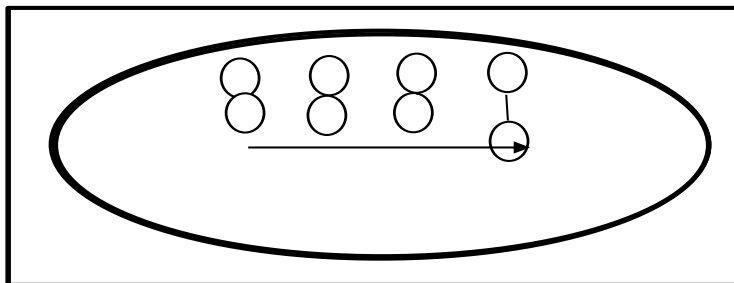
Positioning (Perspective). Positioning strategies exploit our ability to assume a different perspective on any given scene. They are about "the position of the conceptualizer with respect to the conceptual content" (Hart,

2020a, p. 198). Thus, positioning strategies focus on the communicative context of discourse. These strategies depend on a general cognitive capacity for perspective taking and are realized in construal operations of point of view and deixis.

Hart goes on to describe a language mechanism that works by notifying the addressee of the presence or approaching occurrence of phenomena that may pose a 'threat' to the addressee and thus necessitate prompt action (2015). It is operationalized on three levels: space, time and axiology (Hart, 2020a, pp. 200-201) called spatial proximization, spatial proximization and temporal proximization respectively.

The construction of discourse worlds involves the 'plotting' of discourse elements within the three dimensional space relative to one and other where decoders are invited to conceptualize and build up the picture of reality.

Figure 11

Discourse Space Model
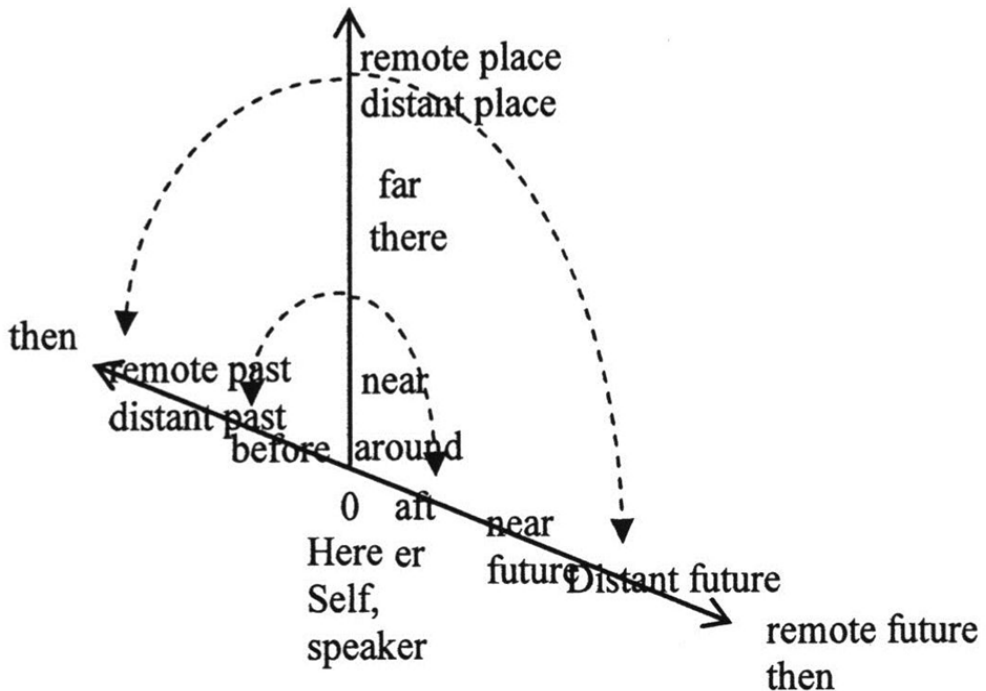
Data Analysis

The first part tabulates analysis of the selected political speeches one by one. The next part- (discussion) - strains the construal operations found in the analysis of the above mentioned political discourse and examines them keeping in view the gender of the leader. Furthermore, the discussion examines the intricate relationship of political discourse with power structures and gender manifestation as revealed in the discourse under scrutiny.

Analysis of the Selected Speeches

Table 1

Construal Operations Identified in Male and Female Leaders' Speeches

Construal Operations/ Leaders	Structural Configuration	Framing	Identification	Positioning
Male Leaders	13 instances	7 instances	7 instances	13 instances
Donald Trump	Figure schema Force dynamic construal MOTION schema	– –	Sequential scanning Sequential scanning	Epistemic positioning Spatial positioning Spatial positioning Epistemic positioning
Xi Jinping	MOTION schema WAR schema Uniplex structure WAR schema MOTION schema Uniplex structure Uniplex structure Uniplex structure	– –	Summary scanning Sequential scanning Sequential scanning Summary scanning	Epistemic positioning Epistemic positioning
Boris Johnson	FORCE schema CONTAINER/ CONTENT schema	metaphor metaphor metaphor metaphor metaphor metaphor metaphor	Profiling	Epistemic positioning Spatial positioning Epistemic positioning

| Construal Operations/ Leaders	Structural Configuration	Framing	Identification	Positioning
Female Leaders	8 instances	1 instance	5 instances	Spatial positioning Temporal positioning 12 instances
Jacinda Ardern	WAR schema MOTION schema ASSYMMETRICAL ACTION schema	- -	Summary scanning	Epistemic positioning Epistemic positioning Spatial positioning Spatial positioning Temporal positioning Temporal positioning Spatial positioning
Angela Merkel	MOTION schema FIGURE schema WAR schema Uniplex structure WAR schema	Metaphor	Summary scanning Sequential scanning Summary scanning	Epistemic positioning Temporal positioning
Sanna Marin	- -	- -	Sequential scanning	Spatial positioning Epistemic positioning Spatial positioning

Some instances of the realization of construal operations are as follow:

As far as schematization is concerned, WAR, FIRE, WATER, MOTION, CONTENT/ CONTAINER and ACTION schema are identified in the speeches of all six statespersons. For example, in a speech, US president Trump informed his countrymen that the government had

declared a health emergency. Furthermore, he highlighted the precautionary measures suggested by the team and instituted by the government encompassing "travel restriction on China" as well as on other countries and quarantine. This step illustrates force dynamic construal**.** Here, the use of structural configuration strategy with the help of MOTION schema to construe the physical process of controlling the virus is identified. This schema consists of a Trajector (TR) (COVID) moving along a path of motion into a Landmark (LM) (USA). His words 'suspending all travel' encode a force-dynamic construal where COVID 19 is cast in the role of an AGONIST (AGO), termed a "Trajector as an entity whose circumstance or location is at issue" (Hart, 2016, p. 9). This force dynamic relation has been demonstrated in the figure given below.

Figure 12
Force-Dynamic Schema
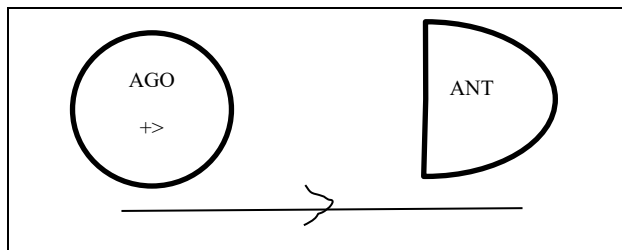
Force dynamic construal is also identified in the speeches of some male as well as female chief executives. It is found where these heads of state inform their citizens about closure of borders. A uniplex structure which falls under FIGURE schema ignores the individual identities of the people and conceptualizes them as a single entity. The decoder finds the words and phrases which invoke multiplex structure in the speeches of male statespersons when they segregate their nation from other countries. Contrarily, in the discourse of female leaders it is found to emphasize the importance of every individual in the society. Moreover, lexical items evoking uniplex structure presenting humanity as a single entity are found in the speeches of the selected female leaders. Trump emphatically concludes his address that we must "put politics aside, stop the partisanship and unify together as one nation and one family". His words "one nation and one family" employ a structural configuration strategy by the use of FIGURE schema**.** These collective nouns such as 'nation' and 'family' activate uniplex structures, construing all individual Americans as one

'nation' and one 'family' overlooking their race, culture, language, and eccentricities. Moving on, in Ardern's words "COVID is now exploding", WAR schema has been used. The virus has been treated as a bomb which is 'exploding'. Then, in "the fight against COVID", the virus has been presented as an enemy who is in warfare with New Zealand. Furthermore, Ms. Merkel in her speech says that doctors are at the "forefront" of the fight against the deadly virus. The word, 'forefront' also construes the WAR schema.

As far as the second construal operation, framing is concerned, it is identified in the speeches of the selected male heads of states, invoking the brutality and viciousness of the pandemic. To exemplify, PM Johnson calls the virus an "invisible killer" which has swept away thousands of lives across the globe. The term, "invisible killer" in his discourse provides template for addressees to construe the havoc wreaked by the pandemic. The phrase activates domain of a supernatural world as depicted in fairytales and horror movies where an unseen slayer is causing massacre to the populace.

The next construal operation which is realized through the discursive strategy of identification is found in the discourses of all political leaders. All six of them have used words and phrases which lead to interpret the use of summery as well as sequential scanning. For instance, Trump says that the US administration is corresponding with the countries which are badly affected by the pandemic. After learning from their experience the US government has devised certain strategies to deal with the pandemic successfully. The strategy encompasses "school closure, social distancing, and reducing large gatherings". Identification strategy through the use of sequential scanning is realized at this part of the speech.
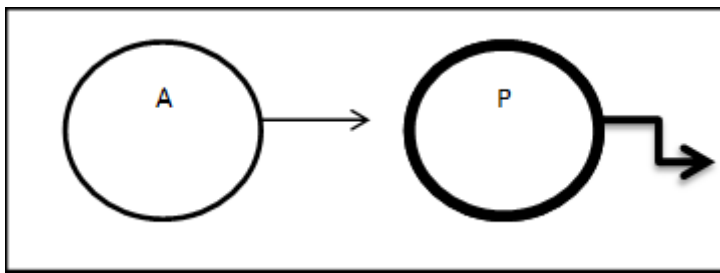
Figure 13
Sequential Scanning
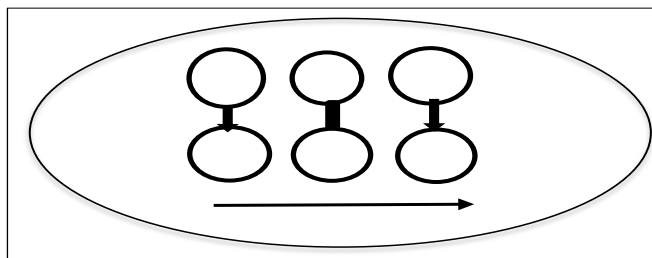
As stated earlier, in sequential scanning, we perceive a changing state of affairs as a chain of interactions, events or steps in sequence (Hart, 2015, p. 334). However, profiling is found only in the address of Mr. Johnson, PM of the UK where he accentuates calling off all social gatherings. The use of imperative sentences emphasizes the seriousness of the instructions and suggests that there is no option of disobeying at all. He foregrounds the instructions using imperatives and puts the populace, the AGENT in the background.

Figure 14

Partial Profile

In the figure, in partial profile the presence of one participant (instructions) is enlarged with the use of imperative sentence structure, the other partaker is the PM's addressee, the British nation which is inevitably overlooked. Thus their reaction over these instructions is completely ignored.

Concerning the last construal operation, positioning, it is identified in the speeches of all male and female political leaders holding authority. All of these chief executives have presented the virus as a threat to their spatial as well as temporal boundaries. For that their lexical choices lead the decoder to identify the epistemic, spatial and temporal proximization. The location of elements along S and M axis in the discourse space realizes positioning strategies. Spatial as well as temporal proximization can be seen where the 'threat', the virus is construed as closer to entering the conceptualizer's spatio-temporal ground. It is explained in the figure below where 'T' represents time line wherein 'Tp' and 'Tf' refer to past and future respectively.

Figure 15

Discourse Space Model
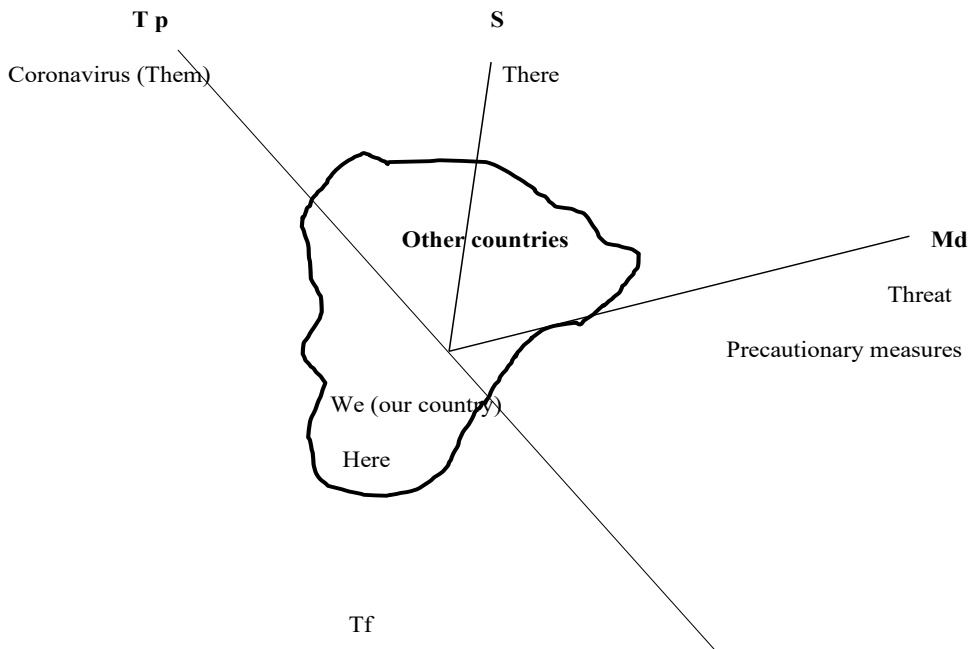
Discussion

The analysis shows that construal operations are realized through the use of all four discursive strategies. However, the use of structural configuration and positioning strategies are more frequently identified in the analysis of the selected data. How these discursive strategies are realized in the analysis of the selected speeches are discussed below.

Structural Configuration

The identification of structural configuration in the chosen speeches reveals that the use of WAR schema, FORCE schema, ACTION schema, CONTAINER/CONTENT schema, FIGURE schema, force dynamic construal and asymmetrical action chain are reflective of the extent to which various heads of state tend to show the psychological impact of the pandemic. However, the frequency of recurrence of these schemas reveals their aversion to and fear of the lethal sickness. The analysis reveals that WAR schema and force dynamic construal recur more often in the discourse

of male statesperson in comparison to their female counterparts. Thus it demonstrates that men manifest their identity as blunt and forceful. Moreover, the analysis also discloses that female political leaders' choice of words lead to find out uniplex structure more where they are concerned about the whole humankind irrespective of the different races, ethnicities and religions. Hence, women manifest their gender as gentle and kind through their discourses.

Framing

The identification of discursive strategy of framing in the speeches shows that the vocabulary items which help the decoder interpret the use of metaphors focusing on the destructive forces of fire and water have been employed by males. When it comes to female leaders, one may come across words and phrases that compare the pandemic to a battle, but their verbal arsenal is less ferocious. Therefore it can be said that women use assertive language keeping in view the requirement of the situation. Despite this, they do manifest their kind selves through their language either by using less assertive words than their male counterparts or by using gentle words addressing the psychological and emotional needs of their people. Thus, it can be said that men carry out their leadership roles and adhere to the established rules of society which allow them to show their dominance through their discourse. The analyst is led to believe that men, regardless of where they are from in the world, conform to gender stereotypes in their discourse.

Identification

As far as scanning-a discursive strategy of identification-is concerned, it is found in all male and female politicians' speeches where they have instructed their citizens about the precautionary measures. So they all have presented COVID-19 as an enemy of humankind. It leads to believe that these leaders of states regardless of gender manifest their identity according to the discourse conventions imposed upon them by the institution which they are a part of. Therefore, it is the power associated with their position, not their gender which determines how they speak and shape their discourse.

Positioning

The scrutiny of the selected speeches leads to construe that epistemic and spatio-temporal positioning is found in the speeches of all, selected

male and female chief executives to show their concerns for the preservation of the lives of their countrymen from the impending health hazard. In addition, epistemic positioning is implied in the addresses of all statespersons irrespective of their gender as they share the same authority. It leads to think that all statespersons irrespective of their gender are concerned about the safety and well-being of their citizens. It also suggests that power and position rather than gender determine our discourse patterns and in the long run discourse conventions.

The present study aimed to determine if a crisis compels political leaders to embrace gender stereotypes. The study further aimed to explore if the crisis emphasizes the significance of the discourse conventions associated with that specific leadership role, irrespective of gender. Traditional research revealed disparities between the sexes that conform to gender role stereotypes, which state that women communicate more emotionally, speak more subtly in public, and use more empathy than men whereas men are said to be more assertive and argumentative (Bishop & Wahlsten, 1997). On the other hand, recently, numerous studies have examined the rhetorical techniques and communication styles of both male and female leaders and reached the conclusion that men used more assertive language and women used sentimental language (Dada et al., 2021). Moving on to political discourse, a study examines two statesmen's speeches, focusing on metaphor usage without taking gender into consideration (Mandl & Reis, 2022). Another research delves into the linguistic choices of the ministers of a country (Rudwick et al., 2021). Yet another body of research highlights the media representation of the political leaders' communication with their nations (Johnson &Williams, 2020). One more study focuses on the conception of ideal leader which has been transformed by the outstanding performance of female leaders during the calamity. According to the more recent research, politicians and other leaders speak in both masculine and feminine ways while integrating emotional and logical arguments (Yarchi & Shitrit, 2023).

Thus most of the above-mentioned studies conclude that male and female leaders conform to gender stereotype, however, one study concludes that leaders employ both masculine and feminine discourse strategies together. However, the data analysis of the present research leads to different findings that show how the selected male leaders do not change their conventional discourse pattern. It is the females who keep on changing

linguistic techniques to communicate effectively keeping in view the situation and their professional position.

Conclusion

The present research is concerned with the issue of power that underlies public proclamations of male and female rulers of states, analyzing how these issues relate to the gender of leaders. Furthermore, the study examines how political leaders position themselves in relation to specific discourse practices.

The findings and discussion in the light of research questions lead to conclude the following:

Referring to the first research question, it is found that both selected males and females portrayed the calamity as a highly serious emergency and used lexical items highlighting the seriousness of the situation. The employment of all four construal operations is evident in all the speeches. On one hand, it leads to construe that females manifest their identity as the leaders of their country disregarding the gender divide. It suggests that the position of an individual affects one's linguistic choices. So discourse patterns are affected by the professional position of a discourse producer. It is the power hidden in their discourses which shapes their discourse practices and social identities are seen as determined by particular power relations in the institutions.

As far as the second research question is concerned that centers on how male and female statespersons employ language comparing with one another in terms of realization of construal operations, the investigation leads to conclude that the selected females do conform to the discourse patterns set by the power structures and the power hidden behind their authority. Ho0wever, at the same time they deviate from the discourse conventions when it comes to empathy and affection.

Regarding the third research question that focuses on the extent to which gender is a determining factor in the use of construal operations, the more frequent recurrence of aggressive expressions in the selected three male statespersons' speeches shows that men are guardians of traditional language norms. Contrariwise, the frequent mention of emotional effects of the disaster in discourses created by the selected female leaders demonstrates that women are compassionate and sympathetic. It implies that gender is innate. Additionally, the data, the political discourse, taken

from different parts of the world leads to conclude that gender disparity is omnipresent, overt or covert it is always present in the eastern as well as in the western social structures.

In a nutshell, it can be stated that political leaders who hold authority do practice discourse conventions set by the societal structures regardless of the male–female dichotomy fulfilling the demand of their position, however, at the same time they also manifest their gender via their discourses when it comes to humanitarian approach. Concerning the selected male political leaders, it is concluded that they adhere to conventional male discourse patterns while the selected female heads of state conform to as well as deviate from the traditional female discourse practices. Thus on one hand, female leaders prove themselves better than their male counterparts by adhering to discourse conventions appropriate to their position, on the other, they manifest their identity as better human beings by expressing their humanitarian and inclusive approach.

To summarize, discourse and societal structures have a two-way relationship. Both affect each other and their relationship is "dialectical" in nature (Fairclough, 2015, p. 37). Gender plays an important role in this relationship as power holders in these societal structures manifest their gender in terms of their contribution to struggle to sustain or transform these power relations and discourse structures.

The study may help the reader understand that language is a dynamic resource that allows people numerous opportunities to develop and form their distinctive identities. Secondly, since the CL-CDA, the methodological framework of the study is a recent development in the field of CDA, therefore this research has made a significant contribution by the application of all four construal operations on a discourse.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

The future research can be conducted using the discourses of men and women from other professional settings and from other countries. For the present research, the breakout of COVID-19 pandemic provided the same context for the discourse from different regions of the world. The same backdrop for future research may be provided by any other current issue as Israeli-Palestinian conflict or any other international problem. In addition, future researchers can collect additional data to enable generalization of the

findings. Furthermore, it is recommended that future scholars analyze the data using this methodology.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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