



المجلة العلمية لجامعة الملك فيصل The Scientific Journal of King Faisal University

العلوم الإنسانية والإدارية
Humanities and Management Sciences



Investigating Thematic Choices in Trump's Tweets on the US-Mexico Wall: Political Discourse on Social Media

Hesham Suleiman Alyousef¹, Najd Emad Q. Alotaibi²

¹ Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Arts, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

² Department of English Language & Literature, College of Arts & Sciences, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Wadi Adwaser, Saudi Arabia

دراسة أنواع المبتدأ في تغريدات دونالد ترامب حول الجدار الحدودي مع المكسيك: الخطاب السياسي في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي

هشام سليمان اليوسف¹ ونجد عماد العتيبي²

¹ قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وأدائها، كلية الآداب، جامعة الملك سعود، الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

² قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وأدائها، كلية الآداب والعلوم، جامعة الأمير سطام بن عبدالعزيز، وادي الدواسر، المملكة العربية السعودية

KEYWORDS

الكلمات المفتاحية

Systemic functional linguistics, Donald Trump's discourse, social media discourse
علم اللغة الوظيفي الانتظامي، خطاب دونالد ترامب، خطاب وسائل التواصل الإعلامي

RECEIVED

الاستقبال

05/04/2020

ACCEPTED

القبول

28/08/2020

PUBLISHED

النشر

01/09/2020



<https://doi.org/10.37575/h/art/2201>

ABSTRACT

Trump declared his intention to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border during his presidential campaign in 2016. On 4 January 2019, President Trump sent a letter to members of the U.S. Congress on the need to build a long wall to secure the U.S. border. This led local news reporters to discuss this political issue and its effects on the American and Mexican populations. Since Trump's decision of building the wall is one of the global issues that have been widely discussed in social media and American media news agencies, it is pertinent to analyze thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.-Mexico border wall issue. The present study aims to investigate Trump's thematic choices, employing Halliday's systemic functional linguistics' approach. UAM Corpus Tool software was employed in the annotation of Theme types. The results of the study showed that topical Theme was the most frequent Theme type in Trump's tweets, followed by the textual Theme. Interpersonal Theme was rarely employed. Trump tends to use a simple, direct, and spontaneous language to make the communication style with his audience more natural and less complex. The study contributes to our understanding of Theme types in political discourse on social media.

المخلص

صرح ترامب أثناء حملته الانتخابية في 2016 عن عزمه بناء جدار على طول الحدود الأمريكية المكسيكية. وأرسل الرئيس ترامب رسالة في الرابع من شهر يناير 2019 إلى أعضاء الكونغرس يشرح بها الحاجة لبناء الجدار من أجل حماية الحدود الأمريكية، مما دعي الصحف الأمريكية لمناقشة هذه القضية وتأثيرها على الشعب الأمريكي والمكسيكي. وتكمن أهمية تحليل أنواع المبتدأ في تغريدات ترامب حول الجدار الحدودي مع المكسيك في أن قرار ترامب أصبح أحد القضايا العالمية التي نوقشت في شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي والإعلام الأمريكي. تهدف هذه الدراسة لبحث أنواع المبتدأ في تغريدات ترامب باستخدام منهج هاليداي في علم اللغة الوظيفي الانتظامي. وتم استخدام برنامج يو ايه إم (UAM) في تحديد أنواع المبتدأ. وأظهرت النتائج أن أكثر أنواع المبتدأ استخداماً في تغريدات ترامب هو الموضوعي، ومن ثم يليه النصي، بينما ندر استخدام المبتدأ التفاعلي. وأظهرت النتائج أن ترامب يستخدم الخطاب البسيط والمباشر والتلقائي، مما يجعل أسلوب تواصله مع جمهوره طبيعياً وأقل تعقيداً. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في فهمنا لأنواع المبتدأ في الخطاب السياسي في وسائل التواصل الإعلامي.

1. Introduction

Donald Trump declared his intention to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico during his presidential campaign in 2016. On June 16, 2015, Trump stated that "I will build a great, great wall on our southern border" (Trump, 2015). In 2018, Trump tweeted in his official Twitter account about the wall, asserting its importance in protecting the U.S. border. On 4 January 2019, President Trump sent a letter to the Congress on the need to build a long wall to secure the U.S. border. Trump wanted the Congress to pay the costs for building a high concrete or steel wall. Before President Trump, there were varieties of barriers extending just a few miles and they were not built according to Trump's wall prototypes. The Congress refused to fund most of the costs because no border walls based on these prototypes have been built or funded by the Congress. As a result, Trump ordered a government shutdown in 2018-2019 which lasted for thirty-four days, the longest one in the history of the US (Zaveri, Gates, & Zraick, 2019).

The democratic leaders Pelosi and Schumer criticized Trump's decision of shutting down the government, arguing that it has affected over 800,000 federal workers and those working in airport security and law enforcement, as they had to continue their work without being getting paid (Pelosi, N., & Schumer, 2019). Nancy Pelosi is the first woman in U.S. history to serve as the Speaker of the US House of Representatives since 2019. Chuck Schumer, a member of the Democratic Party, serves as the senior US senator from New York. Besides, this issue and its effects on the American and Mexican population was also widely discussed in social media and media

news agencies (Abd'lillah, 2019). Trump and the Congress, however, are still debating about the ability to build the wall. The main purpose of Trump's tweets is to achieve his political goal of building the wall, as he always uses this platform to present updated news and information.

Since Trump's U.S.-Mexico border wall issue is one of the global issues that have been widely discussed in social media and media news agencies, it is pertinent to analyze thematic choices in Trump's political social media discourse. This text-based study may attempt to explain some of the causes underlying Trump's partial success in passing a resolution to build the U.S.-Mexico wall to protect the country from illegal immigrants. The study is also significant for those interested in political social media discourse, as it aimed to reveal the prominent thematic choices employed by Trump. Thus, the main aim of the present study is to investigate thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.-Mexico border wall issue.

2. Literature review

Language usually carries various meanings; writers or speakers use language to express different meanings. This led linguists to introduce the field of *discourse analysis*. Discourse analysis is "the study of the patterns of language across texts as well as the social and cultural context in which the texts occur" (Paltridge, 2006). It focuses on both written and spoken languages in different contexts such as educational, economic, social, and political contexts (Paltridge, 2006). Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach to language is one of the theories used in the analysis of

discourses.

The next section presents the theoretical background underlying SFL (2.1), followed by a review of the literature (2.2).

2.1. An Overview of SFL

SFL is a linguistic theory developed by Halliday (2014). It is a social semiotic approach to language that focuses on how people use language to make meaning. According to SFL, language use is functional, i.e. its function is to make meanings that are influenced by the social and cultural contexts. SFL aims to build a link between human language choices in a text and its function in a certain context to express meanings. According to Halliday, language has three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 2014).

The ideational meaning for constructing our experience of the world (experiential metafunction) is realized through the Transitivity system and the logical connections between events in the world (logical meaning). The interpersonal metafunction refers to a function of creating interpersonal relationships and expressing attitudes that are realized through the grammatical systems of Mood (declarative, interrogative, and imperative statements) and modality (judging the probability, obligation, usuality, or willingness of a Theme). The textual metafunction refers to the organization of meaning into a coherent message, which is realized through thematic choices and Theme patterns. These three types of meaning can be considered as powerful linguistic tools which help linguists to comprehend and analyze the linguistic choices in any text. As the study aims to investigate thematic choices in Trump's discourse, it is pertinent to provide an overview of the third metafunction.

The textual metafunction refers to the creation of the discourse in which the ideational and interpersonal meanings are presented as information that can be shared by both listener and speaker in a certain context. Thus, the textual function can be considered as the linguistic expression of two metafunctions, ideational and interpersonal. It deals with the organization of the clauses in a text. The structure which gives the clause its character as a message is known as a thematic structure and it consists of two elements, Theme and Rheme (Table 1).

Table 1. Example of Theme and Rheme

He	Succeeded in the Final Exam
Topical	
Theme	Rheme

The major element in a clause is the system of Theme. Theme is "the element that serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context" (Halliday, 2014, 38). Rheme, on the other hand, is "the part in which the Theme is developed" (ibid). In a clause, we depart from a place that has familiar or Given information to another place that has unfamiliar or New information to complete the message of the clause. Since New information is "typically marked by tonic prominence" (Alyousef, 2016, 489) in spoken discourse, it does not necessarily conflate with Rheme. The phonological indices of Given/New, therefore, are not examined in the present study of written texts. Theme works as a cohesive device that can help us understand the organization of ideas in discourse, how they can be interpreted, and how meanings of messages are constructed (Halliday, 2014).

There are three major systems of Theme: choice of marked and unmarked Theme, choice of predicated and unpredicated Theme, and choice of Theme type. According to thematic markedness, marked Theme means 'atypical, unusual', while the unmarked Theme (subject, a nominal group as Theme) simply means 'most typical/usual' (Halliday, 2014). Theme markedness explains the relationship between the Mood and Theme structure of the clause. The unmarked Theme conflates with the Mood structure constituents, such as Subject (in declarative clauses), Finite (in interrogative clauses), WH

element (in WH-interrogative clauses), and Predicator (in imperative clauses). A marked Theme conflates with other constituents such as Circumstantial Adjuncts and Complements. The system of Theme predication was not investigated in the present study because it is mostly associated with spoken language, whereby New information is marked by intonation.

Theme is divided into three types: an obligatory topical (or experiential) Theme, interpersonal Theme, and textual Theme (Table 2). The latter two are optional. Topical Theme typically consists of a Participant, Circumstance, or Process since it "has some function in the experiential structure of the clause" (Halliday, 2014, 66). A clause can include more than one topical Theme only if Themes are marked since they provide context for the point of departure of the message, as in "*Yesterday, behind the bed* [Theme], John found his book [Rheme]." The circumstantial element '*behind the bed*' is moved to the Thematic position to create a marked Theme. Interpersonal Theme is a constituent that precedes the topical Theme to construct the Mood structure of a clause.

Table 2. Theme types

		Examples
Topical Theme	Participant	Noun group
	Circumstance	Prepositional or adverbial group
	Process	Verbal group
Interpersonal Theme	Finite elements	Modal auxiliaries, 'be' auxiliaries
	Mood Adjuncts	Maybe, probably, never, only, not, Sadly,
	Comment Adjuncts	obviously, surprisingly
	Vocative Adjuncts	Marial Henry! Sir!
	Polarity Adjuncts	Yes/No
	WH-question words	Who, what, where, how, why
Textual Theme	Continuatives	Now, oh, well, no, yeah, umm, ...
	Conjunctions	and, but, or
	Conjunctive adjuncts	therefore, although, so, however
	WH-relatives	who, which, where, how, when

The third type of Theme is the textual Theme which occurs before the first topical Theme; it does not express any interpersonal or experiential meaning. The role of the textual Theme is to relate the clause to its context. It has an important role in increasing the cohesion of the text. Whereas continuity adjuncts construct semantic relations, conjunctive adjuncts construct logico-semantic relationships of expansion, thus contributing to cohesive texts. WH-relatives are both textual and topical Theme rolled into one.

2.2. Review of related studies

The choice of specific words and phrases in political discourse has a powerful effect on the audience (Quam and Ryshina-Pankova, 2016). Many studies in discourse analysis investigated presidential speeches of Bush (Ajmi, 2014), Obama (Alvi and Abdul-Baseer, 2011), and recently president Trump (Kreis, 2017; Chen, 2018; Murni, 2017; Rachman & Yuniarti, 2017; Wang and Liu, 2018; Wignell, O'Halloran & Tan, 2019).

Wignell, O'Halloran, and Tan (2019) investigated Trump's supremacy which enabled him to become the President of America. The researchers used a Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) framework in the analysis of Trump's speeches, in addition to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) approach for analysis of newspaper images. The results of the study showed that Trump was a dominant figure in all types of media which, in turn, led to his success. He gained dominance by increasing certainty and force in his tweets and by speaking the language of common people. Wignell, O'Halloran, and Tan (2019) concluded in their study that Trump's image and his political announcement on the Mexican border wall made him more noticeable than his rivals.

Kreis (2017) investigated Trump's tweets past his inauguration and found that Trump uses an informal and direct language to reinforce the concept of homogenous people. Also, Chen (2018) found that Trump used the first personal pronoun, simple words, brief, and

declarative statements in his inaugural speech to achieve political goals. This indicates that Trump attempts to establish rapport with the audiences and reach many voters. The study also revealed that Trump frequently employed marked Themes to attract the attention of the audience and to increase the coherence of his speech.

Using the SFL-based engagement framework, Quam and Ryshina-Pankova (2016) examined the strategies in which the 2016 presidential candidates Trump, Clinton, and Sanders aligned themselves with their audiences in their election speeches. The results revealed the two most used types of the engagement strategy markers by the three candidates, which were heteroglossia and monoglossia. However, Trump's speeches relied on monoglossic statements more than heteroglossic assertion. Unlike heteroglossic text, monoglossic text includes bare assertions and the author's viewpoints of a proposition. Similarly, Ross, and Caldwell (2020) employed the SFL-based Appraisal framework to investigate the interpersonal language resources (attitude, engagement, & graduation) Trump employed in his tweets. The findings indicated that "Crooked [judgement ^ veracity] Hillary Clinton" ranked most highly. Trump makes use of a variety of Appraisal resources as part of his de-professionalized strategies of 'going negative'. Trump places the negative judgments of Hillary's veracity ('a liar') or propriety ('unethical behavior') in Theme position. Trump also negatively judges Hillary's Capacity ('incompetent') and Appreciation ('bad /judgement decisions').

Degani (2016) examined the main theme and the language complexity in Trump's and Clinton's announcement speeches as candidates for the US presidency. The analysis of the speeches revealed that Trump's most frequent words were names of countries and business-related words (e.g. China, Mexico; billion, money, Ford), while Clinton's most frequent nouns were people related (immigrants, nurses). The study indicated that the theme of Clinton's speech focused on developing more social and economic equality while Trump's speech focused on problems related to business and the American border. Regarding the complexity of the language, both Clinton's and Trump's texts were readable, but Trump's speech was less complex than Clinton's (Readability Index, respectively, 2.4 and 7.8). Similarly, Liu and Lei (2018) found that Clinton's thematic words carry a positive vision while Trump's thematic words indicate a more negative view.

Along similar lines, Wang and Liu (2018) examined the style of Trump's speech in contrast to Clinton's and Obama's styles, using debates and campaign speeches as the data source. The findings showed that Trump's lexical diversity in debates was smaller than Clinton's and Obama's. Trump's sentences were simple, and his campaign speechwriters sometimes employed a richer vocabulary and well-edited sentences (Wang and Liu 2018). As for thematic concentration, Trump's campaign speeches contained more central themes than did Clinton's and Obama's.

Rachman and Yunianti (2017) employed a descriptive qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze Trump's speech in his presidential campaign on November 16, 2015. The results showed that Trump attempts to focus on his political discourse on a national unity of the nation, using an informal language to make the audiences feel close and intimate with him. He utilizes various strategies to gain power and become the President of the U.S. The central topic of his speech is the idea to make America great again. Trump's ideology is gaining power, which is associated with money, politics, and authority. Power also includes one's ability to influence the actions or decisions of others.

To the best of our knowledge, only two studies (Liu & Zhang, 2018; Murni, 2017) employed SFL to investigate Trump's discourse. Murni

(2017) employed the SFL approach to analyze the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings in Trump's tweets from April 2017. Data selection, however, was not based on a specific theme and it included only 62 clauses from 33 tweets. Thus, the unit of analysis was the clause rather than clause complexes. The findings revealed that material processes were dominant process type in Trump's tweets. The interpersonal meaning analysis indicated that Trump used the declarative Mood more than other Moods. Finally, the textual meanings in Trump's tweets were realized by 53 (81.53%) topical Themes and 12 (18.47%) textual Theme. The tweets lacked any instances of interpersonal Themes. Similarly, Liu and Zhang (2018) employed SFL to investigate the textual meanings in Trump's victory speech and found that it contained unmarked Themes to enable the audience to grasp what he is talking about. Trump also used marked Theme to draw attention to particular information. The first-person pronouns 'we' and 'I' were more highly used in Trump's victory speech "emphasize the unity of him and all Americans and his own political ideas" (Liu & Zhang, 2018, 281). The researcher, however, did not provide information related to data size and the unit of analysis.

The reviewed literature shows that investigations of Theme types in Trump's tweets on the U.S.-Mexico border wall issue remain unexplored. The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating Theme types in Trump's tweets on the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This research study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.-Mexico border wall issue, utilizing Halliday's systems of Theme type and thematic markedness.

3.2. Data collection

The corpus included Trump's 190 tweets (7,718 words) on the topic of the U.S.-Mexico border wall. The tweets were collected from Trump's official Twitter account @realDonaldTrump. They were posted between 16 Nov 2018 and 11 Feb 2019. The selection of this timeframe was constrained by the time available for the researchers. The selection criterion for the tweets was that they must contain the following words: 'Mexico', 'Mexican', 'the wall', 'fence', 'border', 'southern border', and 'border security.' The date and time of the tweets, retweets, and the links were excluded because the study aims to analyze Trump's discourse. This process is called data condensation whereby researchers revise the data to select, focus, simplify, abstract, and transform the data that appear in the full corpus (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 1994).

3.3. Data analysis tools and procedures

The researchers employed the corpus annotation software UAM Corpus Tool, developed by O'Donnell (2008), which is based on Halliday's (2014) SFL framework. This software facilitates the process of analysis by automatically tagging Theme types and thematic markedness. Thus, the data were analyzed using UAM software. Complex clauses are the unit of analysis, which includes independent and dependent clauses. The analysis of the UAM Corpus tool of Trump's tweets revealed that the total units of the analysis were 2671.

Although the study is primarily qualitative, frequencies, and percentages of the occurrence of each Theme type were employed to validate our claims when comparing the use of thematic choices. Finally, each researcher manually revised 50% of the annotations to ensure the reliability of the results. Finally, any disagreements regarding the assignment of elided Themes were discussed until we reached full agreement.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings showed that the most frequent Theme type in Trump's tweets on the border wall issue was topical Theme, followed by the textual Theme (Table 3).

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages of Theme types in Trump's tweets

Theme type	Topical		Interpersonal		Textual		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Tweets	653	78.20	15	1.80	167	20	835	100

These findings are supported by Murni's (2017) study of Trump's tweets which showed that topical Theme was the most frequent Theme type (78.20%) followed by textual Theme (20%). Whereas the interpersonal Theme rarely occurred in the present study (1.80%), Murni's (2017) study lacked the occurrence of this Theme type. This could be ascribed to the sample size which was only thirty-three tweets, while in the present study it is 190 tweets.

The most frequent topical Themes in Trump's tweets were the *first-person plural pronoun 'we'* (n= 121) and the singular pronoun 'I' (n=60). Trump typically employs the inclusive pronoun 'we' in his discourse to establish a sense of commonality and trust with his readers and, thereby, achieve his political goals.

- "We [Theme] lose 300 Americans a week, [RHEME] 90% of which [Theme] comes through the Southern Border. [RHEME] These numbers [Theme] will be DRASTICALLY REDUCED [RHEME] if we [Theme] have a Wall! [RHEME]"¹.
- "We [Theme] must now work together, after decades of abuse, to finally fix the Humanitarian, Criminal & Drug Crisis at our Border. [RHEME] WE [Theme] WILL WIN BIG! [RHEME]"².
- "The only reason they [Democrats] do not want to build a Wall is that [Theme] Walls Work! [RHEME] 99% of our illegal Border crossings [Theme] will end, [RHEME] crime in our Country [Theme] will go way down [RHEME] and we [Theme] will save billions of dollars a year! [RHEME]"².
- "I [Theme] want to stop the Shutdown [RHEME] as soon as we [Theme] are in agreement on Strong Border Security! [RHEME] I [Theme] am in the White House ready to go, [RHEME] where [Theme] are the Dems? [RHEME]"³.
- "Humanitarian Crisis [Theme] [is] at our Southern Border. [RHEME] I [Theme] just got back [RHEME] and it [Theme] is a far worse situation than almost anyone would understand, [RHEME] an invasion! I [Theme] have been there numerous times [RHEME] - The Democrats, Cryin' Chuck and Nancy [Theme] don't know how bad and dangerous it is for our ENTIRE COUNTRY... [RHEME]"⁴.

This finding is in line with Liu and Zhang's (2018) study of Trump's presidential victory speech, which showed that the most frequent Themes were 'we' and 'I'. Liu and Zhang argue that Trump uses this Theme to emphasize the unity between him and all Americans and to assure his political ideas. Trump attempts to persuade all the American citizens to realize the urgent need to build the wall by using the strategy of appeal to emotions, which includes the use of loaded language. Thus, Americans need to be aware that 300 Americans are killed every week due to "our illegal Border crossings." Trump foregrounds 'Border crossings' (Tweet 3) by placing it in the Theme position because this information is evident to every American. These figures will be "DRASTICALLY REDUCED" when the wall is built. It should be noted here that Trump uses the 'ALL CAPS' capitalization in his tweets not only to amplify the positive impact of his plan but also to reveal the negative impact that will affect the "ENTIRE COUNTRY" in case the Democrats refuse to vote for the bill. Trump defended this use by tweeting "I capitalize certain words only for emphasis, not b/c [because] they should be capitalized!"⁵ This finding is in line with Ross and Caldwell's (2020) study which indicated that Trump employs the adverb 'so' to add extra emphasis to the negative judgement of veracity, combined with the 'ALL CAPS' capitalization not only to amplify the negative sentiment underlying his tweets but also increase their emotional

impact. In tweet 3, Trump argues that the crime rate will decrease when 99% of illegal border crossings end, thereby billions of dollars are saved every year. Trump employs the plural possessive pronouns 'our' with the topical Theme 'country' (Tweets 3 & 5). The collocates 'our country' and 'our great country' were used thirty-nine times to encourage the Democrats to care for border security. This finding converges with Kreis's (2017) study of Trump's tweets past his inauguration, which indicated Trump's use of the notion of the homeland ('our country') that needs to be protected from 'evil'. Tweet 3 includes an example of embedded-clause topical Theme ("The only reason ... is that") which rarely occurred in Trump's tweets, compared to main-clause topical Themes which more frequently occurred. This result is expected since Twitter users are expected to use a direct style of writing. Trump argues that the Democrats could save the government shutdown if they reach an agreement on "Strong Border Security!" (Tweet 4).

The clause-initial deictic determiners (or demonstratives) 'this' and 'these' serving as topical Themes minimally occurred in Trump's tweets (12 instances). Halliday (2014, p. 87) argues that "all deictic elements are characteristically thematic."

- "We [Theme] lose 300 Americans a week, [RHEME] 90% of which [Theme] comes through the Southern Border. [RHEME] These numbers [Theme] will be DRASTICALLY REDUCED [RHEME] if we [Theme] have a Wall! [RHEME]"⁶.
- "Very sadly, Murder cases in Mexico in 2018 [Theme] rose 33% from 2017, to 33,341. [RHEME] This [Theme] is a big contributor to the Humanitarian Crisis taking place on our Southern Border and then [Ellided Theme] spreading throughout our Country. [RHEME]"⁷.

The deictic determiners 'These' in tweet 6 refers back to the Theme "90% of which" in the previous clause. Similarly, the deictic determiners 'This' in tweet 7 refers to the Theme in the previous clause. Rather than repeating the whole clause, Trump resorts to brevity by substituting the class with the deictic determiners.

The interpersonal Themes were minimally employed in Trump's tweets (Table 4). They included unfused Finite elements in interrogative structure (e.g. "Do the Dems [Theme] realize that most of the people not getting paid are Democrats? [RHEME]"), WH-Question words (e.g. "Where [Theme] are the Dems? [RHEME]"), Mood adjuncts (e.g. "No [Theme] slamming [of the door] [RHEME]"), and comment adjuncts ("Very sadly, Murder cases in Mexico in 2018 [Theme] rose 33% from 2017, to 33,341 [RHEME]").

Table 5. Frequency of interpersonal Themes in Trump's tweets

Type of Interpersonal Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Freq.
WH-question words	Where, why	4
Finite elements	Are/Do & Modal auxiliaries	6
Mood adjunct	Only, no	2
Comment adjuncts	Sadly, simply	3
	Total	15

Trump uses the WH-element 'why' to request missing pieces of information which in his view are obvious.

- "Why [Theme] wouldn't any sane person want to build a Wall! [RHEME]"⁸

This finding is in line with Ross and Caldwell's (2020, 25) study which indicated that Trump's use of leading questions "point towards what he sees as an obvious answer, with no alternative." He also employs the WH-element 'where' in tweet 4 to hold the Democrats responsible for prolonging the government shutdown. It should be noted here that WH- elements have "a two-fold thematic value" (Halliday, 2014, 112) since they are both interpersonal and topical Themes. They are topical (with a non-topical function) because they represent the missing participant or circumstance and interpersonal because they construct the Mood structure of a clause. Instances of comment and Mood adjuncts are shown below:

- "Sadly, there [Theme] can be no REAL Border Security without the Wall! [RHEME]"⁹.

¹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 11, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

² Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 6, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

³ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁴ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 11, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁵ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (July 3, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

⁶ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 10, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁷ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 31, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁸ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 31, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 2, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

- "Very sadly, Murder cases in Mexico in 2018 [Theme] rose 33% from 2017, to 33,341. [Rheme]"¹⁰.
- "Only a Wall, or Steel Barrier, [Theme] will keep our Country safe! [Rheme]"¹¹
- "Only fools, or people with a political agenda, [Theme] don't want a Wall or Steel Barrier to protect our Country from Crime, Drugs and Human Trafficking. [Rheme] It [Theme] will happen [Rheme] - it [Theme] always does! [Rheme]"¹².

Comment adjuncts express a writer's opinion on the proposition being discussed. Trump employed interpersonal Themes in his tweets to influence his audiences. Zompetti (2019) states that "by claiming the Wall will address human trafficking, Trump appealed to a liberal demographic, as well as attempted to temper his misogynistic image with a new commitment against human sex trafficking." Trump uses loaded language to affect his audience: i.e., 'country' (Tweets 3, 5, 11 & 12), 'drugs' (Tweet 2 & 12), 'human trafficking' (Tweet 12), and 'crime' (Tweets 3 & 12). The strategy of using loaded language is among the idiosyncratic features characterizing Trump's discourse (Lakoff, 2017). Kreis (2017, 5) states that "by using an informal and conversational language style in his tweets, he [Trump] has been successful in reaching large audiences and appearing closer to the people."

The most frequent textual Theme type in Trump's tweets on the border wall issue was conjunctions ('and' and 'but'). The conjunctive adjuncts expressing contrast ('however' and 'meanwhile') were rarely used (Table 5). The rare use of conjunctive adjuncts is expected since these are typically employed in academic discourse to link clauses and to facilitate comprehension.

Table 5. Frequency of textual Theme in Trump's tweets

Type of Textual Theme	Textual Theme	Freq.
Conjunctions	And/ &	82
	But	31
	If	27
	Also	1
Conjunctive adjuncts	While	3
	However,	3
	Meanwhile	0
WH- relatives	Which, where	17
Continuatives	Now, well	3
	Total	167

Writers use conjunctions to join two clauses into one sentence, while they use conjunctive adjuncts to link the content of the clause with the preceding text. According to McCabe and Heilman (2007), writers use textual Theme to build a link between clauses and to guide readers to "the expectedness of the writer of the upcoming proposition in light to the previous preposition" (McCabe & Heilman, 2007). For instance, the temporal conjunctive adjunct 'while' in the following tweet serves as a textual Theme that links the clauses together.

- "canceled my trip on Air Force One to Florida while we wait to see if the Democrats will help us to protect America's Southern Border!"¹³.

It indicates that the writer expects the reader to assume that there is a possibility that the border wall will not be approved by the Democrats. Like WH-question words, relatives also have a two-fold thematic structure: topical and textual. They are topical because they represent the missing participant or circumstance and textual because they construct the Mood structure of the clause.

- "Would much prefer that [Theme] Mitt focus on Border Security and so many other things [Rheme] where he [Theme] can be helpful...[Rheme]"¹⁴.
- "Now we [Theme] know where Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer & the Democrats stand [Rheme]"¹⁵.
- "With so much talk about the Wall, [Theme] people are losing sight of the great job being done on our Southern Border by Border Patrol, ICE and our great Military. [Rheme] Remember [Theme] the Caravans? [Rheme] Well,

they [Theme] didn't get through [Rheme] and none [Theme] are forming or on their way. [Rheme]"¹⁶.

The continuatives 'now' and 'well' rarely occurred in Trump's tweets. Continuatives (or 'backchannel-continuatives') signal a new move to the next point in discourse, as the audience is tracking (or 'backchannels') the contribution of the speaker or the writer (Halliday, 2014).

Besides, the findings revealed that unmarked Themes were more frequently employed (Table 6) as a point of departure (n=571) than the marked Themes (n=82). Trump tends to use a simple, direct, and spontaneous language in his discourse to make the communication style with his audience more natural and less complex; thus, he tends to use unmarked Theme more than marked Theme. This finding is in line with several studies (Degani, 2016; Kreis, 2017; Liu and Zhang, 2018; Rachman & Yunianti, 2017; Umiyati, 2019; Wang and Liu, 2018) which suggest that Trump tends to use simple language with unmarked Theme to make his message more understandable. Kreis (2017) argues, that Trump uses simple and direct language in his tweets to increase the concept of homogeneity with people. As stated in Section 2.1.1, The unmarked Theme conflates with the Subject (in declarative clauses), Finite (in interrogative clauses), WH element (in WH-interrogative clauses), and Predicator (in imperative clauses).

Table 6. Frequency of unmarked Theme types in Trump's tweets

Typical Unmarked Theme	MOOD of clause	Freq.
Subject	Declarative	571
Finite	Yes/No Interrogative	6
WH- element	WH- interrogative	4
Predicator	Imperative	19
	Total	600

The imperative is the only case in which the Predicator (or the verb) serves as the Theme of the clause. Trump uses this typical Theme type to urge the Democrats to act immediately (i.e. pass the bill that secures the borders): "Let's get it done!" Trump's blunt and harsh, sometimes threatening, discourse appears in a few of his tweets.

- "Stop [Theme] playing political games [Rheme]"¹⁷
- "Shutdown [Theme] today if Democrats do not vote for Border Security! [Rheme]"¹⁸
- "Are you [Theme] going to approve Border Security which includes a Wall or Steel Barrier? [Rheme]"¹⁹

Trump judges the ethics of the Democrats (Tweet 17). This finding converges with Ross and Caldwell (2020) study of Trump's tweets which utilized not only direct negativity but also de-legitimized the character of his political opponent, i.e. Hillary Clinton. Although the Predicator 'Stop' occurs in Theme position, it carries the focus of New information because the basic meaning of the message is "I want you [the Democrats] [Theme/Given] to stop playing political games.[Rheme/New]." Finite interrogatives function as unmarked Themes because they express polarity, yes or no. However, Theme extends over the following subject since they do not carry the experiential structure of a clause (participant, circumstance, or process). The basic meaning of finite interrogatives is "I want you to tell me whether or not" (Halliday, 2014, 101). Thus, the meaning of tweet 19 is "I want you to tell me whether or not you [Theme] are going to approve Border Security which includes a Wall or Steel Barrier [Rheme]."

As Twitter users are constrained by a maximum length of 280 characters (with spaces) per tweet, Trump employed some strategies such as the omission of the subject Theme, omission of finite in Rheme position (e.g. "Tax & Reg cuts [are] historic"/ "Trade deals [are] great"), and the use of contracted forms. Contracted forms included 'Reg' for 'regulation', 'Dems' for the 'Democrats', and the

¹⁰ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 31, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹¹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 15, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹² Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 26, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹³ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 22, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁴ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 2, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁵ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 26, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁶ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 20, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁷ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 15, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁸ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 21, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 9, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

'Fed' for the 'Federal Reserve System'. Trump also omits the subject Theme in his tweets which resulted in 31 elided Themes to direct his audience into the point of his tweets (Tweets 20-22, elided Themes are placed in square brackets).

- "[I] [Theme] Would much prefer that Mitt focus on Border Security and so many other things [Rheme] where he can be helpful. [Rheme]"²⁰
- "[I] [Theme] Will be going to Camp David tomorrow morning for meetings on Border Security and many other topics with @WhiteHouse senior staff. [Rheme]"²¹
- "V.P. Mike Pence and team [Theme] just left the White House. [Rheme] [They] [Theme] Briefed me on their meeting with the Schumer/Pelosi representatives. [Rheme] Not much headway [Theme] made today. [Rheme] Second meeting [Theme] set for tomorrow. [Rheme] After so many decades, [Theme] [we] must finally and permanently fix the problems on the Southern Border! [Rheme]"²²

The topical Themes 'I' (Tweets 20-21) and 'They' (Tweet 22) are elided to save text space. Elided topical Themes are recoverable from the context. The communicative purpose of using elided Themes in the present study contrasts with Refyantari's (2017) study which revealed that Trump tends to omit the subject (Theme) in his speeches to simplify the language and to make it more direct.

Marked Themes are employed to introduce a new stage in discourse by providing readers with circumstantial detail, expressed by prepositional or adverbial phrases. Eggins (2004, 320) argues that "skillful writers and speakers choose marked Themes to add coherence and emphasis to their text."

- "Without strong Borders, [Marked Theme] we don't have a Country [Rheme]"²³.
- "Without a Wall [Marked Theme] our Country can never have Border or National Security. [Rheme] With a powerful Wall or Steel Barrier, [Marked Theme] Crime Rates (and Drugs) will go substantially down all over the U.S. [Rheme]"²⁴.
- "In the Great State of Texas, between 2011 & 2018, [Marked Theme] there were a total of 292,000 crimes by illegal aliens, 539 murders, 32,000 assaults, 3,426 sexual assaults and 3000 weapons charges. [Rheme] Democrats [Theme] come back! [Rheme]"²⁵.
- "In 2018, [Marked Theme] 1.7 million pounds of narcotics seized, [Rheme] 17,000 adults [Theme] arrested with criminal records, [Rheme] and 6000 gang members, including MS-13, [Theme] apprehended. [Rheme]"²⁶.

Trump selects the marked Themes 'Without strong Borders', 'Without a Wall', and 'With a powerful Wall or Steel Barrier' (Tweets 23-24) to buttress his position and, thereby, gain the support of the Democrats. Trump argues in one of his tweets, since at least seventy-seven peace walls were built around the world, it is pertinent to complete this wall. To place his arguments within the local context, Trump also employs temporal and location circumstances (Tweets 25-26), marked Themes, to direct the attention of his audience into important information or events. As Liu and Zhang (2018, 281) state, Trump employs some marked Themes so that "the audiences pay attention to some special information." Trump uses the marked Theme 'Now' to stress the urgency of time (Tweet 28).

- "For those that naively ask why didn't the Republicans get approval to build the Wall over the last year, [Theme] it is because IN THE SENATE WE NEED 10 DEMOCRAT VOTES, [Rheme] and they [Theme] will gives us "NONE" for Border Security! [Rheme] Now we [Theme] have to do it the hard way, with a Shutdown. [Rheme]"²⁷.
- "The great people of our Country [Theme] demand proper Border Security [Rheme] NOW! [Theme]"²⁸.

As stated earlier, the continuative 'now' rarely occurred in Trump's tweets. The Democrats will be responsible for the government shutdown if they do not immediately vote for the wall (Tweet 27). Trump also stresses the urgent need to demand border security

(Tweet 28). This finding converges with Chen's (2018) CDA of Trump's inaugural speech which revealed that Trump widely used the marked Theme 'Now' and 'Together' to attract the attention of his audience.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This research investigated thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.-Mexico border wall. The findings showed that the most frequent Theme type was topical Theme, followed by the textual. Interpersonal Themes rarely occurred in the tweets. Trump tries to present his decision of building the wall as a political issue for all Americans through the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' to establish a sense of commonality and trust and, thereby, achieve his political goals. Unmarked Themes were more frequently employed as a point of departure than the marked Themes. Trump tends to use a simple, direct, and spontaneous language to make the communication style with his audience more natural and less complex. Trump's tweets used more conjunctions ('and' and 'but') than adjuncts to connect his ideas. As each tweet is constrained by a limited number of characters, Trump's tweets are characterized by the use of contracted forms, the omission of the subject Theme, and the omission of finite in Rheme position.

SFL can help us understand how language is used in political social media discourse to construct the events in specific kinds of ways. Studying thematic choices can tell us about the tendency and the characteristics of language. The results of this study indicate that thematization plays a salient role in political social media discourse. The findings of this study provide evidence to support the view that thematic choice is a useful and important tool in writing, especially political texts. It is recommended that politicians consider thematic choices in their text production.

What makes the present research different is the use of the SFL framework in the analysis of Theme types in political social media discourse. Furthermore, the study analyzed spoken-like language in the Twitter genre on the topic of the U.S.-Mexico border wall which was not explored in the literature. The present study contributes to our understanding of Theme types in political social media discourse. Based on the findings of the study, several pedagogical implications are drawn from the study. English teachers can use SFL as an approach for teaching students how to analyze the clauses in texts. Since thematic choices increase the coherence of texts, teachers can encourage students to employ a variety of Theme types, thereby developing their language skills (Alyousef, 2020).

Finally, the present study was limited to the investigation of thematic choices in political social media discourse. Further research is required to examine power and ideology as well as thematic progression in political social media discourse to reveal if there are any variations in terms of stance and the development of Theme. Studying these patterns can support the current results of the study. Future studies could also investigate thematic choices in political social media discourse of other languages.

Bios

Hesham Suleiman Alyousef

Department of English Language & Literature, Faculty of Arts, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, +966553000412, hesham@ksu.edu.sa

Dr. Alyousef completed his Ph.D. in 2014 from the University of

²⁰ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 2, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²¹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²² Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²³ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (February 25, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁴ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 22, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁵ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 12, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁶ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁷ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 29, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁸ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 14, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

Adelaide, Australia. He has published three book chapters and 10 ISI/Scopus-indexed research articles. He has over 30 years of experience in teaching ESL/EFL students. His research interests include SFL, metadiscourse, reading comprehension, assessment, and the use of Web 2.0 technology in education. ORCID: 0000-0002-9280-9282. Website: fac.ksu.edu.sa/hesham

Najd Emad Q. Alotaibi

Department of English Language & Literature, College of Arts & Sciences, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia, ne.alotaibi@psau.edu.sa

Miss Alotaibi received her MA in Applied Linguistics in 2019. She works as a lecturer at the Department of English Language & Literature, College of Arts and Sciences, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include discourse analysis and corpus linguistics.

References

- Abd'lillah, I. (2019). *Donald Trump's Tweets on the Border Wall: A Critical Discourse Analysis*. Master's thesis, University Abdelhamid Ibn-Badis, Mostaganem, Algeria.
- Ajmi, Hela. (2014). Subjectivity in discourse: A CDA Approach to the study of adjectives in two political speeches. *Arab World English Journal*, 5(1), 151-166.
- Alvi, Sofia Dildar, and Abdul-Baseer. (2011). An investigation of the political discourse of obama's selected speeches: A hallidian perspective. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(16), 150-60.
- Alyousef, H. S. (2016). A multimodal discourse analysis of international postgraduate business students' finance texts: An investigation of theme and information value. *Social Semiotics*, 26(5), 486-504.
- Alyousef, H. S. (2020). 'Grammatics for ameliorating reading comprehension skills: A social semiotic approach'. In: P. Mickan and I. Wallace (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language Education Curriculum Design*. Oxford, UK: Routledge.
- Chen, W. (2018). A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech from the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(8), 966-72.
- Cozma, R. and Kozman, C. (2018). The Syrian crisis in US and Lebanese newspapers: A cross-national analysis. *International Communication Gazette*, 80(2), 185-204.
- Degani, M. (2016). Endangered intellect: A case study of Clinton vs Trump campaign discourse. *Iperstoria: Testi letteratura linguaggi*, 8(8), 131-45.
- Eggins, S. (2004). *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. 2nd edition. London/ New York: Continuum.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (2014). *Introduction to Functional Grammar. Revised by Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen*. 4th edition. London/New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Kreis, R. (2017). The "tweet politics" of President Trump. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), 607-18.
- Kress, G. and Leeuwen, T.V. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge.
- Lakoff, R.T. (2017). The hollow man: Donald Trump, populism, and post-truth politics. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), 595-606.
- Liu, D. and Lei, L. (2018). The appeal to political sentiment: An analysis of Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's speech themes and discourse strategies in the 2016 US presidential election. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 25(n/a), 143-52.
- Liu, X. and Zhang, H. (2018). Discourse analysis of the victory speech of President Trump from the perspective of Theme and thematic progression patterns. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 250(n/a), 277-82. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2991/emim-18.2018.56>
- McCabe, A. and Heilman, K. (2007). Textual and interpersonal differences between a news report and an editorial. *Revista alicantina de estudios ingleses*, 20(n/a), 139-56.
- Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. London, U.K.: Sage.
- Murni, Y.P. (2017). *Metafunctions Analysis of Donald Trump's Tweets*. Master's Thesis, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia.
- O'Donnell, M. (2008). The UAM 'CorpusTool: Software for corpus annotation and exploration'. In: B. Callejas, C. M. et. al. (eds.) *Applied Linguistics Now: Understanding Language and Mind/La Lingüística Aplicada Hoy: Comprendiendo el Lenguaje y la Mente*. Universidad de Almería: Almería, Spain.
- Paltridge, B. (2006). *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Pelosi, N. and Schumer, C. (2019). Read: Pelosi and Schumer's response to Trump's border speech. *NBC News*. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/> (accessed on 8/5/2020)
- Quam, Justin, and Mariana Ryshina-Pankova. (2016). "Let me tell you...": Audience engagement strategies in the campaign speeches of Trump, Clinton, and Sanders. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 20(4), 140-60.
- Rachman, A. and S. Yunianti. (2017). Critical discourse analysis in Donald Trump presidential campaign to win American's heart. *TELL: Teaching of English Language and Literature Journal*, 5(2), 8-17.
- Refyantari, R. (2017). *Exploring the textual meaning of the political discourse: A speech by Donald Trump on October 22nd, 2016 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania*. B.A. Project, Dian Nuswantoro University, Central Java, Indonesia, Available at: <http://mahasiswa.dinus.ac.id/docs/skripsi/jurnal/19834.pdf> (accessed on 10/5/2020)
- Ross, A. S., and Caldwell, D. (2020). 'Going negative': An APPRAISAL analysis of the rhetoric of Donald Trump on Twitter. *Language & Communication*, 70(n/a), 13-27. DOI: 10.1016/j.langcom.2019.09.003
- Trump, Donald. (2015). The reality television host said he is running for president. Here are his remarks from a speech given Tuesday at Trump Tower in New York city. *Time*. Available at: <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/> (accessed on 13/5/2020)
- Umiyati, M. (2019). Textual Metafunction in Donald Trump's Speech "Recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's Capital". *International Journal of Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 2(2), 55-60.
- VPRNews. (2019). Annotated Transcript: President Donald Trump's 2019 State of The Union Address. *Vermont Public Radio*. Available at: <https://www.vpr.org/post/annotated-transcript-president-donald-trumps-2019-state-union-address#stream/0> (accessed on 15/5/2020)
- Wang, Y. and Liu, H. (2018). Is Trump always rambling like a fourth-grade student? an analysis of stylistic features of Donald Trump's political discourse during the 2016 election. *Discourse & Society*, 29(3), 299-323. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0957926517734659>
- Wignell, Peter, Kay O'Halloran, and Sabine Tan. (2019). Semiotic space invasion: The case of Donald Trump's US presidential campaign. *Semiotica*, 2019(226), 185-208.
- Zompetti, J. P. (2019). Rhetorical incivility in the Twitter sphere: A comparative thematic analysis of Clinton and Trump's Tweets during and after the 2016 Presidential Election. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 9(1/2), 29-54.