

Legitimation Strategies in Political Rhetoric: Examples From Presidential Speeches on Covid- 19

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Abstract—Heads of states are currently focusing on containing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic—commonly called Covid-19, and grappling with a series of strategies for addressing the pandemic. Political discourse concerning Covid-19 can be examined to better understand the ideology of the speaker and its impact on the audience. In this paper, we use Van Leeuwen’s (2007) and Van Leeuwen and Wodak’s (1999) legitimation strategies that social actors use to justify courses of action/political decisions in a critical discourse analysis approach. Drawing on presidential speeches specifically made by Donald Trump (USA) and Xi Jinping (China), this paper elucidates how legitimation strategies are linguistically constituted and fashioned to justify the leaders’ particular policy decisions and actions for controlling and containing the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, thus achieving their political goals.

Index Terms—Covid-19, Political discourse, legitimation, critical discourse analysis, presidential speeches

I. INTRODUCTION

In December 2019 a mysterious infection named Covid-19 was discovered and has since spread to almost all countries of the world, killing hundreds of thousands of people and infecting millions of others. At the same time, a series of intense debates have also ensued in the social and news media about what Covid-19 entails, including the collective role of citizens and their elected leaders in controlling and managing the psychological and socio-economic problems resulting from the pandemic. Despite these advances, however, there is paucity of knowledge regarding the varied legitimation strategies that are being used by the heads of state in their updates through speeches, particularly, to inform their citizens about the state of affairs in regards to coronavirus and the need to adopt and observe particular regulations and rules for containing the disease.

Using Van Leeuwen’s (2007) and Van Leeuwen and Wodak’s (1999) legitimation strategies for justifying political decisions and actions, this article interrogates the varied discursive strategies used in selected presidential speeches from Donald Trump (USA) and Xi Jinping (China) on Covid-19 and seeks to elucidate how these discursive strategies are linguistically constituted and fashioned to achieve particular political ends. To realize this objective, the paper will be guided by the following questions: (1) What legitimation strategies do the heads of state use to justify their Covid-19 driven political decisions/courses of action in their speeches on the coronavirus pandemic? (2) How do the heads of state achieve their political goals through the legitimation strategies they used in their speeches?

II. WHAT IS LEGITIMATION?

Legitimation is the process through which social actors endorse or sanction an action or behaviour to a given audience. According to Reyes (2011), “legitimation entails the process by which speakers accredit or licence a type of social behaviour” (p. 782). In this context, legitimization is achieved through argumentation, in which case, the speaker provides an argument to clarify a particular decision, thought or behaviour declaration that they assume the interlocutor does not agree with or endorse (Said, 2017). These clarifications are actually provided to justify given actions, behaviour or decisions, hence win their audience's acceptance.

CDA is widely used for the analysis of political discourse. Fairclough (2012) emphasizes the need to see political discourse analysis as entailing “the analysis of political discourse from a critical perspective, a perspective which focuses on the reproduction and contestation of political power through political discourse”(p.17). A similar view is expressed by Fairclough et al. (2011), who see the aforesaid notion of hegemony as entailing how discursive practices that are part of the broader socio-cultural practice (involving power struggles and ideologies) help to sustain and reproduce the social status quo. In this context, any act of legitimation suggests an effort to justify an “action or no action or an ideological position on a specific issue” (Reyes, 2011, p.783).

Therefore, legitimization in political speeches (i.e. as a form of political discourse) deserves special attention because it is from such speech events that “political leaders justify their political agenda to maintain or alter the direction of a whole nation”(Reyes, 2011, p.783). Based on this understanding, our article examined strategies of legitimation in

selected American President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi's presidential speeches, including the linguistic means by which such strategies were achieved in discourse.

III. RELATION WITH CDA

Critical discourse analysts undertake to examine discourse practices to uncover the "relationships between language and ideology, language and power, language and gender" (Reyes, 2011, p.785). From the stand point of critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA), legitimation involves the discursive process of creating a "sense of acceptance in specific discourses or orders of discourse" (Vaara et al., 2006, p.79). It is in this sense that discourse defines "what is legitimate or illegitimate" (Olga, 2013, p.17). According to Olga (2013, p.17), CDA is "concentrated on studying discursive strategies, utilized by particular actors to influence and convince others with the help of certain linguistic practices". In this way, CDA has the potential to unravel both the existing legitimacy and the processes of legitimation.

In the current study, we examine strategies of legitimation in selected presidential speeches, as well as the linguistic means through which they are realized in discourse. For better observation of the particular linguistic elements that were deployed to legitimate given interventional strategies against the corona-virus, the study draws analytical tools from Halliday and Mathiesen's (2004) theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics/Grammar premised within CDA. Specifically, SFL was chosen as one of the analytical tools in this article, because, unlike CDA, it (SFL) is oriented toward context (situational, generic and ideological) which is operationalized through its metafunctions /approaches (the textual, interpersonal and ideational metafunctions) that help CDA by its (SFL's) wide variety of grammatical features to achieve its objective of analyzing discourse ideologically (Salayo, 2020; Van Leeuwen, 2006).

IV. VAN LEEUWEN'S LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES FOR LEGITIMATING POLITICAL DECISIONS AND PRACTICES

According to Van Leeuwen (2008), "all forms of authority undertake to create and cultivate some belief in their legitimacy" (p.105). Further, Van Leeuwen reiterates the crucial role of language in the process of legitimation. In this context, he proposes four major forms of legitimation in discourse, i.e. authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis (see Table 1), which as he argues, can be used separately or in combination to legitimize, delegitimize or give a critique. These are discussed in detail below.

TABLE 1
CATEGORIES OF LEGITIMATION (VAN LEEUWEN 2007)

Categories	Sub-categories
Authorization	Personal authority, impersonal authority, tradition, conformity, expert authority, role model authority
Rationalization	Instrumental rationalization, theoretical rationalization
Mythopoesis	Moral tales, cautionary tales
Moral Evaluation	Evaluation, abstraction, analogies, comparison

A. Authorization Legitimation

According to Van Leeuwen (2008), Authorization legitimation entails legitimation through reference to authority and "legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested" (p.105-109). Van Leeuwen (2008) proposes several modes of authorisation legitimation: (1) Expert authority achieved by invoking an expert or experts in a given area of knowledge; (2) Role model authority (an exemplar), realized by invoking role models or opinion leaders such as wise/experienced teachers, including their endorsements; (3) Impersonal authority of laws, rules, and regulations; and (4) The Authority of tradition invoked, particularly, through key words like "tradition", "practice", "custom", "habit".

B. Rationalization Legitimation

Rationalization legitimation is legitimation achieved by invoking the usefulness of a particular social practice or part of it, or "the facts of life" (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p.105), and by making reference to specialists in particular fields who elucidate the domains of knowledge or understandings that can be utilized for the purpose of legitimation. This strategy of legitimation is linguistically expressed through propositions such as "After consultations with..." or "verbs denoting mental and verbal processes such as 'explore' and 'consult'" (Reyes, 2011, p.876).

C. Mythopoesis

Mythopoesis is the type of legitimation realized by storytelling. This includes the use of moral tales, that present protagonists as having been rewarded for indulging in "legitimate social practices or restoring the legitimate order," and cautionary tales that explain what will occur if one does not adhere to norms of social practices, such as engaging in "deviant activities that lead to unhappy endings" (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.117-118).

D. Moral Evaluation

Moral evaluation is the type of evaluation based on values and is connected to particular "discourses of moral value" (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.109-111). This type of legitimation is signalled in text and talk by analogies that express some

moral evaluation through comparisons, and the use of evaluative terms/adjectives like good, bad, healthy, normal, natural, cool, golden and useful that are based on particular moral discourses.

V. OVERVIEW OF THE DATA

In this article, President Xi's and Trump's speeches were chosen for analysis based on their similarity of purpose, in terms of legitimizing particular policy actions for addressing the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, our analysis also draws on a white paper titled: *Fighting Covid-19 China in Action*, published by The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, and remarks by President Trump on Actions Against China published by The White House: National Security and Defence as well as excerpts from varied international media sources such as "The New York Times", "Voice of America News" (VOA), "The Diplomat".

VI. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Use of Authorization Legitimation

Authorization is commonly achieved by making reference to the authority of given laws, customs, or of an individual in "whom institutional authority of some kind is vested" (Van Leeuwen, 2007). In this context, legitimations were largely realized by invoking authority of official bodies and legal documents (impersonal authority), personal authority and Authority of tradition.

1. Authorization Legitimation through Personal and Impersonal Authority

Van Leeuwen (2007) emphasizes that legitimation through personal authority relies on a person's position and/or role within an institution, hence the belief fact that "those who hold or who are assigned a higher status in society are able to exert status-derived authority to (de) legitimate more than those holding a lower status" (Rivers & Ross, 2020, p.834). Van Leeuwen (2008, p.105-109) defines impersonal legitimation as legitimacy garnered from laws, rules, and regulations. In his words: "The answer to the unspoken 'why' question is then, not 'because I say so' or 'because Dr Juan says so' or 'because Penny Minter-Kemp does it', but 'because the laws (the rules, the policies, the guidelines, etc.) say so'" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.96). These concepts were repeatedly used by president Trump to legitimate his actions in the following excerpts:

- (1)...we are marshaling the full power of the federal government and the private sector to protect the American people (Trump, 2020A).
- (2). At the very start of the outbreak we instituted sweeping travel restrictions on China and put in place the first federally mandated quarantine in over 50 years (Trump, 2020A).
- (3). These restrictions will be adjusted subject to conditions on the ground... The White House has since clarified that the ban "only applies to human beings, not goods and cargo (Trump, 2020A).

In this case, the speaker legitimizes his position by making reference to official bodies/entities enshrined in the American law such as "the federal government" and "The White House" (impersonal authority). As seen below, Trump also refers to himself (personal authority) as the one vested with "institutional authority" (Van Leeuwen, 2008), and as the elected president of the US. This is achieved through the use of pronouns as part of the "structural tools speakers use to project their utterances as factual and credible" (Said, 2017, p.42):

- (4). Additionally, last week I signed into law an \$8.3 billion funding bill to help CDC [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] (Trump, 2020A).
- (5). My administration is coordinated directly with communities with largest outbreaks and we have issued guidance on school closures (Trump, 2020A).
- (6). I will be asking Congress to take legislative action to extend this relief (Trump, 2020A).
- (7)To this end I'm asking Congress to increase funding for this program by an additional \$50 billion (Trump, 2020A).
- (8) Using emergency authority, I will be instructing the Treasury Department to defer tax payments (Trump, 2020A).

As seen in the examples above, Trump repeatedly uses the personal pronouns "I," "I'm" and "my" to invoke his personal authority, thereby legitimizing his decisions. That is, His use of self-reference through the pronouns "I" and "my" serves to index his (personal) authoritative power to act on behalf of all Americans-owing to the institutional authority vested in him as the legal President of the United States of America.

From a rhetorical perspective, the framing in the propositions: "I signed into law an \$8.3 billion funding bill to help CDC," "I will be asking Congress to take legislative action to extend this relief," and "I will be instructing the Treasury Department to defer tax payments" in example (6) and (8) above, allows Trump to "position himself as a dedicated servant to the American people" (Rivers & Ross, 2020, p.839), who not only strives to cushion his fellow citizens against contracting the coronavirus disease, but also against the socio-economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic. In this sense, notice that Trump's speech comes ahead of the presidential elections slated for November 2020, meaning that his message on the coronavirus pandemic has provided the political platform he so much needs to mount his presidential campaign, his self-referencing through the repeated use of the personal pronoun "I" (i.e., signalling personal involvement in signing a "funding bill" and "instructing Treasury Department") is strategically used to

legitimate personal authority through which his aims are being pursued. In this context, the signed "Funding Bill" and call to "defer tax payments" are framed as legitimate forms of impersonal authority.

From the perspective of Reyes (2011), concept of altruism discussed in example (1) and (4)-(8) above are framed in ways aimed at depicting the speaker's actions/policy decisions as being meant for the common good of all the American citizens. For instance, example (4) makes it clear that the speaker has "signed into law an \$8.3 billion funding bill to help CDC [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]."

2. Authority of Tradition

As mentioned earlier, the Authority of tradition is invoked, particularly, through key words like "tradition," "practice," "custom," "habit" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.105-109) as a means of legitimation in political speeches. This type of legitimation is exclusively used in Trump's (2020 A) speech a couple of times (see the examples below):

(9) From the beginning of time nations and people have faced unforeseen challenges... This is the way it always was and always will be.

(10) Americans always rise to the challenge and overcome adversity.

In this context, for instance, the use of the underlined propositions above are used to legitimate the idea that people world over and America in particular, have customarily faced epidemics similar to the Covid-19 pandemic. Rhetorically speaking, therefore, Trump's framing style above is tailored to raise people's comfort level, to the idea that they will finally overcome the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, owing to their past victories and/or successful experiences with similar epidemics.

B. Legitimation through Rationalization

Legitimation through rationalization entails legitimation achieved by invoking the usefulness of a particular social practice or part of it, or 'the facts of life' (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p.105). This concept is better illustrated in the following analyses under the sub-headings: Instrumental rationalization, Theoretical rationalization and Rationalization legitimation through nominalizations.

1. Instrumental Rationalization

Instrumental rationalization is used to legitimize actions or decisions by invoking the needs or purposes they serve, or the positive impact they are likely to bring about. In the majority of the cases, the data analyzed in this paper involved the use of propositions followed by "purpose linking words" (Said, 2017) involving the infinitive "to," such as "to help," and "to protect," or "future oriented verb phrases" (Fairclough, 2003, p.55) like "will prevent" and "will significantly reduce".

(11) We are marshalling the full power of the federal government and the private sector to protect the American people (Trump, 2020A).

(12) We are cutting massive amounts of red tape to make antiviral therapy available (Trump, 2020A).

(13) I will never hesitate to take any necessary steps to protect the lives, health, and safety of the American people (Trump, 2020A).

(14) Last week I signed into law an \$8.3 billion funding bill to help CDC... fight the virus and support vaccines (Trump, 2020A).

(15) I'm confident that by counting and continuing to take these tough measures we will significantly reduce the threat to our citizens (Trump, 2020A).

(16) These treatments will significantly reduce the impact and reach of the virus (Trump, 2020A).

(17) To keep new cases from entering our shores, we will be suspending all travel from Europe to the United States for the next 30 days (Trump, 2020A).

(18). Smart action today will prevent the spread of the virus tomorrow (Trump, 2020A).

In example (11)-(14) above, Trump explains the purpose and/or reason why the actions taken "take the forms they do" (Van Leeuwen 2008), thereby legitimizing his policy actions by invoking the goals they serve. This is evident in the underlined phrases above beginning with the infinitive "to". According to van Dijk (1997, p.17), political discourses have a tendency of deploying future-oriented language (similar to Reyes' [2011] notion of hypothetical future). Based on this understanding, therefore, it is arguable that President Trump's use of a hypothetical future through a future-oriented language is aimed at triggering American people's positive hopes with regard to the future policy actions that their government has promised to accomplish in their on-going fight against the covid-19 pandemic. This can be evidenced in the use of the future oriented verb phrases like "will significantly reduce;" "will be suspending;" and "will prevent" in example (15)-(18) above. These are invoked in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, that is posing a challenge to people's survival, hence the need for urgent policy actions in the present to eliminate its negative effects in the future.

Fairclough (2003, p.5) emphasizes that the verb "help" is one among other linguistic features/verbs that can be deployed strategically to trigger value assumptions "about what is good or desirable. Therefore, Trump's use of the verb "help" in the underlined future-oriented verb phrases below could be said to be indicative of what he considers desirable, hence his ability to legitimate the structural conditions under which the actions he proposes will occur.

(19) These low-interest loans will help small businesses overcome temporary economic disruptions caused by the virus (Trump, 2020A).

(20) Acting with compassion and love, we will...help our fellow citizens, and emerge from this challenge (Trump, 2020A).

2. Theoretical Rationalization

Theoretical rationalization legitimation is realized by invoking specialists in particular fields who elucidate the domains of knowledge or understandings that can be used to legitimate particular actions or practices (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p.105). For instance, President Trump both explicitly and implicitly made it known that he consulted significant authorities/people in official bodies before deciding to take his current position regarding instituting travel restrictions to the USA. Examples in point include:

(21) After consulting with our top government health professionals, I have decided to take several strong but necessary actions to protect the health and well-being of all Americans (Trump, 2020A).

(22) Earlier this week I met with the leaders of health insurance industry who have agreed to waive all co-payments for coronavirus treatments.(Trump, 2020A).

(23). "...it is critical for you to follow the guidelines of your local officials who are working closely with our federal health experts and they are the best (Trump, 2020A).

In example (22), Trump uses both mythopoesis and rationalization legitimation to legitimize his claims. That is, the phrase "Earlier this week" is characteristic of a narrative/story, as Trump narrates to his audience about his prior meeting with "the leaders of health insurance industry." In this context, he legitimizes his views by implicitly signaling the fact that he had consulted with leaders of the aforesaid insurance bodies, who are specialists in particular areas of concern (theoretical rationalization) - before making his final decision. This view is also in line with Reyes (2011) emphasis that "it can be considered 'rational' to consult other sources and explore all the options before making a decision"(p. 876).

3. Rationalization Legitimation through Nominalizations

Fowler (1991) defines nominalization "as a process of syntactic reduction and/or transformation that reduces a whole clause to its nucleus, the verb, and turns that into a noun" (p.80). According to Fairclough (1992), nominalization entails the "conversion of a clause into a nominal or noun" (p.27). Further, Fairclough posits that nominalization together with passivization may be linked with ideologically significant features of text, such as the systematic mystification of agency (i.e. both allow the agent to be deleted). From this perspective, it is arguable that President Trump uses nominalization to represent viral infections characteristic of Covid-19 as "historically natural and even inevitable force" (Oddo, 2011), that Americans are circumstantially compelled to 'confront.' For instance, Trump uses the nominalization threat many times in his speech. In this sense, the threat posed by the virus is presented as a force that can only be defeated by "marshalling the full power of the federal government". In his words:

We will significantly reduce the *threat* to our citizens... From the beginning of time nations and people have faced unforeseen... dangerous health *threats*... Our banks and financial institutions are fully capitalized and incredibly strong... This vast economic prosperity gives us flexibility reserves and resources to handle any *threat* that comes our way (Trump 2020A)

This legitimation through the nominalization threat is further enhanced through the regular use of military-oriented terms (war metaphors) such as battle, confront/confronted, fight/fighting and defeat/defeating, which are also prevalent in President Xi Jinping's speeches:

(24)This is the most aggressive and comprehensive effort to confront a foreign virus in modern history (Trump, 2020A)

(25) China calls on the international community to increase political and financial support for WHO so as to mobilize resources worldwide to defeat the virus (Xi, 2020B).

(26) At this crucial juncture, to support WHO is to support international cooperation and the battle for saving lives (Xi, 2020B).

(27) We'll ultimately and expeditiously defeat this virus...(Trump, 2020A)

(28) Confronted by the ravages of COVID-19, the international community has not flinched (Xi, 2020B)

(29)Each of us has a role to play in defeating this virus. (Trump, 2020A)

(30)Solidarity and cooperation is our most powerful weapon for defeating the virus (Xi, 2020B)

(31)We are at a critical time in the fight against the virus (Trump, 2020A)

(32)From day one of our fight against the outbreak, we have put people's life health first (Xi, 2020A)

(33)"...last week I signed into law an \$8.3 billion funding bill to help CDC [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and other government agencies fight the virus... (Trump, 2020A).

(34) We must comprehensively step up international cooperation...so that humanity as one could win the battle against such a major infectious disease (Xi, 2020A)

(35) First, we need to be resolute in fighting an all-out global war against the COVID-19 outbreak (Xi, 2020A)

In the same vein, Trump uses the nominalization challenge a couple of times to represent the coronavirus as a type of trial and/or “inexorable test” (Oddo, 2011, p.301), just like those previously faced by Americans and which must be overcome to ensure a better future for all Americans:

From the beginning of time nations and people have faced unforeseen *challenges*...Americans always rise to the *challenge* and overcome adversity...Acting with compassion and love, we will heal the sick, care for those in need, help our fellow citizens, and emerge from this *challenge* (Trump, 2020A).

From this excerpt, the unmodalized assertion “Americans always rise to the challenge and overcome adversity,” serves to present “a heroic portrait of American history – one that does not leave space for alternative viewpoints” (Oddo, 2011, p.298), thereby legitimating his actions both in the present and the future.

Arguably, the utilization of the nominalization challenge performs the same “argumentative service” (Leff & Mohrmann, 1974, p.353) in Xi’s (2020A) speech. President Xi strategically uses the nominalization challenge, probably to image the coronavirus as a kind of “inexorable test” (Oddo, 2011, p.301):

the Covid-19 outbreak is spreading worldwide, posing enormous threat to life and health and bringing formidable *challenge* to global public health (Xi, 2020A).

and:

Now is a crucial moment, a time for us to rise up to *challenge* and act with swiftness (Xi, 2020A).

From a critical angle, it is arguable that political speakers, such as Xi and Trump are not neutral contributors to the discourses of Covid-19. They have vested interests in governance issues, including the management of the coronavirus pandemic. For instance, while Trump uses nationalistic and humanistic discourses as legitimation tools, his request for Americans to stop “politics” and “partisanship” is indicative of his response to oppositional politics/voices, which he undertakes to delegitimize:

We must put politics aside, stop the partisanship, and unify together as one nation and one family. (Trump, 2020A)

On the contrast, Xi takes a more international rather than domestic view by stressing the core Chinese diplomatic value of “a shared future for mankind” which was written into the UN Charter in 2017, to call on international cooperation and suggest its willingness to become an active player in the combat against Covid-19 to legitimize Chinese model:

Guided by the vision of building a community with *a shared future for mankind*, China will be more than ready to share our good practices, conduct joint research and development of drugs and vaccines, and provide assistance where we can to countries hit by the growing outbreak. (Xi, 2020A)

These oppositional interests, more specifically, are framed in a way suggestive of their likelihood to question or undermine his authority/policy decisions. Said otherwise, the communicative intention of invoking politics and partisanship is clear; authoritative figures of the oppositional political party (democrats) may disagree with his actions, and are therefore delegitimized because they are not supportive of his policy decisions. For instance, the presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee, Joseph Biden has regularly criticized Trump’s administration for failing to protect the American people from the coronavirus. This view is better expressed by the editors of The New York times, in their article titled: “Biden Says Trump ‘Surrendered’ to Coronavirus in Blistering Speech” (Stevens & Kaplan, 2020). In this context, Biden is said to have criticized Trump for “having surrendered to the virus,” arguing that “President Trump’s persistent failures” are the result of “the current circumstances” (Stevens & Kaplan, 2020) that American people are facing.

Along similar lines, Trump’s reference to the coronavirus as a foreign virus in example (24) above and President Xi’s praise for and call for international support for the WHO in example (25) and (26) are worth mentioning. According to Evaldsson (2005), “argumentation is largely prolonged through sustained contradiction or recycling of arguments” (p.770). In view of this, there has been a controversy regarding the origins of the coronavirus, in which case, Trump uses the opportunity to recycle the argument about the source of the virus, by refereeing to it as a foreign virus, to strengthen his stance against China. This is in view of the fact that Trump has repeatedly attacked China and called Covid-19 a Chinese virus, meaning that he could as well, in this instance, be attributing it to China. It is in this light that the Chinese government defended itself in its white paper by stressing that: “The novel coronavirus is a previously unknown virus. Determining its origin is a scientific issue that requires research by scientists and doctors” (The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China 2020). It is against this background, that President Xi emphasizes the need “to increase political and financial support for WHO,” probably to appease it (WHO), for covering it up against “blames for the global health crisis” (VOA, 2020). This explains Trump’s decision to withdraw and terminate the US’s funding for the WHO, claiming that the institution (WHO) is under “total control” by China, and has therefore “failed to make the requested and greatly needed reforms” (Trump, 2020B).

C. Legitimation through Mythopoesis

Mythopoesis entails legitimation by means of storytelling (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.117-118). In the examples below, the speaker uses narratives that highlight how things have been to legitimize his actions:

(36) As history has proven time and time again, Americans always rise to the *challenge* and overcome adversity (Trump, 2020).

(37) From the beginning of time nations and people have faced unforeseen *challenges* including large scale and very dangerous health threats (Trump, 2020).

Example (36) and (37) involve legitimation through mythopoesis and rationalization, the speaker uses narratives that highlight how things have been to legitimize his actions. By the same token, mythopoesis is strategically interwoven with theoretical rationalization to achieve the speaker's desired ends. In this case, the texts under discussion involve the speaker giving a narrative involving some rationalizing remarks.

A similar discursive practice of combining two or more legitimation strategies as the one stated above is realized through the use of emotive vocabulary (Bhatia, 2006, p.188), mythopoesis and topoi of history and numbers (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Reisigl and Wodak identify varied types of topoi that speakers/social actors use such as the topos of history, topos of finances/cost, topos of numbers and topos of responsibility. President Xi deployed mythopoesis to explain the emergence of and effects of the coronavirus on people's lives, by using the topoi of history and numbers to illustrate the large number of countries already affected by the virus, as well as the number of people that have been killed by the same:

Catching the world by surprise, COVID-19 has hit over 210 countries and regions, affected more than seven billion people around the world and claimed over 300,000 precious lives. *I* mourn for every life lost and express condolences to the bereaved families ... (Xi, 2020B).

Van Leeuwen (2007, p.95) emphasizes that speakers have a tendency of using scientific figures (i.e. topos of numbers attributed to given scientific findings-voices of expertise) "to endorse given propositions as being a good idea, hence their legitimation within given contexts of practice", This suggests that so as to convince his audience regarding the Chinese government's professed efforts to help contain and mitigate the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, President Xi opts to use the topos of numbers which carries some sense of recommendation for the stated actions, thereby legitimating them within their contexts of practice. This is evidenced through the use of the proposition: "210 countries" and "over 300,000 precious lives" to emphasize the number of people and countries affected by the coronavirus.

D. Legitimation through Appeal to Emotions

According to Bhatia (2006), emotive vocabulary plays a very important function in persuading and creating a sense of some drive or passion and support for a given cause and commonly used to amplify the speaker's "level of felt concern and commitment" (Aberi, 2016) to a particular issue. As such, the use of emotive vocabulary is realized in the examples above through the proposition "I mourn for every life lost and express condolences to the bereaved families" (Xi, 2020B), which not only serves to show and communicate the speaker's heartfelt concern and sympathies to families that have lost "300,000 precious lives" to the coronavirus, but also to justify his line of action against the deadly virus.

In this regard, upon asking his audience to fight against oppositional politics, President Trump opts to legitimize his actions through a path of shared emotions triggered through emotionally packed terms such as compassion, love, heal, care, help and well-being that are dialogically (Bakhtin, 1981) linked with the widely shared Christian/human values:

I will never hesitate to take any necessary steps to *protect the lives, health, and safety* of the American people.

I will always put the *well-being* of America first... Acting with *compassion and love*, we will *heal* the sick, *care* for those in need, *help* our fellow citizens, and emerge from this challenge *stronger* and more *unified* than ever before (Trump, 2020A)

From the perspective of CDA, these terms are discursively used to set off an emotional track and help in the audience, hence the speaker's ability to legitimize his political decisions and actions based on "the aftermath of such shared feelings."

From another perspective, emotional effect is realized by displaying a worrying and terrifying situation. This is evident in the extracts below:

From day one of our fight against the outbreak, we have mobilized the whole nation, set up collective control and treatment mechanisms and acted with openness and transparency... We have put up a strenuous struggle and made tremendous sacrifices. **Now the situation in China is moving steadily in a positive direction..** it is imperative for the international community to strengthen confidence, act with unity and work together in a collective response. We must comprehensively step up international cooperation and foster greater synergy so that humanity as one could win the battle against such a major infectious disease (Xi, 2020A)

In these excerpts, the speaker uses the intensifiers / evaluative adjectives (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p.98) strenuous, tremendous, positive denoting a positive evaluation, to "express their commitment and assurance in the truth value of their arguments" (Trajkova & Neshkovska, 2019. p.16).

E. Legitimation through Moral Evaluation

As already stated, moral evaluation entails the type of evaluation linked to the "discourses of moral value" (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.109), and is linguistically realized through the use of evaluative terms (e.g. adjectives and modals) and comparisons/relational strategies. These are well demonstrated in the discussion below under the sub-headings: Moral evaluation legitimation through modality and Moral evaluation legitimation through comparison.

1. Moral Evaluation Legitimation through Modality

In line with SFL/Grammar, Fowler (1986) defines modality as “the grammar of explicit comment, the means by which people express their degree of commitment to the truth of the propositions they utter, and their views on the desirability or otherwise of the states of affairs referred to” (p.131). Fairclough (2003, p.165-170) distinguishes between two types of modality (i.e. epistemic and deontic). He defines epistemic modality as the utterances that speakers make (i.e. assertions) to show their commitment to truth, while deontic modality as involving the speakers’ utilization of modal verbs to express their commitment to obligation and /or necessity (p.168). Notably, President Xi and Trump made use of modality that covers the three “values of modal commitment: high, median and low” (Koussouhoun & Dossoumou, 2015, p.29). In this case, to legitimize their claims, Xi and Trump made a repeated and recurrent use of the modals “must,” “should” and “will,” probably to express their moral obligation and high level of commitment and accountability of their governments. The underlined modals in the following examples are indicative of Presidents Xi and Trump’s strategic use of modality to legitimize their policy statements:

All must work together to build a strongest global network of control and treatment that the world has ever seen (Xi, 2020A)

(38) China will be more than ready to share our good practices (Xi,2020A)

(39) We must comprehensively step up international cooperation and foster greater synergy (Xi,2020A)

(40) We must do everything we can for COVID-19 control and treatment (Xi, 2020B)

(41) This work should be based on science and professionalism led by WHO...(Xi, 2020B)

(42) China will prevail over this outbreak and we all will embrace a brighter future for mankind (Xi ,2020A)

(43) China will provide US\$2 billion over two years to help with COVID-19 response (Xi, 2020B)

(44) To keep new cases from entering our shores, we will be suspending all travel from Europe to the United States (Trump, 2020A)

(45) Smart action today will prevent the spread of the virus tomorrow (Trump, 2020A)

(46) We made a life-saving move with early action on China. Now we must take the same action with Europe (Trump, 2020A)

(47) In general, older Americans should avoid nonessential travel in crowded areas (Trump, 2020A)

(48) Young and healthy people can expect to recover fully and quickly if they should get the virus (Trump, 2020A)

(49) We must put politics aside, stop the partisanship, and unify together as one nation and one family (Trump, 2020A)

(50) We must provide greater support for Africa. ...African countries in particular, have weaker public health systems. Helping them build capacity must be our top priority in COVID-19 response (Xi, 2020B)

From a critical perspective, the repeated use of the deontic modalities “must” and “should” and future oriented language signaled through the auxiliary verb “will” reflect the existing unfulfilled role in combating the on-going spread of the coronavirus pandemic. This is a rhetorical strategy aimed at pushing their audiences’ acceptance of the proposed actions, thereby legitimating them. From the standpoint of Reye’s (2011) concept of hypothetical future, van Dijk (1997) emphasizes that political discourses tend to espouse a future-oriented language. In this context, “will” is tailored to trigger the audiences’ positive hopes with regard to the future policy decisions that are hoped to counter the negative effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

However, as already mentioned, just like Trump’s case, President Xi’s speeches are largely meant to rebut criticisms against himself and the Chinese government for the wrongs done against members of the international community. For instance, his emphasis on the need to “provide greater support for Africa” in example (51) above can be said to be aimed at countering damaging media reports on the “discrimination and stigmatization” against African nationals in Guangzhou, China recently, as well as to avoid a backlash against Chinese nationals working in Africa–based on the alleged mistreatment of African nationals in China.

2. Moral Evaluation Legitimation through Comparison

Moral evaluation can be realized by analogies that express some moral evaluation through comparisons (Van Leeuwen, 2008). President Trump deployed direct comparisons to legitimize the key issues in his speech and showcase his supposedly swift action to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease in America. In this context, he not only explains how his comparably early policy interventions against Covid-19 ensured “fewer cases of the virus in the United States,” compared with those in Europe, but also the superiority of the American economy, health care and level of preparedness against the coronavirus, compared with other countries of the world:

(52)...and taking *early, intense action*, we’ve seen dramatically fewer cases of the virus in the *United States than are now present in Europe* (Trump, 2020A).

(53) *We have the greatest economy anywhere in the world by far*. Our banks and financial institutions are fully capitalized (Trump, 2020A).

(54) *No nation is more prepared or more resilient than the United States*. We have the best economy, the most advanced health care (Trump, 2020A).

In this regard, Trump is seeking to legitimate his policy actions against Covid-19 as being the best. From Van Leeuwen’s (2008) notion of moral evaluation, Trump could be said to be anticipating presenting the idea that his propositions are anchored in some kind of truth value owing to the state of affairs in the objective world. By the same token, by explicitly praising his administration’s approach-while implicitly downplaying the approaches of others,

Trump is aiming at delegitimizing their actions through negative evaluation-while validating his authority as “a means to justify his decision or action” (Said, 2017, p.20). This is in line with Van Leeuwen’s (2007) view that “comparisons in discourse almost always have a legitimacy or de-legitimacy function” (p.99).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

From an interdisciplinary approach to data analysis involving the use of analytical tools and concepts from argumentation (use of topoi), CDA, dialogism, SFL and rhetoric, this article has shown how the strategies: authorization (authority of personal and impersonal authority, tradition), rationalization (instrumental, and theoretical and nominalizations), mythopoesis (storytelling), appeals to emotions, and moral evaluation (legitimation through modality, evaluations and comparisons) were widely used in both speeches of Donald Trump (USA) and Xi Jinping (China) to justify particular forms of action against the coronavirus pandemic. Evident from the discussion above was also a common trend of combining two or more legitimation strategies, i.e., moral evaluation and mythopoesis through the use of topoi (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), including the use of nominalization and appeal to emotions realised by displaying a terrifying situation.

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