

Legitimization Under Extreme Scrutiny: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Netanyahu's 2024 UN General Assembly Speech

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Abstract

This study critically examines Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 2024 United Nations General Assembly speech, focusing on how language is strategically manipulated to justify actions widely referred to as genocide in Gaza by the United Nations, human rights organizations, and international legal bodies. Using van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, this study systematically examines Netanyahu's rhetorical strategies. The analysis focuses on lexicalization and metaphor as analytical tools, examining how these devices construct narratives of legitimacy and moral superiority while marginalizing opposing perspectives. The research addresses two key questions: How Netanyahu's use of binary oppositions legitimizes Israeli actions and marginalizes Palestinian perspectives in the UN speech, and how these linguistic choices reinforce a dichotomy between civilization and barbarism. The analysis reveals a stark irony: Netanyahu, while addressing allegations of genocide, uses the UN platform to criticize its own procedures and regulations, challenging global values and the legitimacy of the very institutions tasked with upholding international law. This rhetorical strategy not only seeks to shift blame and deflect accountability but also positions Israel as a defender of democracy and civilization in opposition to a supposedly barbaric adversary. The findings reveal that Netanyahu strategically uses language to mask documented breaches of international law, including extensive civilian casualties and the destruction of essential infrastructure. His rhetoric reduces the credibility of global institutions and justifies controversial policies, posing a significant challenge to the enforcement of international justice and the protection of human rights.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Speech, Genocide in Gaza, Legitimization Strategies, Israeli occupation

Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a powerful tool for examining the role of language in shaping perceptions and responses within contexts of war zones and political crises¹. Pioneered by scholars like Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak², CDA explores how discourse not only reflects but also constructs and perpetuates power dynamics and ideologies. In conflict situations, political leaders, media, and institutions often use strategic language to shape public opinion, legitimize military actions, or delegitimize opponents³. CDA aims to reveal these underlying intentions by analyzing elements like word choice, framing, metaphors, and narrative structures. For instance, in war-related discourse, terms like "freedom fighters" versus "terrorists" can significantly influence public perception, portraying one group as morally justified while framing the other as inherently villainous⁴.

In political crises, CDA provides insights into how language can be used to reinforce authority, justify controversial policies, or mobilize support, often through the creation of binary oppositions that simplify complex issues⁵. By examining how language shapes our understanding of war and crisis, CDA uncovers the mechanisms by which discourse can influence international responses, legitimize interventions, or marginalize certain groups. This approach ultimately underscores the pivotal role of language in both constructing social realities in war zones and shaping public responses to political crises. It also reveals the ideological forces that drive policy and action in these high-stakes contexts⁶.

The intersection of political discourse and international crisis presents unique challenges for discourse analysis, particularly when leaders must maintain legitimacy while facing serious allegations of international law violations (Bianchi, 2015)⁷. This study analyses Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 2024 United Nations General Assembly speech, delivered during a period of unprecedented international scrutiny following allegations of genocide in Gaza, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and mounting civilian casualties exceeding 43,000—10,000 of whom are under the rubble⁸.

¹ Nawaz et al. 2024.

² Amoussou and Allagbe 2018, 11–18.

³ Amrani, Mokadem, and Mohamdi 2024.

⁴ Jamel, Abdi, and Basheer 2024, 21–32.

⁵ Al-Khawaldeh, Rababah, and Al-Khawaldeh 2024, 17–34.

⁶ Alashqar 2024.

⁷ Bianchi 2015.

Walsh and Abu Elouf 2024.⁸

The Lancet, a leading medical journal, reported that the number of people who lost their lives exceeded 186,000, including people who lost their lives directly or indirectly⁹. Netanyahu's speech demonstrates how political leaders navigate what Fairclough¹⁰ identifies as competing demands for legitimacy, addressing domestic constituencies, international legal bodies, and global public opinion simultaneously by using the main topic "Us vs. Them".

The Gaza war has inflicted devastating humanitarian consequences on the population, leaving an indelible mark on civilians. The relentless airstrikes, ground incursions, and blockades have caused widespread destruction to homes, schools, hospitals, and vital infrastructure¹¹. The Israeli army has killed thousands of people, with most of the casualties being women and children. These actions are not recent but have been continuous since 1948, systematically targeting civilians, including women and children. This prolonged violence severely restricts the ability of civilians, especially women, to contribute to building a peaceful and prosperous future¹². Entire neighbourhoods have been reduced to rubble, displacing hundreds of thousands of residents and creating a severe humanitarian crisis. Beyond the physical devastation, the people of Gaza are subjected to collective punishment, a practice that flagrantly violates human rights and international law. The deliberate targeting of civilians and the blockade's restrictions on basic necessities such as food, clean water, and medical supplies have created conditions that defy the principles of humanity and justice. These actions not only contradict the international legal framework established after World War II but also threaten to dismantle the global order, reducing the world to a state of chaos where the strong prey on the weak with no regard for morals or the fundamental rights of human beings. The psychological toll on Gaza's population, particularly children, is profound, with many suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health issues¹³.

The international response to the Gaza war has been multifaceted but widely criticized as inadequate and ineffective in addressing the severity of the humanitarian crisis. While various countries and organizations have issued statements condemning the violence and calling for ceasefires, these actions have fallen short of meaningful intervention. The United States, with its significant political and diplomatic influence, has consistently shielded Israel in international

Khatib et al. 2024, 237–238.⁹

Fairclough 2010.¹⁰

Aljamal 2024, 120–124.¹¹

Al-Bal'awi 2023.¹²

Alali 2024.¹³

forums, undermining global efforts to hold it accountable for its actions. Despite countless reports of civilian casualties, including the killing of innocent children, the world has largely stood by, watching as one of the greatest humanitarian tragedies of the 21st century unfolds. Israel's strict control over aid deliveries, combined with international inaction, has left millions in Gaza without access to vital resources. This weak global response underscores a moral failure to stop the bloodshed and protect the most vulnerable, especially children, from the horrors of war¹⁴.

Consequently, this paper aims to uncover the sophisticated evolution of legitimation strategies, especially within what Bianchi¹⁵ describes as "legal-political discourse hybridization." The speech illustrates how political discourse can retain its impact despite overwhelming documentary evidence of civilian casualties and widespread infrastructure destruction. This dynamic prompts critical questions about the interplay between political rhetoric and accountability on the international stage. Finally, this paper investigates how Netanyahu's speech shape perceptions, influence global perspectives on Israel's occupation of Palestine, and potentially legitimize actions that would otherwise be contested in the international arena.

Problem Statement

The language and rhetoric used by political leaders in international forums play a significant role in shaping public perception and legitimizing policies, particularly in conflict-ridden regions. Prime Minister Netanyahu's 2024 United Nations General Assembly speech exemplifies this by framing Israel's occupation of Palestine, through a stark "Us vs. Them" dichotomy. This research examines how Netanyahu's lexical choices, metaphors, and binary opposition in his speech work to position Israel and its allies as champions of democracy and peace while portraying Palestinian groups and their allies as symbols of terror and regression. This dichotomous framing may influence international opinion and potentially justify contentious policies, impacting the narrative around Israel's occupation of Palestine. Understanding the mechanisms and implications of this rhetoric is crucial for analysing how language shapes geopolitical narratives and public discourse around complex conflicts.

While extensive research exists on political discourse analysis and crisis communication, there remains a significant gap in understanding how leaders maintain legitimacy when facing multiple simultaneous challenges: active military operations, international legal proceedings, and

Alali, *ibid.*¹⁴
Bianchi 2015.¹⁵

humanitarian crisis allegations. This study addresses this gap by examining how these elements intersect in a single high stakes address during a period of unprecedented international scrutiny.

Research Questions:

1. How does Netanyahu's use of binary oppositions legitimize Israeli actions and marginalize Palestinian perspectives in the UN speech?
2. In what ways do Netanyahu's lexical choices and metaphors portray Israel as a symbol of civilization and its adversaries as existential threats to the world peace?

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has emerged as a vital framework for examining how language shapes and perpetuates power relations, particularly in contexts of political crisis and conflict. The theoretical foundations for analyzing political discourse in crisis situations draw from several key scholarly traditions and approaches that inform our understanding of how political leaders maintain legitimacy during times of international scrutiny.

Theoretical Foundations of Critical Discourse Analysis in Political Crisis

The foundational work of Fairclough¹⁶ provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how discourse operates within social and political contexts, emphasizing that language choices not only reflect but actively reinforce power dynamics. This approach is particularly relevant when examining how political leaders maintain legitimacy during times of crisis. Building on this foundation, van Dijk¹⁷ introduces the socio-cognitive dimension of discourse analysis, highlighting how mental models and shared beliefs influence both the production and interpretation of political communication, especially in contexts of international conflict.

The analysis of legitimation strategies in political discourse has been significantly advanced by van Leeuwen¹⁸, who outlines how language choices serve to justify actions and policies, particularly in controversial contexts. This framework is especially pertinent when examining how political leaders navigate international criticism while maintaining domestic support. Wodak and Meyer¹⁹ further develop this understanding by emphasizing the role of historical and

Fairclough, *ibid.*¹⁶
van Dijk 2015, 466–485.¹⁷
van Leeuwen 2008.¹⁸
Wodak and Meyer 2015¹⁹

contextual factors in shaping discourse strategies, particularly in situations of political conflict where multiple audiences must be addressed simultaneously.

Binary Opposition and Political Discourse

The construction of binary oppositions in political discourse has been extensively analyzed by Charteris-Black²⁰, who demonstrates how metaphorical language can be deployed to create and reinforce ideological divisions. His work reveals how political leaders strategically employ language to construct clear distinctions between in-groups and out-groups, particularly during times of conflict. This perspective is crucial for understanding how political leaders frame conflicts in terms of "Us versus Them." Wodak²¹ builds on this by examining how right-wing political discourse often employs such binary constructions to legitimize controversial policies and marginalize opposition, a pattern that becomes particularly evident in crisis communication.

Legitimation Strategies in International Forums

In the context of international forums, political leaders navigate increasingly complex legitimation challenges. Charteris-Black²² explores how metaphor serves as a powerful tool for political persuasion, particularly when leaders need to justify controversial actions to multiple audiences simultaneously. His analysis reveals how carefully chosen metaphors can bridge cultural and ideological divides while reinforcing desired political narratives. This understanding is complemented by van Leeuwen's²³ detailed analysis of legitimation strategies in discourse and communication, which provides a framework for understanding how political actors maintain authority while facing international scrutiny.

Crisis Communication and International Law

The intersection of political discourse and international law presents unique challenges for discourse analysis. Bianchi²⁴ examines how political leaders navigate the complex relationship between political rhetoric and international legal frameworks, particularly when facing allegations of violations. His work illuminates how discourse strategies adapt to maintain legitimacy while addressing legal challenges in international forums. This perspective is

Charteris-Black 2014²⁰
Wodak and Meyer, *ibid.*²¹
Charteris-Black 2011²²
van Leeuwen 2008²³
Bianchi, *ibid.*²⁴

particularly relevant when analyzing speeches delivered at the United Nations, where leaders must balance domestic political interests with international legal obligations.

Contemporary Developments in Political Discourse

Recent work by Wodak and Krzyżanowski²⁵ has advanced our understanding of how political discourse operates in increasingly polarized international contexts. Their analysis of right-wing populist discourse provides valuable insights into how political leaders construct narratives that resist factual challenges while maintaining support among their bases. The strategic use of metaphor in political discourse, as analyzed by Chilton²⁶, reveals how language choices can frame conflicts in ways that resonate with deeper cultural and historical narratives, particularly in situations of international crisis.

The literature reveals a complex interplay between discourse strategies, legitimation techniques, and binary oppositions in political crisis communication. While scholars like Fairclough, van Dijk, and Wodak have established robust frameworks for analyzing political discourse, there remains a need to understand how these elements function collectively in unprecedented situations of simultaneous military, legal, and humanitarian challenges. The unique context of Netanyahu's 2024 UN speech—delivered during active conflict, international legal proceedings, and unprecedented civilian casualty allegations—provides an opportunity to examine how traditional discourse strategies adapt to maintain legitimacy under extreme scrutiny.

Building on these theoretical foundations, particularly van Leeuwen's²⁷ work on legitimation and Charteris-Black's²⁸ analysis of metaphor in political discourse, this study employs a methodological approach that specifically examines the linguistic mechanisms used to construct and maintain legitimacy in crisis situations. The following methodology section outlines how this research systematically analyzes Netanyahu's speech through the lens of lexicalization and metaphor, providing insight into the evolution of political discourse strategies in contemporary international crisis situations.

Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017, 471–484²⁵

Chilton 2003.²⁶

van Leeuwen, *ibid.*²⁷

Charteris-Black, *ibid.*²⁸

Methodology

The researcher adopts a qualitative approach, following Creswell & Creswell's²⁹ interpretive descriptive method, to analyze how Netanyahu constructs legitimacy amid accusations of war crimes. This study examines Netanyahu's rhetoric in addressing military operations, legal challenges, and humanitarian concerns. Despite facing calls for accountability, he frames his actions as essential for Israel's security. This aligns with Tracy's³⁰ emphasis on analyzing how language shapes social and political realities in high-stakes contexts. This paper specifically examines Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's September 2024 speech at the United Nations, focusing on the analytical lenses of lexicalization and metaphor. The analytical framework draws on Miles et al.'s³¹ approach to qualitative data analysis, particularly their methods for examining rhetorical devices and discourse patterns. By studying Netanyahu's language choices and rhetorical devices, this study seeks to uncover how discourse is used to construct ideological meanings and shapes perceptions of social and political realities. The paper explores only Netanyahu's lexical choices, metaphors, and the implications of these elements within his speech. Thus, the combined analysis of lexicalization and metaphor reveals the nuanced ways in which discourse legitimizes or critiques social and political actions, subtly shaping a reality that resonates with underlying ideological goals. This analytical approach builds on Denzin and Lincoln's³² constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes how meaning is created through language and social interaction. The study's analysis will be structured around these categories to systematically explore the ideological implications of Netanyahu's language choices.

Analytical Framework

This paper adopts van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which integrates cognitive psychology with discourse analysis to explore how language constructs and reinforces social power relations, ideologies, and group identities³³. Central to van Dijk's framework are mental models, which represent socially shared beliefs and attitudes that influence both the production and interpretation of discourse. Binary oppositions, particularly the

Creswell and Creswell 2018.²⁹

Tracy 2020.³⁰

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2020.³¹

Denzin and Lincoln 2018.³²

van Dijk 2014.³³

"Us vs. Them" dichotomy, are crucial in van Dijk's analysis, simplifying complex social realities into opposing categories that strengthen group identities and reinforce ideological divides.

Furthermore, these oppositions are often embedded in lexical choices, metaphors, and syntactic structures, such as contrasting terms like "freedom fighters" versus "terrorists," which serve to polarize groups. In this paper, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach and binary oppositions is applied to analyze Netanyahu's 2024 UN speech. This analysis focuses on how lexicalization and metaphor are used to create in-group and out-group dynamics, reinforcing ideological positions. By examining these discursive strategies, this study aims to uncover how the speech constructs ideological meanings that contribute to shaping social and political perceptions within an international context.

Data Analysis

This section aims to examine Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech at the United Nations General Assembly, focusing on the prominent theme of establishing an "Us vs. Them" topic. The analysis explores Netanyahu's lexical choices, metaphors, and the implications of these elements within his speech. Specifically, the researcher addresses a key theme underpinning his discourse strategy: framing Israel and the United States positively as the "in-group" while depicting the Palestinians, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran as the "out-group." This framing supports Netanyahu's attempt to justify the genocide's atrocities and the conditions under which Palestinians live, and to create a legal basis for sustaining Israeli war and occupation.

Netanyahu's rhetorical choices, including specific language, stylistic devices, and strategic framing, serve to reinforce political narratives, appeal to targeted audiences, and lend credibility to contentious policies. By focusing on the dominant theme of "Us vs. Them," we can assess how Netanyahu's language bolsters this dichotomy. Netanyahu often uses pronouns like "we" and "our" when speaking about Israel, its people, and allies, crafting an in-group identity for Israel and those who support it. In contrast, words like "they" and "them" can refer to adversaries, particularly in reference to entities seen as threats, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, or states that oppose Israel's actions.

Constructing an "Us vs Them" Dichotomy

Using binary rhetoric, Netanyahu tends to present Israel and its allies as protectors of democracy and peace, while countries like Iran—and occasionally Palestinian authorities or groups such as Hamas—are portrayed as threats. This approach emphasizes a "civilizational" conflict narrative,

which frames the Middle East in terms of allies and adversaries, aligning with Western ideological perspectives.

Binary opposition theory, often associated with structuralism, explores how concepts and identities are constructed through contrasts or "oppositions." This theory is well-suited for analysing Netanyahu's speech, as he clearly delineates between two opposing sides. The "Us vs. Them" dichotomy is strongly present, primarily between Israel (and its allies) and Iran and its proxies, with Israel representing civilization, peace, and democracy, while Iran and groups like Hamas and Hezbollah are portrayed as embodying terror, tyranny, and violence.

Lexicalization

Here's an analysis of key oppositions in the speech using certain lexical choices:

Peace vs. Terror

Netanyahu positions Israel as a peaceful nation striving to protect civilization and maintain democratic values. He speaks of Israel's ongoing efforts to secure peace, particularly through partnerships in the Middle East, such as the Abraham Accords and potential normalization with Saudi Arabia. Through phrases like "**peace-seeking**" or "**stable democracy**," Netanyahu reinforces Israel's position as a positive actor, deserving of international support, especially from the West.

Netanyahu portrays Israel and its allies as symbols of peace, civilization, and moral righteousness. Words like "**peace**," "**prosperity**," "**hope**," and "**blessing**" are used to describe Israel's vision and relationships. This lexicon is paired against terms depicting Iran and groups like Hamas and Hezbollah as "**savage**," "**terrorists**," "**murderers**," and "**monsters**," intensifying the moral judgment against them.

Netanyahu highlights Israel's willingness to pursue peace to garner international support and sympathy. This phrasing casts Israel in a positive light as a peace-seeking party, while simultaneously delegitimizing Palestinians by implying they lack the intent to work toward a peace agreement.

Netanyahu frequently frames Israel's actions as morally justified, often casting Israel as the victim or as upholding democratic values. This dichotomy of Israel as righteous and opponents as morally inferior can foster a sense of legitimacy for Israel's actions.

In contrast, Hamas and its allied forces are depicted as relentless purveyors of violence, bringing "**the curse of terror**" to the region. The use of vivid language, such as "**savage enemies**" and "**murderous monsters**," reinforces the idea of an enemy that is not only hostile to Israel but poses a global threat.

Civilization vs. Barbarism

In Netanyahu's speech, Israel is described with language that conveys modernity and progress, such as "**prosperity**," "**future**," and "**cooperation**." The enemies, by contrast, are frequently referred to using terms like "**barbaric**," "**dark age**," and "**terror**." Netanyahu's description of Hamas's actions on October 7th – "**burned babies alive**," "**savagely murdered**" – evokes visceral horror. The use of such binary language is evident in the speech, where the casualties and destruction faced by the in-group are emphasized, while the suffering of out-groups is downplayed.

Netanyahu's speech portrays Israel as part of a shared "**common civilization**" that values human rights, law, and prosperity. Israel is presented as a beacon of these values within a hostile environment, advocating for moral principles and civilized conduct. Netanyahu often portrays the Israeli settler-colonialism through a security lens rather than addressing it in terms of sovereignty or human rights. This framing can serve to justify controversial policies, such as genocide, atrocities, settlements or military action, as necessary defensive measures rather than violations of international law. By emphasizing "**security**," Netanyahu frames Israel's policies as necessary responses to "**terrorist threats**" from Palestinian groups. This language downplays the broader socio-political dimensions of the conflict and may marginalize Palestinian calls for statehood or rights. Terms like "**security**" and "**defence**" make Israel's actions appear as a legitimate response rather than an aggressive stance.

While Iran and groups like Hamas and Hezbollah are associated with "**barbarism**," as Netanyahu describes actions such as kidnapping, beheading, and burning civilians alive. He suggests that their conduct is "**reminiscent of the Nazi Holocaust**," a metaphor that strengthens the barbaric image of "Them" in opposition to Israel's humane values. Iran and Hamas, are portrayed as a tyrannical, regressive force aiming to drag the region back into a "**dark age**" of oppression.

Good vs. Evil

By casting Israel as a defender of both its own citizens and broader democratic values, Netanyahu frames Israel's fight as inherently good and just. Phrases like "**we're defending ourselves, but we're also defending you**" establish Israel as a protective force against shared threats. Netanyahu represents Israel and its allies as symbols of peace, civilization, and moral righteousness. Words like "**peace,**" "**prosperity,**" "**hope,**" and "**blessing**" are used to describe Israel's vision and relationships. This lexicon is paired against terms depicting Iran and groups like Hamas and Hezbollah as "**savage,**" "**terrorists,**" "**murderers,**" and "**monsters,**" intensifying the moral judgment against them. For example, Netanyahu speaks of Israel's actions as defending "**our common civilization,**" framing the conflict as not just for Israel's survival but for a larger moral cause. So, legitimizing Israel's genocides, atrocities and actions in Gaza and the Middle East is Netanyahu's ultimate goal.

Iran and its proxies are described as the embodiment of evil, seeking to "**destroy our way of life**" through violent extremism. Netanyahu argues that the United Nations and the International Criminal Court (ICC) exhibits a "moral confusion" in failing to recognize this distinction, particularly when they criticize Israel's actions against terrorism. This serves to further reinforce the dichotomy, asserting that Israel is on the "good" side of history.

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu's speech reveals a strategy to shield Israel from accusations of war crimes in the Gaza Strip, framing the Israeli crimes as "defence." He simultaneously justifies human rights violations while emphasizing themes of peace, security, and human rights. Netanyahu attempts to build rapport with his audience by using inclusive language like "we" and "our", suggesting that threats to Israel's peace also endanger global peace. He frames Israel's actions as defensive responses to Palestinian actions, focusing on the harm and damage suffered by Israeli citizens due to Palestinian behaviour. Netanyahu's portrayal is one-sided: he holds Hamas consistently accountable for violence against Israelis, while downplaying Israel's responsibility in such acts. The concept of "Otherness" is prominent, underscoring the marginalization of Palestinians throughout the speech.

Metaphor

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's 2024 UN speech employs numerous metaphors, effectively framing Israel's current struggle in stark, morally charged terms. Here are some key uses of metaphor and their implications:

“Curse of October 7th” vs. “Blessing of Peace”

Netanyahu contrasts the "curse" associated with the Hamas aggression on Israel on October 7th with the "blessing" of potential peace, particularly through normalization with Arab nations. This metaphor of curse and blessing ties back to Biblical language, evoking an eternal moral struggle between good and evil.

The “Map of Curse, Arc of Terror” vs. “Map of Blessing”

The "map of curse" and "map of blessing" serve as powerful metaphors in Netanyahu's discourse. These maps are loaded with connotations that align regions, alliances, and policies with either positive or negative moral valence. The "map of curse" likely depicts alliances and locations associated with Iran and its allies, symbolizing chaos, danger, and instability. Conversely, the "map of blessing" would presumably highlight nations aligned or willing to cooperate with Israel, representing security, peace, and prosperity. By contrasting a "map of blessing" (a land bridge connecting Israel and its Arab allies) with an "arc of terror" created by Hamas and Iranian influence, Netanyahu frames geopolitical alliances in highly symbolic terms. This juxtaposition, illustrated by two maps he describes, offers a choice between a path to peace and cooperation or one leading to "darkness," war, and instability.

Hamas and Hezbollah as “Terror Army” and “Curse”

The language used to describe these groups as a "terror army" or the "curse of October 7th" amplifies their threat, turning them into almost mythic adversaries that threaten not only Israel but “civilization” itself. This framing portrays Israel’s conflict as a defence of universal values, not merely national interests.

“Arc of Darkness” and “House of Darkness” (United Nations)

Netanyahu refers to the UN as a “house of darkness” filled with "anti-Semitic bile" and double standards against Israel. This metaphor casts the UN as morally corrupt and a place that unjustly vilifies Israel, portraying Israel as a beacon of light and truth in contrast to the institutional bias he perceives there.

Towards the end of his speech, Netanyahu uses **“Torch of Israel”** and **“Eternity of Israel”** to affirm Israel’s resilience and unwavering presence in history. He quotes the Bible to underscore the timelessness and inevitability of Israel’s existence and survival, which he likens to a torch that will "forever shine bright." This imagery reinforces his message that Israel’s struggle is part

of a larger, eternal narrative. Furthermore, Netanyahu likens the idea of including Hamas in a post-war Gaza to "allowing the defeated Nazis in 1945 to rebuild Germany." This metaphor positions Hamas as an irredeemable force of evil, drawing historical parallels that resonate emotionally, especially in the context of Jewish history.

“The Long Arm of Israel”

The metaphor of the "long arm of Israel" serves to illustrate the extent of Israel's military and intelligence capabilities. This phrase suggests not only a wide-ranging ability to strike but also Israel's vigilance and commitment to proactive defence across the region. The idea that "there is no place in Iran or the entire Middle East" beyond Israel's reach creates an image of omnipresence and deterrence. It suggests that Israel's military power is both physically pervasive and symbolically omnipotent, aimed at containing perceived threats wherever they may arise. This metaphor contributes to the "Us vs. Them" structure, portraying Israel as a vigilant guardian prepared to protect itself and its allies from "malignant" forces.

By using these vivid metaphors, Netanyahu not only heightens the emotional impact of his speech but also reframes Israel's struggles as an archetypal battle between light and darkness, blessing and curse, civilization, and barbarism. This approach seeks to universalize Israel's narrative, positioning it within a framework that resonates deeply with his audience's values and historical consciousness. Also, he seeks to justify and legitimize his war crimes in Gaza.

Discussion

Netanyahu's 2024 UN speech employs a binary narrative to portray Israel as morally righteous and progressive, while casting adversaries like Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah as symbols of barbarism and terror. This approach, often used in political discourse, resonates with strategies described by van Dijk³⁴, where powerful actors construct narratives that present their actions as protective and necessary, thus validating controversial policies under the guise of security. Netanyahu's use of terms such as 'blessing' and 'curse' aligns Israel with universal values like peace and democracy, a tactic that mirrors what Fairclough³⁵ calls 'mythopoesis', the use of mythical language to establish a moral high ground, appealing to Western audiences by invoking shared democratic ideals.

Van Dijk, *ibid*³⁴
Fairclough, *ibid*³⁵

Further, Netanyahu's framing aligns with research on the construction of oppositional identities in political discourse³⁶, where the negative portrayal of an opposing group serves to reinforce the speaker's moral authority. By casting Palestinian groups as terroristic "monsters," Netanyahu not only justifies Israel's defensive actions but also delegitimizes Palestinian aspirations. This approach aligns with previous findings, such as those of Wodak³⁷, who observed that portraying adversaries as existential threats strengthens the speaker's narrative of righteousness, aiming to reduce public tolerance for neutrality or opposition.

In a comparative sense, Netanyahu's use of metaphor and biblical language, such as "curse" and "blessing," resembles what Chilton³⁸ describes as "moral polarization." This framework, where conflicts are presented as good vs. evil, can reduce complex conflicts to morally charged, binary oppositions. Such polarizing language, while effective in garnering support, has been critiqued for sidelining nuanced discourse and hindering peace efforts by oversimplifying the political realities involved. The exclusionary nature of Netanyahu's rhetoric may resonate with his immediate audience but aligns with findings that such strategies often reinforce deep-seated divisions and reduce the likelihood of diplomatic resolution³⁹.

In sum, Netanyahu's discourse uses binary opposition not only to justify Israel's actions but also to position neutrality as morally indefensible. This reflects common themes in critical discourse studies, which argue that framing conflicts as existential struggles simplifies the narrative, leaving little room for balanced engagement. Consequently, while Netanyahu's approach might rally immediate support, it risks undermining longer-term peace efforts by polarizing perspectives and intensifying hostilities—a result that mirrors the conclusions of several discourse scholars who emphasize the dangers of such binary framing in conflict resolution.

Conclusion

This study has shown how Prime Minister Netanyahu's 2024 United Nations General Assembly speech employs rhetorical strategies to create an "Us vs. Them" framework. Through lexical choices, metaphors, and binary oppositions, Netanyahu portrays Israel as a champion of peace, democracy, and civilization. In a stark contrast, he presents adversaries as threats to global stability. His strategic use of language serves to legitimize Israel's actions and policies while

Wodak, *ibid*³⁶

Wodak, *ibid*³⁷

Chilton, *ibid.*³⁸

Wodak & Krzyżanowski, *ibid*³⁹

marginalizing Palestinian perspectives and rights. This binary framing aligns Israel with universally positive values and its opponents with morally negative traits, fostering a dichotomy that simplifies complex political realities for his audience.

This study of Netanyahu's 2024 UN speech reveals how political discourse adapts to maintain legitimacy. It does so even when faced with serious international law's violations and extensive documentation of civilian casualties. The analysis demonstrates sophisticated evolution in crisis communication and legitimation strategies which have significant implications for our understanding of political discourse in contemporary international contexts. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Netanyahu's speech underscores how language can shape the international opinion on the Israeli military occupation and legitimizing contentious policies, illustrating the profound influence of rhetoric in the discourse surrounding global conflicts.

Finally, this study demonstrates how political discourse has evolved to maintain legitimacy even in contexts of extensively documented violations of international law. While this reveals the sophistication of contemporary political communication, it also raises profound questions about accountability in international relations. As Wodak and Krzyżanowski⁴⁰ argue, the ability of political discourse to resist factual challenges may require new approaches to ensuring accountability in international contexts.

Wodak & Krzyżanowski, *ibid*⁴⁰

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