

**Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of Russian  
And Ukrainian Presidential Political Speeches**

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## Abstract

This research addresses a significant topic about the transformation of language into a communication purpose. The study examines two speeches delivered by politicians Putin and Zelensky. These two speeches were intentionally chosen to correspond with the period after the declaration of war. The objective of the current study is to examine the discoursal function of transitivity in both political speeches of Putin and Zelensky. The objective is to elucidate transitivity functions manifested in the political speeches of Putin and Zelensky. These issues were conveyed via transitivity methods. The Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, established in 2014, was utilized to examine language function and structure. Significant data indicate that the six processes were employed, with material, relational and mental processes occupying the top ranks in both speeches.

## 1. Introduction

A presidential address can be classified as a sort of discourse, and the type of language that is employed in a certain context is referred to as discourse (Nunan, 1993). Analyzing a discourse entails investigating the context of the text's production, encompassing the location, time, and circumstances, alongside the text itself. Thus, experts assert that discussion is more advantageous and impactful in contemporary culture. The language of dialogue transcends the sentence structure. It may mirror the dominant socioeconomic conditions of the era in which the artwork was produced. Discourse analysis is an approach that illustrates the linguistic patterns inside a document, while also taking into account the social and cultural environment of its production (Paltridge, 2008). Grammatical selections, as articulated by Halliday (1994), act to convey meaning in language and are associated with its ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions. An analytical examination of text structure, sentence design, phrase grammar, and vocabulary can show a link between linguistic choices and greater ideological concerns. Researchers frequently examine topic progression, modality, transitivity patterns, cohesion, and coherence in discourse analysis. This analysis entails distinguishing between provided information (theme) and novel information (rheme), reflecting responders within a clause, and employing explicitly and implicitly connected terminology. Research in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) has mostly concentrated on analyzing transitivity as an element of the interpersonal meta-function across many discourse types, including conservative, legal, media, literary, academic, political, and medical contexts. Furthermore, these research have examined the application of transitivity in modern English (Aboh, 2012). This study examines the speeches of the presidents of Russia and Ukraine through the lens of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). It specifically delineates Halliday's three purposes, emphasizing the Ideational meta-function, which is illustrated by Transitivity processes that characterize

the formal attributes of these speeches. The primary aim is to analyze the interrelations of language, ideology, and power, and how these elements are exploited in presidential addresses to persuade audiences to embrace and promote their philosophies and programs. This study is significant and useful in linguistics, particularly in critical discourse analysis. It provides a significant scholarly contribution to both the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. This paper provides a thorough examination of transitivity in specific political speeches, emphasizing the theoretical dimensions. The study offers specific examples and analyses that examine the practical use of the theoretical framework in a pragmatic and scientific way. This delineates the process for assessing any part of spoken communication as referred by Halliday & Matthiessen's Model (2014). This study use transitivity analysis to elucidate the speaker's intentions. Systemic Functional Linguistics includes the examination of transitivity analysis as the initial component of its framework, which may be comprehended in three unique dimensions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. An utterance is utilized to reflect experiential patterns in accordance with Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) transitivity framework. The analysis is confined to the political rhetoric present in two presidential speeches by Putin and Zelensky, sourced from the period of 2022 to 2023, as this timeframe significantly influences global events.

## 2. The Literature Review

Certain researchers, such as Anggraini (2018), have examined transitivity in political discourse, focusing on the political ideologies present in Donald Trump's statements during the 45th United States presidential election. This study utilizes a descriptive-qualitative approach to clarify how transitivity processes may reveal ideology. The primary objective of Anggraini's (2018) study is to investigate Donald Trump's talks about transitivity and modality. This study illustrates how Donald Trump, as the 45th President of the United States, employs language to convey his political ideology during his talks. The primary objective of Chalimah and Sumarlam's (2017) research is that to examine the political speech of Indonesian President Jokowi (Joko Widodo) concerning transitivity and modality. Ultimately, in the political sphere, Al Hyali's 2022 purpose is to elucidate the types of processes and the roles of actors in the discourses of Obama and Biden employed to attain ideational meaning. The study also seeks to determine how the second meta functional aspect is manifested through modality choices within clause structure which is interpersonal meaning. The data which is utilized in the study is derived from the speeches of Obama and Biden. This study differs from other research in that it utilizes the political speeches of Putin and Zelensky as its data source. Furthermore, the primary aim is to discern the transitivity processes and their operational mechanisms in both political speeches. Consistent with the present study, the principal findings of Chalimah and Sumarlam (2017), Anggraini

(2018), Mobarak (2021), and Al Hyali (2022) indicated that material process , relational process, and mental process are the predominant types employed in the analyzed political discourse.

### 3- Transitivity in Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic functional linguistics is founded on the contributions of the main figures such as J.R. Firth and Branislav Malinowski. The SFL model of language architecture is extensive, evolving from a broad representation of language in context to a more intricate depiction, emphasizing the description of lexicograms and incorporating additional semiotic elements. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is extensively employed in global language education and discourse analysis. Although SFL emphasizes mental practice, it is intricately linked to sociology. Halliday perceived language as a system that associates meaning with form through a system of signs, prioritizing linguistic function over structure. The connection between semantics and grammar is founded on three domains: interpersonal, ideational, and textual meta-functions. Interpersonal relationships are established by semantic methods such as persuasion, solicitation, and insistence. Grammar offers a fundamental resource for these interactions by introducing clause structures known as mood. The primary distinction in mood is between "indicative" and "imperative" sentences, each possessing distinct systemic characteristics. The former offers numerous options to distinguish between past, present, and future tenses, as well as various persons, whereas the latter possesses a singular tense and one person (the addressee). The distinction between indicative and imperative clauses represents the most fundamental aspect of this grammatical domain. Indicative clauses may be declarative or interrogative, tagged or untagged, and can be classified as either WH-type or Yes/No type. The experiential meta-function is manifested in transitivity. It establishes a foundational semantic framework that encompasses the entirety of experience and distills it into a concise enumeration of manageable process categories. Transitivity system constitutes a component of the ideational meta-function. The experiential meta-function concentrates on the phrase level, where some processes are perceived as embodying human experience in reality. The processes can represent acts, events, emotions, or states of existence that occur in reality (Halliday, 1985, p.101). A transitivity process comprises three primary components: the participant (who engages with the circumstances and executes the process), the process (conceived as a series of actions), and the circumstances (which encompass time, location, method, cause, accompaniment, matter, and role). All transitivity process types encompass these three features. Halliday identifies six distinct sorts of processes. He commences with the material process, as it constitutes the broadest category with the most extensive cross-cutting opportunities. The fundamental processes of the English transitivity system are encapsulated by the initial three

groups of clauses. Table one illustrates that each entry possesses a distinct participant and intrinsic significance. The concept of transitivity has been defined multiple times in the history of linguistics. Naess (2007, p.1) observes that due to the essential nature of transitivity in language structure, a substantial body of scholarly work has been produced examining it as a grammatical phenomenon. The extensive research on the subject indicates that this global phenomenon is more widely recognized than it truly is. Sudarto (2011, p.349) defines transitivity as the grammatical framework of the clause that facilitates the representation of our experiences regarding a process, the persons directly engaged in that process, and the surrounding circumstances. The verb transmits meaning from the subject to the predicate (Hancock, 2005, p.91). It functions to characterize the verb and its object alongside the entire clause (Thompson, 2004, p.88–89). Moreover, the core principle of the transitivity system posits that our most profound understanding of reality is constituted by the activities of doing, occurring, feeling, and being. The semantic structure of the language organizes these occurrences, while clause grammar articulates them (Kondowe, 2014, p. 176). Lyons (1968, p.350) proposes a classification system based on the number of nominals associated with verbs, which he considered the central elements of the phrase.

A transitive clause is considered as the one that has both a direct object and a subject, in accordance with traditional definitions of transitivity as defined by Wang (2015). In this regard, they may illustrate that the action transitions from the subject to the object through the verb. Transitive and intransitive phrases can be readily recognized, as per the description. Consequently, few issues contradict the traditional notion of grammar. Sentences such as "I hear you," classified as transitive, do not align with the concept of the verb "passing over"; instead, the action—if an action is indeed indicated—occurs in the opposite direction. Nonetheless, this traditional, unequivocal definition of transitivity results in several complex, unresolved issues and presents an ambiguous perspective. In contrast, LaPalombara (1976, p.42) designates transitive and intransitive verbs as "verbs of action." The latter necessitate only a mandatory adverb to convey their meaning, or they may not require any words whatsoever. Conversely, "verbs that denote an action which not only impacts the patient but also inevitably induces a change in it" are referred to as transitive verbs. Consider (kill, annihilate, fracture, distort, etc.) as an illustration. The notion of transitivity is commonly employed to classify verbs according to their possession of an object.

#### 4. Political Speeches

Political discourse, as articulated by Van Dijk (1998), is not a distinct genre but a category of genres defined by the political domain. Consequently, certain genres associated with politics including political speeches, legislative discussions, electoral debates, political programs, and governmental



dialogues. To persuade and convince audiences, politicians with societal responsibilities employ a form of communication known as political language. Political speeches exert a direct influence on multiple domains, including social, cultural, military, economic, and educational sectors. In other words, they periodically address topics such as war, peace, stability, or conflict during their discussions. Political discourse is essential as it influences and determines the nation's future. Schaffner (1996) posits that political speech is a type of discourse that can be categorized according to two criteria: thematic and functional. Politics encompasses a diverse array of activities and events. Consequently, political speech functions as a medium for their expression and is influenced by historical and cultural viewpoints. It is thematic due to its focus on subjects and issues largely associated with politics, including political relations, acts, and concepts, and functional as it serves several purposes arising from diverse political activities and events. Language has transcended its role as a mere assemblage of symbols and codes, evolving into a potent tool for politicians. Thus, it is difficult to separate politics from language. Schäffner emphasized that politics is viewed as a collaborative effort to address conflicts of interest concerning freedom, authority, wealth, and analogous issues. Nonetheless, politicians can attain their particular goals through persuasion, rational argumentation, fallacious strategies, intimidation, or any other methods they consider effective. Language has a crucial part in political actions, accompanying and influencing them at various stages (Schaffner, 1996, p.201-4). The relationship between politics and language can be derived from the interaction between communication and language. Humans are intrinsically political entities in every facet of life, and their capacity for verbal communication provides a mechanism for influence and empowerment. Language is essential in the creation, execution, and influence of all actions especially political one (Schaffer, 1996). Beard (2000) contends that the examination of political language is significant as it facilitates comprehension of how language is employed by individuals aiming to acquire, wield, and sustain power. Language is utilized to formulate speeches and statements in the domain of politics. The political career is efficiently managed and executed through the essential role of language in giving speeches. Moreover, Beard (2000) asserts that politicians are instrumental in delivering speeches, articulating policies, and influencing citizens. Lakoff (1990) offers a more accurate representation of the inseparable relationship between language and politics. He asserts that language is intrinsically political, as power dynamics influence its usage and perception. Moreover, he contends that the use of language is essential in political manipulation, since it underpins the comprehension and clarification of power dynamics. Language empowers individuals by designating specific roles, hence defining the relationships among its users. Language usage exemplifies power, and each language user functions according to a "hidden agenda" that encompasses a linguistic power dynamic. The unarticulated elements of language possess higher influence

than the articulated ones (Lakoff, 1990). Political discourse encompasses a variety of conflicts and partnerships, disputes and agreements, commendations and criticisms, alongside sophisticated critique and steadfast endorsement (Obeng, 1997, p. 58). Given the complex and hazardous nature of politics, together with the impact of rhetoric, political figures may utilize an ambiguous, cryptic, and cautious communication style. The language of politics is marked by significant diversity and variation. Consequently, offering an exact characterization of this language type is difficult, as its use is contingent upon the particular context and is frequently altered to fulfill certain objectives (Zheng, 2000, p. 1). Zheng illustrated that politicians employ several approaches and techniques, which become emblematic of a specific politician for some of them, resulting in their distinctive speaking style or idiolect. The inclusion approach is a tactic employed by politicians to convince the public that their perspectives, aspirations, and values align with those of the constituents.

## 5. Methodology

This research examines transitivity and its role in political discourse. Two political addresses have been selected: those of Putin and Zelensky. Thus, a descriptive-qualitative approach was considered the most suitable study strategy for this subject. The Hallidayan perspective (2014) serves as the analytical framework for this inquiry.

### 5.1 Data collection

The primary focus of the current study is concerned with the speeches of political discourse that is used in the speeches of the presidents of Russia and Ukraine. The researcher intentionally selected two speeches for examination from each president of Russia and Ukraine. The global and domestic contexts of the presidential elections in Russia and Ukraine were disparate, likely affecting the Transitivity linguistic patterns utilized by the presidents in their addresses. The first two speeches were chosen because they were delivered by the current president of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and their potential influence on linguistic variety. The subsequent two speeches were chosen as they represent the most contemporary addresses delivered by the current President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Consequently, it was concluded that these utterances provide a suitable data source for the study owing to their uniqueness in transitivity. The talks' transcripts are thoroughly examined. The two presidents are chosen from distinct historical eras. All requisite samples are available online. The researcher employs these samples to ascertain data aligned with certain objectives of the investigation. Both presentations were subjected to examination on YouTube and were provided with reliable transcripts. The chosen speeches emphasize the dominant linguistic structures utilized in political discourse. The analysis of the present study was conducted using sentences extracted from the scripts of the two speeches. The researcher

utilized complete clauses extracted from the chats, as they were essential for addressing the research issues.

## 5.2 Findings and Discussion

The analysis of Putin's political speeches begins with dividing the transcriptions into paragraphs and classifying each type of process, encompassing all six processes of transitivity which are material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes. The analysis of these processes is conducted through their prevalence in political speeches to reveal the underlying ideology of President Putin as Russia's leader. Table (1) reveals that (72) processes are recorded in the document. The material process is the most prevalent, with 40 instances, accounting for 55% of the total. The material process is followed by eleven occurrences of the relational process, or fifteen percent of the total. Material and relational processes constitute the largest proportion, at 70% of the total. The table reveals that ten mental processes constitute 14% of the total. The verbal procedures transpired seven times, representing ten percent of the total. Table (4.1) reveals that the least prevalent types of processes in Putin's political discourse are the behavioral process, which appears 2 times and comprises 3% of the total processes, and the existential process, which also appears 2 times and represents 3% of the entire processes.

As for Putin, Fifty-four processes are analyzed in Zelensky's political statements on Putin. Twenty-two material processes comprise 41% of the total. There are twelve relationship processes, comprising twenty-two percent of the total. Material and relational processes constitute the largest proportion, at 63% of the total. Furthermore, there exist ten cognitive processes, constituting eighteen percent of the overall total. The verbal process occurred six times during the speech, representing 11% of the total process. The behavioral processes transpired twice, constituting 4% of the total. The existential processes transpired twice, comprising 4% of the entire process. Table (4.1) displays the frequency of transitivity processes together with their corresponding percentages across all talks in the study.



	In Putins speeches		In Zelenskys speeches	
The process type	The number of occurrences	Percentage	The number of occurrences	Percentage
Material	40	55%	22	41%
Relational	11	15%	12	22%
Mental	10	14%	10	18%
Verbal	7	10%	6	11%
Behavioral	2	3%	2	4%
Existential	2	3%	2	4%
The total number	72	100%	54	100%

Table (1): Frequency of processes of transitivity and their percentage in all speeches

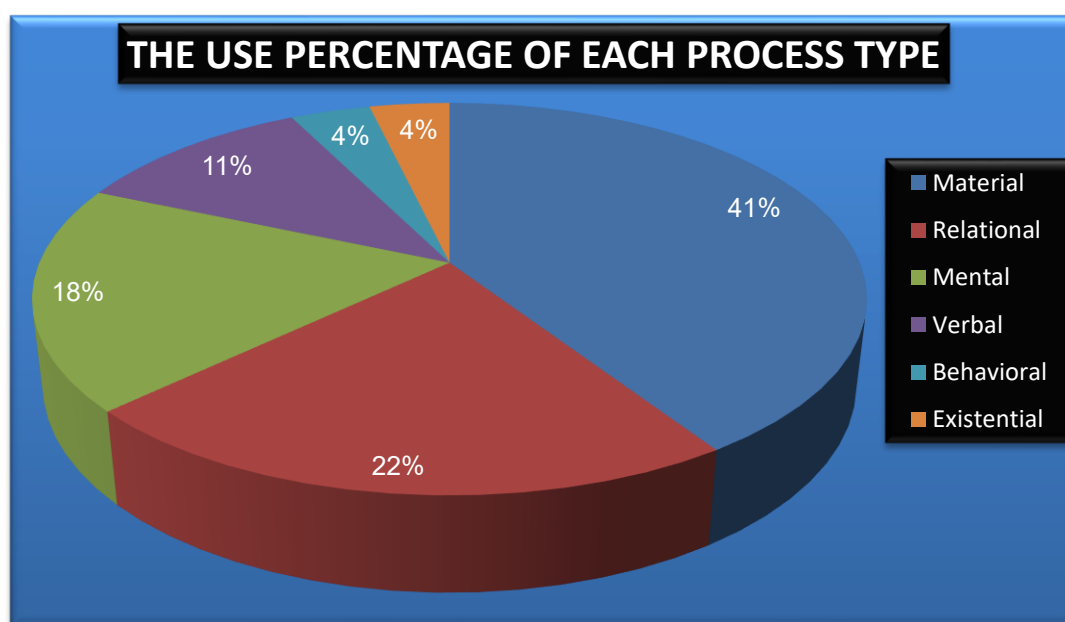
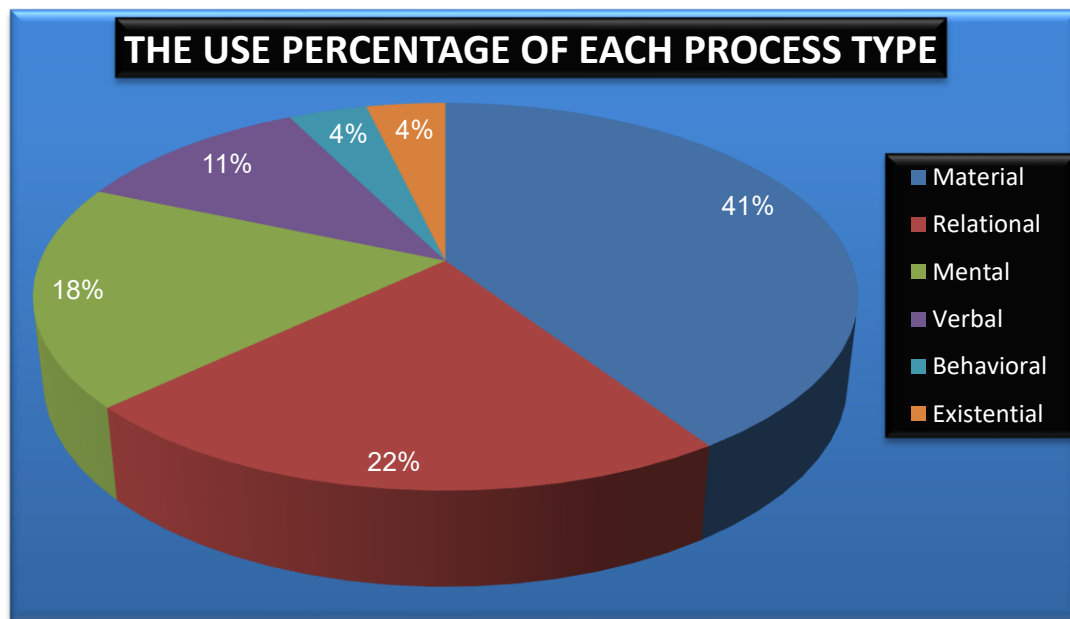


Figure 1: Percentage of transitivity processes of Putin's speech.



**Figure 2: Percentage of transitivity processes of Zelensky's speech.**

This study examined the importance of transitivity as a crucial element of language function in Russian and Ukrainian political speeches. This study's significance lies in the comparative analysis of two presidents and their statements regarding the war between their respective nations, representing the two major political parties: the Republicans and Democrats. Putin and Zelensky expressed their views through transitivity, a facet not previously examined in earlier studies referenced in the current research. Furthermore, the methods, aims, and subjects employed in the current study differ from those in earlier studies. The variation in frequencies of transitivity process types shows their functional value in both utterances. The material and relational processes were classified as the most prevalent occurrences compared to other processes. This supremacy pertains to both presidents being proactive individuals prepared to implement significant changes for their nations, even if such changes necessitate invasion. Material and Relational processes are predominantly employed in political discourses to articulate descriptions of reality and subsequently communicate them to the audience. These procedures appear to exhibit greater objectivity than the others, a finding consistent with the majority of prior research, particularly those studies referenced in the current analysis.

The data indicate that both presidents primarily focus to utilize the material and relational processes inside the Transitivity processes. The primary expression of the approach conveyed a sense of power and strength to the audience. They utilized this way to clarify the situation of the nation, which is undergoing considerable hardship, and the obstacles faced by the presidents of Russia and Ukraine. Both Putin and Zelensky utilize material processes in their speeches

to convey the activities they will do to restore their nations' grandeur and ensure national security. The analysis of the process is crucial, as both presidents create substantial relationships regarding critical issues. In his address, Putin articulated a substantial link between his presidency and democracy, alluding to his predecessors' ambition to enhance Russia's status as a leading nation worldwide. Consequently, Putin outlines his governance strategy for the nation in times of war. Moreover, Putin forged relationships by underscoring the importance of the citizenry and their influence on national affairs, associating their voices with the possibility of change. A notable component is emphasizing Russia's protective posture, as they endeavor to safeguard their citizens and families. Such relationships fostered a sense of authority and acknowledgment among the audience, demonstrating that someone truly understood their suffering and was willing to enhance their lives, so legitimizing his status as a powerful leader. Zelensky's talk encompassed essential themes, notably his conviction in Ukraine's splendor and his aspiration to restore it with the aid of his political friends and familial support. Zelensky cultivated substantial contacts with persons impacted by the conflict with Russia, while also nurturing an essential relationship with the pacifist ideologies of several factions within Ukraine. Through this relationship, Zelensky subtly indicates his governance strategy for the nation, particularly in the context of the ongoing conflict with Russia. The cognitive processes were a crucial element of the two speeches, in which the presidents' mental activities, emotions, and views of persons were expressed. In light of the volatility of the Russia-Ukraine scenario, both presidents aimed to articulate their forthcoming plans concerning these developments with public support. To do this, they must elucidate their policies from the beginning to facilitate the audience's understanding of the impending circumstances through the articulation of ideas and concepts. By elucidating their policy to the audience, they want to secure their trust and endorsement to further their initiatives. Data indicates that 'I' and 'we' predominantly function as the senser in the mental processes of both speeches, reflecting a commitment to implementing a new policy. The increasing utilization of the plural form about mental processes signifies a collective intention to act, hence enhancing audience engagement with their perspective. The verbal, behavioral, and existential processes are rarely utilized in the speeches of both Putin and Zelensky. Due of the absence of in-person remarks, it is essential to utilize verbal terminology. Both presidents utilized these approaches with a comparable purpose in consideration. Notably, Putin effectively articulated the existential crisis in his speech, directing the audience's attention to the genuine problems, the precarious circumstances, and the hardships faced by individuals striving to live with dignity. Concurrently, he is fostering optimism for a promising future. Zelensky's speech utilizes verbal processes less frequently than Putin's, indicating a distinction. In summary, the primary processes employed in both speeches of Putin and Zelensky are the material, relational, and mental processes, respectively. These tactics seek to educate the

audience with the policies to be enacted for their nation's victory in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, while convincing them that these measures would be executed collaboratively by the government and the citizenry. They endeavor to promote awareness of audience liberty, claiming that all individuals, irrespective of race or color, are entitled to their rights as citizens of either Russia or Ukraine.

## 6. Conclusion

The study reveals that all the six processes of transitivity are used in both political speeches of Putin and Zelensky, reflecting the ideational function. Transitivity is considered as the fundamental building block of representation in Putin's speeches, while Zelensky's speeches have a higher percentage of transitivity. The study also reveals multiple ideologies hidden in the speeches, which can be challenging to understand for the recipients due to various factors such as cultural differences, critical thinking, cognitive biases, individual deviations, and social circumstances. Political ideologies are not new but are innovative in their form of expression, making them difficult to analyze and comprehend for the reader or listener. Politicians possess a greater awareness of ideas and employ them more adeptly than non-politicians. Ideologies may appear implausible in specific instances, making it difficult for readers or listeners to understand them. In political discourse, material and relational processes are primarily employed to express statements of reality from the audience's perspective. Putin and Zelensky effectively utilized transitivity in their speeches to communicate their objectives and future ambitions, emphasizing tangible aspects of politics such as conflicts, invasions, military operations, and geopolitical strategies. Putin's speeches used 53% of material processes, while Zelensky's used 43%. This usage signifies their strong resolve to defend, develop, and construct their nations and their determination to undertake various activities to achieve these goals. The relational process is crucial in discourse, used to assert Russia and Ukraine's moral and factual positions, particularly in relation to their actions, history, and Western perceptions. Putin effectively used connections to significant events and critical concerns, while Zelensky's causal connections were conventional and not prominent. Both presidents used relational techniques to align themselves with the audience and promote a positive image of themselves. The mental process in speeches reflects emotional, desirable, and intellectual dimensions of people and the president. Cognitive processes convey awareness of the nation's reality, urging citizens to recognize their rights and foster patriotism. Both speeches provided insights into the speaker's consciousness and perception of reality

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