

**Theme–Rheme Organization in the Political Tweets of Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian During US–Iran Political Conflicts: An SFL-Based Comparative Study**

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## ABSTRACT

*Political communication has been radically changed by the wider use of social media by politicians, providing new opportunities for linguistic analysis. X (previously Twitter) is one of the social media channels that has proved to be significant in the communication of political positions, political ideologies, and reactions to international events by political actors. In this study, the Systemic functional theory known as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was used to analyze the Theme–Rheme organization of the political tweets of Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian during heightened US–Iran political conflicts. The study seek to discover the most common types of Themes, to analyze Theme–Rheme structures and thematic progression patterns, and to examine how Theme choices impact ideological representation and political positioning. The study uses a mixed-method research approach, analyzing a purposive sample of 40 tweets, comprising 20 tweets from Donald Trump and 20 from Masoud Pezeshkian. The data set consists of 78 clauses, containing 46 clauses from Trump’s tweets and 32 clauses from Masoud Pezeshkian’s tweets. The analysis was conducted at the topical, textual, and interpersonal Theme level and across the chosen data set. The results show that both leaders have the majority of topical Themes in their tweets. There is, however, substantial variation in their choices of topic and information structures. While Trump's tweets focus on authority, strength and security for the nation, Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets highlight diplomacy, sovereignty, legality and collective responsibility. The findings demonstrate that Theme–Rheme organization functions as a linguistic resource for ideological construction in political discourse.*

**Keywords:** Political Discourse, Masoud Pezeshkian, Donald Trump, SFL, US–Iran Conflict

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

The rapid development of digital communication has changed the political communication in modern societies. Social media is now playing an increasing role, as political leaders use it directly with voters to communicate political messages and react immediately to issues of international events. In the list of such platforms, X has turned into one of the most powerful platforms for communication by enabling political actors to post short and direct political messages. Political tweets are not merely social media posts; they

are discourse-building tools that political leaders employ to build political ideologies that serve national interests and shape public opinion. For decades, the political differences between the United States and Iran have been a key concern in international politics. Their diplomatic, economic, military and ideological rivalry has been marked by conflict, economic sanctions, military threats and ideological rivalry. In the 2026 US–Iran conflict, the political conflict escalated in the form of airstrikes, military conflict, and disagreements over the Strait of Hormuz. These developments resulted in a tremendous amount of political communication by both the American and Iranian political players. Among the various factors that gave both of Trump's and Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets international visibility in this context were their political stances, diplomatic reactions, and ideological narratives on the key conflict.

Twitter has recently come under the focus of many studies in discourse analysis, political communication and linguistic analysis, and for this reason has gained political relevance (Ott, 2017; Enli, 2017). Linguistic resources are used strategically by political actors to highlight ideological content on social media, according to previous research (Ott, 2017; Enli, 2017). The special significance of political communication on Twitter is greatest when there is a political crisis, as Twitter enables leaders to react quickly and directly to political events. Political tweets are, therefore, important language data for discourse analysis.

In the field of linguistics, Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), proposed by Halliday, offers a broad perspective for analyzing language as a system for creating meaning in social contexts. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), there are three metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The present study specifically deals with the textual metafunction and Theme–Rheme organization in particular. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) argue that Theme is the part that has the main focus of the clause, while Rheme is the rest of the information that is developed in the message. The selection of the theme is important because it provides the focus and structuring of information in discourse. The Theme–Rheme organization is a significant characteristic of political discourse as it might indicate whether a speaker's position, planning agenda and rhetorical strategy are shaping the theme choice. According to Eggins (2004), thematic structures play a role in making the text coherent and affect the reader's perception. Likewise, Thompson (2014) points out that the choice of theme is a reflection of speakers' communicative purposes and their ideological focus. Daneš (1974) also elucidates the role of thematic progression in creating the continuity of a discourse and the flow of information across it. Hence, Theme–Rheme analysis is an effective tool to analyse how meanings are strategically organized by political leaders in political tweets. There have been previous studies that examine political discourse on Twitter through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), framing theory and rhetorical analysis. The literature has been focused mainly on the aspects of populism, aggression, persuasion and ideological representation of Trump's tweets (Ott, 2017). Likewise, research on Iranian political discourse has focused on nationalism, diplomatic discourse and resistance discourse. But there has been comparatively little discussion on the Theme–Rheme organization in political Twitter discourse in comparison studies, especially in comparative studies with political leaders from different geopolitical settings. There is little research on the way political elites carefully construct meaning in text through thematic structures in times of political conflict.

Based on this, the present study compares the tweets of Masoud Pezeshkian and Donald Trump during the 2026 conflict between the United States and Iran with respect to Theme–Rheme analysis. The study examines the political meaning, ideology, and narration in the political discourse of the leaders' thematic choices that are explored using the textual metafunction approach of SFL.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The increasing use of social media platforms by political leaders has transformed political discourse. As political leaders like X convey their political narratives, political discourse has become a significant domain of linguistic studies on the internet. The research on political tweets has been predominantly focused on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), persuasive techniques, populism, and the representation of ideology. But comparatively little attention has been paid to the textual metafunction of the language, specifically Theme–Rheme organization in political Twitter discourse. Earlier work has not often examined political leaders' strategic use of information in the form of thematic structures to highlight political meanings and the interpretation of ideology. Furthermore, studies that compare the tweets of Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian based on the SFL perspective are still scarce. Moreover, there has been little focus on comparative studies of political tweets during the 2026 US–Iran conflict. Therefore, a significant research gap exists regarding how thematic choices contribute to ideological positioning, information organization, and meaning construction in political Twitter discourse.

### **Research Objectives**

The study intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify and categorize the types of Themes used in political tweets of US President Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian.
2. Thematic progression patterns to analyze and contrast the Theme–Rheme structures and thematic patterns used in the selected tweets of both political leaders.
3. To examine the role of themes in the representation of ideology and political positioning of the selected tweets.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which types of Themes are mainly used in the tweets of Masoud Pezeshkian and Donald Trump, respectively, in the context of politics?
2. What are the differences between the Theme–Rheme structures and thematic patterns in Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian's political tweets?
3. How do the thematic choices construct ideological positioning and/or political stance in the tweets selected?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to political discourse analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics by examining thematic organization in political tweets. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the disciplines of political discourse analysis, digital communication and Systemic Functional Linguistics through a study of Theme-Rheme organization in Twitter discourse. The analysis carried out in this work is based on the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) using textual metafunction in political tweets produced by different geopolitical, ideological and communicative contexts of Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian. The comparative perspective provided by this study deepens the understanding of

differences in the thematic selection and the mode of structuring the text in different political communication styles, specifically in the case of populist and diplomatic discourse. The results of the research might also help researchers, discourse analysts and students to understand the function of thematic organization to represent an ideology, to position a political message, to achieve the coherence of the discourse, and to convince the audience of the political message in the political discourse on social media platforms.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is grounded in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics theory, which is the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday, who claims that language is a social semiotic system in which meanings are constructed, and within it, communication can work in certain social contexts. In SFL, there are three proposed metafunctions by Halliday and Hassan: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In this study, the main concern is the textual metafunctions that are, in this case, the structure of Theme-Rheme. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) state that the difference is that Theme is the point of departure of a clause and Rheme is the message developed from the point of departure. By using this framework, this study will examine how a political leader emphasizes particular viewpoints, ideologies and persuasive emotions through social media platforms, mainly on Twitter, to organize information strategically. Halliday & Matthiessen then further divide the themes into three types, which are topical Themes, interpersonal Themes and textual Themes. Topical Themes are the general experiential part of the clause, which are regarded as obligatory, while interpersonal Themes are expressions of the speaker's attitudes, judgments, or interaction with the listeners. Textual Themes are, however, used to link clauses and to make discourse cohesive. The present study uses these thematic categories to examine how these political actors make use of linguistic devices to establish authority, ensure coherence and shape public opinion in the digital arena of political communication.

Moreover, the study uses the concept of thematic progression (Frantisek Daneš 1974), which has been developed to describe the evolution of Themes within clauses to produce text continuity and coherence through the text. Daneš outlines some thematic progression patterns, including constant Theme progression, linear progression, and a split Rheme progression. Patterns can shed light on political Twitter communication and the maintenance of coherence across the short, vast expanse of social media. The framework is supplemented by the work of Peter H. Fries (1995), which highlights the thematic organization/communicative purpose link. Fries claims that there are no random choices in themed choices, but rather they are made based on the speaker's intentions, ideological position and assumptions about the audience. Thematic development is an important aesthetic device that can foreground and highlight specific problems, draw readers' attention and influence the interpretation of political events and political identities in the context of political discourse. This study combines Halliday's textual metafunction with the theories on thematic progression proposed by Daneš and Fries for a comprehensive framework to analyze the political tweets. The framework allows for exploring the structuring of Themes, the flow of information through the clauses, and the role of thematic decisions in persuading, cohering, ideologizing and engaging audiences in the modern political communication landscape on social media.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theme–Rheme in Systemic Functional Linguistics**

The organization of Theme–Rheme is a major principle of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as developed by Halliday. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) divide the clause into Theme and Rheme, where Theme is the point of departure from which the rest of the message proceeds and Rheme is the rest of the message. Theoretically, the selection of the theme is important since it foregrounds and organizes the

information in discourse. Thematic organization thus helps to convey information flow in the text, communicative emphasis and coherence.

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), Themes can be categorized into three broad categories: topical Theme, interpersonal Theme, and textual Theme. The experiential part of the clause is the one expressed by the Topical Theme and most often serves as either the subject or the participant. Adjuncts, vocatives, and mood markers are all part of the Interpersonal Theme and are used to create interpersonal connections and convey speakers' attitudes or evaluations. Textual themes are conjunctions and discourse markers that function to structure discourse.

Suzanne Eggins (2004) claims that the themes are choices that reflect communicative priorities of the speaker and affect the interpretation of the audience. Likewise, Geoff Thompson (2014) says that "Selection of topics plays a part in the ideological emphasis since the speaker highlights certain meanings in discourse. The idea of thematic progression was extended by Daneš (1974), who pointed out that thematic patterns help to maintain the continuity and coherence of a text within a clause. Fries (1995) also emphasized how thematic organization affects ways of textual development and ways of discourse interpretation.

Theme–Rheme analysis has been used in a number of studies involving political language, media texts and institutional language. J.R. Martin (1992) claims that thematic patterns are the reflection of ideology and institutionalization in discourse. Theme–Rheme analysis has therefore emerged as an effective analytical approach in studying strategies used by political actors in the organization of meanings in communication.

### **Political Discourse on Social Media**

Social media has revolutionized how people communicate politics and politics can interact with people without institutions. Of these platforms, X stands out as one of the most powerful platforms for political dialogue, offering political actors a tool for immediate political reactions, ideological expressions, and diplomatic messages. Twitter is a political platform that is brief, timely and public, and these are important characteristics of political communication that make the tweet a significant discourse unit for linguistic analysis.

Twitter's role as a tool for developing political identity and shaping public opinion has been noted in previous studies. Enli (2017) proposes that politicians use Twitter to create authenticity and direct communication with the audience. Likewise, for Ott (2017), Twitter discourse facilitates the use of emotionally charged and evaluative language that can be used to strengthen ideological positioning.

The study of political communication often identifies two styles of communication: a populist and a diplomatic. According to Ruth Wodak (2015), the basic features of the populist discourse are directness, confrontation and emotionality, while the language of diplomatic discourse is characterized by moderation, institutional representation and negotiation. Polarization is often created by using simplifying and evaluative language in populist political communication. Diplomatic discourse, by contrast, has formal and linguistically mediated structures that are strategically regulated. Such differences can also be expressed in the political tweets' thematic organization and information structure. Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Framework has been adopted as one of the major trends in political discourse research. Aljuraywi and Alyousef (2022) and Muneeb et al. (2025) have provided case studies that demonstrate how politicians strategically use affect, judgement and appreciation to work towards a persuasive end and to create a specific public image. These studies make a connection between language choices and ideological positioning, but they tend to be more concerned with the interpersonal evaluation and ignore

the text organization of discourse. More recently, the use of social media as an important channel for political communication has been the focus of scholarship. In their detailed analysis of Donald Trump's Twitter discourse, Clarke and Grieve (2019) reveal certain stylistic patterns, such as the use of the patterns of conversational discourse and those of campaigning discourse and engaged discourse. Their results show the importance of Twitter as a key means of communication that can influence news agendas. It does not, however, focus on the functional structure of Theme and Rheme, but rather on grammatical patterns. Likewise, the study of political branding in digital environments does not investigate the support of thematic progression to the cohesion and persuasiveness of the message. There is also a gap in the literature as far as context is concerned. Donald Trump's rhetoric has received extensive research and been subject to a variety of negative characterizations by his opponents and the media, but these "Middle Eastern" political figures are barely mentioned. Most of the existing literature is centered on the Western and South Asian context; the figure of Masoud Pezeshkian is largely understudied. This lack restricts the understanding of political communication across cultures in SNS.

The present study thus fills a significant gap by investigating the organization of information in the tweets of politicians from different political and cultural environments; the study will contribute to SFL studies by studying interpersonal evaluation and will show the utility of thematic progression analysis in the study of political communication in digital environments. Twitter's political ascendancy has thus motivated researchers to study the strategies of political leaders in constructing meanings and representations of ideology through social media communication.

### **Previous Studies on Trump's Tweets**

From a linguistic perspective, several studies have examined the Twitter discourse of Donald Trump, while from a political perspective, there are also several such studies. Ott (2017) states that Trump's tweets are often characterized by direct language, repetition, and evaluative language, which serve to create a populist political identity and ideological positioning. Likewise, Enli (2017) notes that Trump carefully leveraged Twitter to authentically establish and connect with supporters directly.

In previous research on Trump's tweets, stance-taking, aggression, nationalism, and populist rhetoric have been the primary areas of interest. Previous studies on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) demonstrate that Trump is no stranger to using confrontational and polarizing language to build an ideological opposition and political authority. Additionally, Trump's tweet rhetoric has been shown to highlight nationalism, military strength, and political dominance, and shows a preference for direct, simplified language structure.

Several studies have looked at Trump's tweets from an ideological and rhetorical perspective, but significantly less research has been undertaken on Trump's Twitter discourse from a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective on the text metafunction. Previous research has not extensively studied how Theme – Rheme organization helps to create emphasis and ideology representation in Trump's tweets.

Likewise, an analysis of political discourse in Iran has been done in terms of nationalism, resistance narrative and diplomatic discourse. But comparative studies on the thematic organization of tweets of American and Iranian political leaders remain underexplored.

### **Ideology and Textual Organization in Political Discourse**

Political language is tightly linked to the building of ideology, power relations and political identity. Researchers in discourse studies claim that language is organized in strategic ways by political actors to

highlight specific perspectives and shape public understanding. In political communication, the use of language is not neutral, but rather a reflection of the communicative purposes and ideology of the speaker.

Research in discourse analysis has indicated that information structure plays an important role in ideological representation. The organization of clauses, patterns of emphasis, and sequencing of information may lead the reader to specific understandings of political events and identities. National interest, authority, solidarity, or opposition are often emphasized in the political leaders' discourse by adopting a strategic analysis of the texts.

These ideological approaches, however, are more apparent in digital political communication because of the brevity of the tweet. The social media platforms encourage politicians to convey short, concise, and emotionally charged messages that catch the attention of the audience in the shortest time. Thematic organization, as a result, is an important linguistic tool for stressing political priorities and audience perception.

Additionally, the study of political discourse reveals that there are linguistic differences between the way of organizing a discourse and a diplomatic discourse. Moreover, research into political discourse also shows that the way of organizing a discourse is different from the way of organizing a diplomatic discourse. The confrontational, evaluative and polarizing elements of populist discourse are often more prominent, while the elements of moderation, institutional representation and negotiation of diplomatic discourse are more prominent. These communicational differences can also affect thematic selections and information flow of political tweets.

Thus, the analysis of the Theme–Rheme organization of the discourse in social media can serve as a source of information on how the political leadership constructs political identities and how it constructs ideological meanings through social media.

### **Political identity and persuasive communication on social media.**

The nature of political communication has changed because of social media, which allows political actors to directly engage with citizens. Platforms like X give politicians an immediate space for political opinion, ideology, and policy response with no editorial mediation, unlike traditional institutional media.

In previous studies, social media has been utilized by political leaders to build up their political identity and boost their relations with the public. Typical political tweets are brief, repeat, express an evaluation, and use emotionally charged words to maximize persuasive impact. These linguistic strategies are used to give politicians credibility, legitimacy, and ideological resonance to the people they speak to.

Research on digital political communication also indicates that digital communication facilitates personalization of political communication. Political leaders often appear as direct agents of the nation's interests or of the general interests of the public. Thus, a tweet's themes can show politicians' emphasis on specific political personalities, topics, and/or ideologies.

The social media communication context also makes for increased competition in ideology, as the tweets spread fast and stay public. Textual organization is particularly crucial in political speech, since the politician has to convey complex political meanings in a restricted number of texts. Based on this, Theme–Rheme analysis is likely a good tool to analyze the way political leaders organize persuasive political messages in a social media context, prioritizing information.

### **Research Gap**

Previous studies have extensively investigated political discourse on Twitter using different approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis, rhetorical analysis, and ideological analysis, SFL in political speeches, media discourse, and other institutional discourse. Yet, there has been little focus on the phenomenon of comparative Theme-rheme organization in the political discourse used in social media platforms, specifically in the case of communication on Twitter/X. Furthermore, few studies have explored thematic organization for political leaders with divergent geopolitical and ideological backgrounds, like the U.S. and Iran, respectively. Compared to other studies, there are fewer studies that examine the role of text organization and thematic development in constructing meanings in political tweets on a broader ideological and rhetorical level, however, and more on the level of an individual political leader or figure.

In this regard, the present study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the thematic–rhematic organization in tweets that were produced by Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian over the course of the study, using Systemic Functional Linguistics, specifically the textual metafunction model, to investigate how thematic choices and thematic progression patterns aid in ideological representation, political positioning, and textual coherence within the context of modern political discourse on Twitter/X.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

The study is a mixed-method research design in which the qualitative and quantitative methods are used together. The qualitative approach is concerned with the analysis of Theme–Rheme structures and thematic organization of political tweets, while the quantitative approach is concerned with the number and distribution of Theme types in the selected data. The approach chosen is mixed method because it allows for the descriptive interpretation and numerical comparison of the thematic patterns in political discourse.

The present study is using a comparative research approach since it is focusing on and comparing tweets produced by two political leaders – Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian – during the 2026 US–Iran conflict in terms of thematic organization. By comparing the two texts, the researcher can see how the political leaders(s) have made choices about the theme, the manner of writing the text, and how the political leaders(s) have represented ideologies in each of the two political/geopolitical contexts.

The study is based on the system functional linguistics theory, especially the Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) metafunction of text. The primary analytical approach used is Theme–Rheme analysis (TA) to explore the organization of political meanings in the Twitter discourse.

#### **Data Collection and Sampling**

The data used in the current study are political tweets published between 02/2026 and 04/2026 by Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian. Overall, 40 manually compiled tweets with full clauses and their publication time were chosen, with 20 tweets of each political leader being analyzed. The tweets were chosen using purposive sampling and were related to the following topics: US-Iran conflict and diplomatic issues, sanctions and Strait of Hormuz. Re-tweets that contained no text and duplicated and hyperlinks were not included in the study. To ensure analytical reliability, thematic categorization was rechecked manually according to Halliday and Matthiessen’s framework. The study utilized publicly available tweets; therefore, no ethical approval was required.

### **Analytical Framework**

The current study follows the textual metafunction approach of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) devised by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014). Specifically, the analysis concentrates on the Theme–Rheme organization of political tweets and on the categories of the Theme.

Further, the study explores marked and unmarked Themes to see how political leaders use them to foreground information in their discourse. The marked Theme contains rhetorical/ideological emphasis for specific elements, while the unmarked Theme follows a conventional clause structure.

### **Analytical Tool**

The manual Theme–Rheme analysis is used as the main tool for analysis in the present study based on the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) proposed by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014). The analysis is aimed at the identification and classification of Theme – Rheme structure in the selected political tweets.

Clauses were segmented from each tweet and the Theme and Rheme of each clause were manually determined. To categorize Themes, the authors followed Halliday, dividing them into topical Themes, interpersonal Themes and textual Themes. Furthermore, the study explored marked and unmarked Themes to investigate the way information is highlighted and a political emphasis built by politicians in their discourse.

The analytical process included detailed text analysis and comparison of the thematic structure of the posts of Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian on Twitter. The analytical process included careful examination of the tweets of Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian and comparison of their thematic structures. Frequency counts were also made to test the distribution of Theme types in the two data sets. The manual analytical technique was found to be suitable because Theme–Rheme analysis demands contextual and functional interpretation of the linguistic structures within the discourse.

## **RESULTS**

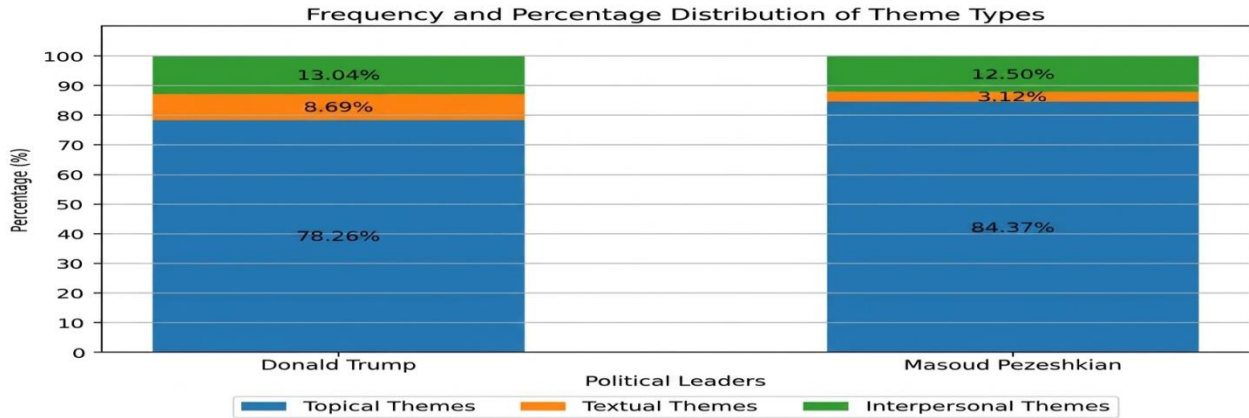
### **Analysis of Theme Types**

The first research question is designed to discover and categorize the types of Themes which are used in the political tweets of Masoud Pezeshkian and Donald Trump. The analytical approach used in the study is the systemic functional linguistics approach, which is part of the textual metafunction in SFL. Themes–Rheme analysis is conducted at the clause level, which is why each tweet was broken down into clauses. Following the segmentation into clauses, the Theme of each clause was found and categorized into topical Theme, textual Theme and interpersonal Theme. The frequency and percentage of each of the Theme types were then computed to see the major Theme type in the tweets of each of the political leaders.

The entire dataset for this analysis is composed of 40 political tweets, 20 tweets by Donald Trump and 20 tweets by Masoud Pezeshkian. The tweets of these two leaders were manually coded in order to uncover the thematic choices they made to highlight political actors, values, institutions and ideological stances.

The percentage distribution of theme types in Donald Trump's and Masoud Pezeshkian's messages is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Frequencies and Percentage Distribution of Theme Types**



**Two types of frequencies are shown in Figure 1, along with percentages.**

The predominant Theme type in both data sets is topical Theme (see Figure 1). Topical Themes are present in 20 of the 46 total clauses across 36 tweets of both leaders, and 78.26% of the total Themes are in Trump's tweets. In Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets, 20 is the number of tweets containing Topical Themes in 27 clauses, which is 84.37% of the total number of Themes in the tweets. These findings suggest that both politicians focus primarily on experiential aspects, such as the participants, political protagonists, institutions, events, values, and conflicts.

The distribution also indicates that, less frequently, there are Textual and Interpersonal Themes. There are 4 textual Themes (8.69%) and 6 interpersonal Themes (13.04%) in Trump's text, and 1 textual Theme (3.12%) and 4 interpersonal Themes (12.50%) in Masoud Pezeshkian's text. It means that the themes or patterns of text or interaction are secondary to the others. Themes are organized primarily by textual relations (condition, contrast, immediacy) or interpersonal (evaluation, emphasis, warning, interactional stance).

The dominant topical themes in Donald Trump's tweets can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1: Topical Themes in Donald Trump's Tweets**

Topical Theme	Example Clause	Functional Interpretation
I	“I will NOT let that happen.”	Foregrounds Trump’s personal agency and decision-making authority
We	“We have a plan.”	Represents a collective governmental or military agency
Iran	“Iran is trying to build a Nuke.”	Positions Iran as the central political problem
Iran’s missile program	“Iran’s missile program is a threat to the world.”	Represents Iran’s military capacity as a global security threat
The Supreme Leader	“The Supreme Leader thinks he’s safe.”	Identifies the opposing political authority
The Strait	“The Strait is OPEN.”	Foregrounds a strategic geopolitical location
The 12-Day War	“The ‘12-Day War’ was just a preview.”	Frames the conflict as a warning and a political reference point

Table 1 shows the main topics caught in Trump's tweets, called Topical Themes. The themes in these Texts reveal a major focus of Trump's thematic organization on political figures, military dangers, strategic territories, and personal power. The frequent appearance of "I" in the thematic position reinforces Trump as the main protagonist in making decisions and exercising political control. The Theme builds the speaker as an active agent in clauses like "I will NOT let that happen" and "I made it happen," and the Rheme develops meanings of prevention, authority, and achievement.

The term "We," on the other hand, is used differently but is also closely related to power and agency. It is the authority of all the people of a government, administration, or military. Clauses like "We have a plan" and "We are tracking every move they make" imbue the theme with organization, preparation and ability to act on it, as it is presented as if it were the United States, or its leadership. Iran-related Themes, such as "Iran," "Iran's missile program," and "The Supreme Leader," put the other side in an initial position and build Iran as the main security issue. As a result, Trump's topical themes tend to be actor-centred, conflictual, and related to authority.

**Table 2: Dominant Topical Themes in Masoud Pezeshkian's Tweets**

<b>Topical Theme</b>	<b>Example Clause</b>	<b>Functional Interpretation</b>
Dialogue	"Dialogue is the only path to regional stability."	Foregrounds diplomacy as the preferred solution
The Iranian people	"The Iranian people deserve peace and prosperity."	Constructs collective national identity
We	"We must distinguish between the American people and the aggressive policies..."	Represents collective political responsibility
Diplomacy	"Diplomacy is the only winner."	Presents negotiation as the legitimate political option
Sovereignty	"Sovereignty is not negotiable."	Foregrounds national rights and political independence
The Constitution	"The Constitution must be our only guide..."	Establishes legal and institutional authority
National unity	"National unity is our strongest shield..."	Represents unity as national protection
Fundamental political reforms	"Fundamental political reforms are no longer a choice."	Presents reform as necessary for political survival

As indicated in Table 2, there are some differences in the semantic orientation of Masoud Pezeshkian's topical Themes and Trump's Themes. Masoud Pezeshkian's Twitter posts often start with all the abstract political values, collective identities and institutional principles. Issues of negotiation, legalism, national rights and collective stability are all highlighted in the themes of "Dialogue," "Diplomacy," "Sovereignty," "The Constitution," and "National Unity." This is a sign of Masoud Pezeshkian's thematic organization, which is more value-driven and institution-focused.

In the message of the Theme "The Iranian people", citizens are put at the starting point, and they are built as the main focus of the political language. Also, there is the collective responsibility Theme "We"—which has a different meaning than Trump's use of "We." "We" is used in Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets to refer to "distinction", "restraint", "unity", and "careful judgment," such as "I think we have to distinguish...", "We must remain calm and united...", and "We must weigh the cost of every action." Thus, Masoud Pezeshkian's Topical Themes are basically value-oriented, institutional, diplomatic and collective.

**Table 3: Textual and Interpersonal Themes in the Selected Tweets**

Political Leader	Theme Type	Example Theme	Example Clause	Function
Trump	Textual	If American soldiers are touched	“If American soldiers are touched, the response will be overwhelming.”	Establishes a conditional warning
Trump	Textual	but	“but they need more.”	Creates contrast and escalation
Trump	Textual	JUST NOW	“JUST NOW: We have successfully struck targets in Iran.”	Foregrounds immediacy and urgency
Trump	Interpersonal	NEVER	“NEVER!”	Expresses absolute refusal
Trump	Interpersonal	Big mistake	“Big mistake.”	Provides a negative evaluation of the opponent
Trump	Interpersonal	A total success	“A total success!”	Claims achievement and success
Masoud Pezeshkian	Textual	but	“But we will not surrender our right to technology.”	Establishes contrast between denial and resistance
Masoud Pezeshkian	Interpersonal	To those who drum for war	“To those who drum for war: Remember the lessons...”	Addresses pro-war actors and issues a moral warning
Masoud Pezeshkian	Interpersonal	Will	“Will we choose cooperation or catastrophe?”	Foregrounds reflective questioning
Masoud Pezeshkian	Interpersonal	A heavy day	“A heavy day for our nation.”	Expresses national seriousness and collective concern

Table 3 shows that textual (54.5%), interpersonal (58.3%), and topical (59.4%) Themes occur less often than expected compared to the topical Themes (69.3%). Trump uses textual Themes to structure warning, contrast, escalation and immediacy in his tweets. The conditional Theme “If American soldiers are touched”, anticipates a hostile action and sets up the reader to expect a retaliatory consequence. The tweet is presented as an immediate, political announcement with the theme ‘JUST NOW,’ putting the emphasis on immediacy.

The interpersonal Themes in Trump's speeches are very evaluative and rhetorical. Certainty, judgment, and triumph are at the forefront of themes like “NEVER,” “Big mistake,” and “A total success.” These Themes add to the assertiveness and confrontational nature of the tweets. They don't so much add new experiential content as amplify the speaker's attitude to the political situation.

Textual and interpersonal Themes play more reflective and diplomatic roles in Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets. The denial of the pursuit of nuclear weapons creates a contrast in the textual theme “but” with the defense of the rights of technology. Moral address, questioning, and national seriousness are

foregrounded in Interpersonal Themes like “To those who drum for war,” “Will,” and “A heavy day.” These decisions help create more prudent and institutionalized political positions.

### **Analyse Theme–Rheme Structures and Thematic Patterns**

The second question of the research is exploring the organization of information in the speeches of Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian in terms of Theme–Rheme structures and thematic patterns. The analysis is based on the structure of the revised article, which says that the Theme–Rheme analysis is performed at the clause level, and that each tweet needs to be broken down into clauses before the Theme and the Rheme can be determined. The article also provides an explanation of how the study compares the thematic organization of the tweets of both leaders to find similarities and differences in the word organization and ideological representation.

**Table 4: Theme–Theme Structures in Trump’s and Masoud Pezeshkian’s Tweets**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Donald Trump’s Tweets</b>	<b>Masoud Pezeshkian’s Tweets</b>
Main Theme focus	Personal authority, military action, Iran, threat	Diplomacy, sovereignty, people, unity, law
Dominant structure	Direct and assertive Theme–Rheme structure	Reflective and institutional Theme–Rheme structure
Information flow	Short, forceful, and action-oriented	More explanatory, balanced, and value-oriented
Thematic pattern	Repetition of actor-centered Themes	Repetition of value-centered and collective Themes
Communicative effect	Creates urgency, power, and confrontation	Creates moderation, legitimacy, and national responsibility

Trump's Theme – Rheme structures tend to be assertive, brief, and direct in general, as demonstrated in the analysis. On his Twitter, his posts frequently start with words like “I,” “We,” “Iran,” “The Supreme Leader,” and “The Strait.” These Themes emphasize personal authority, national power, military preparedness and the other side. These Themes are then developed by the Rheme with meanings of warning, action, success or threat. Rheme typically announces a major action or political assertion when Trump starts a clause with 'I' or 'We'. This gives rise to a very actor-oriented architecture with a politically active opening verb in the clause.

Masoud Pezeshkian's Theme–Rheme constructions are, on the other hand, institutional and value-laden. His tweets usually start with Themes like “Dialogue”, “Diplomacy”, “Sovereignty”, “The Iranian people”, “The Constitution”, and “National unity”. These Themes emphasize abstract political values, community identity and legal or diplomatic ideas. The Rheme then expands these Themes by enumerating their significance regarding peace, stability, national dignity, political responsibility, etc. This reveals that Masoud Pezeshkian's style of information is less confrontational and more explanatory.

### **Thematic Pattern Differences**

The emphasis in Trump's tweets is largely on a persistent thematic progression pattern: the same political actors or topic of conflict are repeatedly set in the Theme position. This repetition reinforces the emphasis on the theme of authority, threat, and response. His thematic pattern is thus more confrontational and more convincing, as the same political issues are brought forward again and again.

Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets also have repeated Themes that repeat each other, but this repetition is not on the basis of authority, but on values and collective principles. Diplomacy, Dialogue, Sovereignty, and National unity are the themes that establish a continuity of institutions and diplomacy. This helps his tweets to have a stronger, more reflective form.

**Analysis of ideological representation and political positioning**

The third research question is about the representation of ideology and positioning created through the choices of themes made by Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian. Theme, which is the first constituent of a clause, is also an indicator of the speaker's foregrounding of the information he wishes to make salient in the clause. Thus, the choice of specific Themes may indicate political agendas, ideology, and communicative intent. This aligns with the updated article, which outlines how thematic selections can be used to explore the ways that political leaders shape meanings, highlight ideological viewpoints, and create political narratives in the context of Twitter/X-based political communication.

**Table 5: Thematic Choices and Ideological Representation**

<b>Political Leader</b>	<b>Recurrent Thematic Choices</b>	<b>Ideological Representation</b>	<b>Political Positioning</b>
Donald Trump	I, We, Iran, Iran's missile program, The Supreme Leader, The Strait	Represents politics through authority, threat, military strength, and national security	Positions himself as a decisive leader and Iran as a security threat
Masoud Pezeshkian	Dialogue, Diplomacy, The Iranian people, Sovereignty, The Constitution, National unity	Represents politics through diplomacy, legality, national rights, and collective responsibility	Positions himself as a diplomatic and institutionally responsible leader

Comparing the themes of Trump's messages and the beliefs he unleashed, it is clear that his themes were shaping a Trump ideology of authority, confrontation and security (Table 5). Evaluating his repeated use of "I" brings the individual leader to the forefront of political activity. This emphasizes personal control and places the speaker as the primary decision-maker. Likewise, "We" is used repeatedly and means the power of the state and military. Topics like "Iran" or "Iran's missile program" create the image of Iran as the main point of danger, while "The Supreme Leader" builds it into the main danger. Trump's tweets are part of an overall theme that looks like a national security, military might, and "do something" issue.

Thematic choices in Masoud Pezeshkian's speeches create a new set of orientations. Themes like "Dialogue," "Diplomacy," "Sovereignty," "The Constitution," and "National unity" emphasize negotiation, the rule of law, national dignity, and national responsibility. These Themes are expressions of the conflicts as a political and diplomatic crisis which demand restraint, unity and legal guidance rather than primarily a military conflict. The representation of national identity and public interest is also reinforced by the Theme "The Iranian people", as it puts citizens at the heart of political interest.

**Table 6: Comparison of Political Positioning through Theme Selection**

Aspect	Donald Trump	Masoud Pezeshkian
Self-positioning	Strong, active, controlling leader	Responsible, diplomatic, institutional leader
Representation of the opponent	Iran as a threat and enemy actor	Aggressive policies as the problem, not the American people
Dominant political stance	Confrontational and security-based	Diplomatic and legality-based
Main ideological emphasis	Power, military strength, national protection	Peace, sovereignty, unity, constitutional order
Effect on discourse	Creates urgency and polarization	Creates moderation and legitimacy

Table 6 shows that the two leaders make different choices of themes in the service of the construction of their political identities. Trump's themed organization makes him a strong and effective leader capable of controlling the war through force. He frequently starts his tweets with actors and military-related topics, threats, and strategic control. This produces a discourse of confrontation and dominance. For instance, if in the Spondee, Trump says “I” or “We”, then the Rheme typically takes on one of four meanings: action, refusal, surveillance, attack, or success. This allows his thematic selections to be ideologically based on the concept of strong leadership and national security.

Masoud Pezeshkian's thematic organization makes him seem a diplomatic and institutionally responsible leader. As with his Themes, he emphasizes values and institutions over personal dominance. The thematic positioning in Masoud Pezeshkian's political discourse of “Dialogue,” “Diplomacy,” “Sovereignty,” “The Constitution,” and “National Unity” signals a peaceful, legal, and national approach to politics. These Themes typically emerge in his Rhemes as meanings of stability, rights, restraint, reform, and survival. Thus, his theme selections are consonant with an ideology of diplomacy, sovereignty and collective unity.

## DISCUSSION

### Summary of Key Findings

This study aimed to investigate Theme–Rheme organization in some political tweets of two individuals, Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian, in the context of the US–Iran conflict. The analysis was carried out in the context of the textual metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics, which refers to the Topical, Textual and Interpersonal Themes. The results show that the predominant Theme type in both datasets is topical. In Trump's tweet, there are 36 topical themes out of 46 clauses (78.26%), while Masoud Pezeshkian's tweet has 27 topical themes out of 32 clauses (84.37%). This distribution shows that the two leaders' tweets most often focus on the experiential aspects, such as political actors, institutions, national identity, strategic events, and ideological values.

However, there is a significant difference between the semantic orientation of each Theme when they are both predominant. Personal agency, state power, Iran as a security danger, and military preparedness are all themes emphasized by Trump. Diplomacy, sovereignty, constitutional rule, national unity, and collective responsibility are all highlighted in Masoud Pezeshkian's thematic selections. As a result, the results reveal the possibility of ideological and communicative functions of similar Theme types in political discourse.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The first question in the research enquiry was about the kind of themes that were mostly preferred by both the leaders' tweets. The results reveal that the topical themes are the most frequent in both sets of data. It indicates that Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian both use experiential meanings rather than textual connectors and interpersonal markers to organize their tweets. Trump's repeated terms (“I,” “We,” “Iran,” “Iran's missile program,” and “The Supreme Leader”) develop a language of agency, confrontation and security. Themes like “Dialogue,” “Diplomacy,” “Sovereignty,” “The Constitution,” and “National Unity” appear repeatedly in Masoud Pezeshkian's speeches and represent a discourse on legality, diplomacy, and national unity.

The second research question was on differences between Theme–Rheme structures and Theme–Rheme patterns. Trump's Theme–Rheme structures are always short, straightforward and to the point. The Themes often introduce a political actor or a group involved in a conflict, and the Rhemes form meanings of warning, retaliation, control, achievement or military success. This pattern creates a strong and aggressive tone to the text. The Theme–Rheme structures of Masoud Pezeshkian are more reflective and institutionally oriented as compared to others. His Themes tend to feature values, institutions, or collective identities, while the Rhemes convey meanings of stability, restraint, legality, reform and responsibility. This is a diplomatic and legitimizing style of text organization.

The third research question explored the significance of thematic selections for ideology representation and political positioning. Trump's thematic selections signal that he will be a defining political figure and Iran a key security threat. The repeated use of “I” and “We” emphasizes leadership, control and State power. On the other hand, Masoud Pezeshkian's selection of themes aligns him with a diplomatic and institutionally responsible leader. The themes of dialogue, sovereignty, law, and national unity, which he has used repeatedly in his pieces on the conflict, portray it as a political crisis that needs to be handled with restraint, legality, and collective responsibility. Therefore, Theme–Rheme organization serves as a linguistic device that not only helps leaders shape the meanings of ideas but also helps shape political identities.

### **Comparison with Previous Literature**

The results of this study support Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) perspective that Theme acts as the starting point for the clause and plays a role in organizing the meaning of the text. The high and similar percentage of topical Themes in both datasets is consistent with the SFL perspective that experiential elements, like participants, institutions, values, and events, often introduce clauses. In this research, these elements also play an ideological role in highlighting political authority, threat, diplomacy, sovereignty and national identity.

The findings also validate the arguments of Eggins (2004) and Thompson (2014), who claim that Theme selection influences the interpretation of discourse by accenting certain meanings. The repeated use of “I,” “We,” “Iran,” and “The Supreme Leader” emphasizes personal authority, state power and security threat, as highlighted by Trump. The themes deployed by Masoud Pezeshkian, on the other hand, amplify such concepts as “Dialogue,” “Diplomacy,” “Sovereignty,” and “National unity,” which emphasize legality, negotiation, and collective responsibility.

The findings also align with Ott (2017), who uses Trump's Twitter discourse to describe his style as being direct, forceful and confrontational. This is confirmed by the present study through Theme–Rheme analysis, which demonstrates that Trump's themes often tend to involve himself, state power and threats

of Iran. Likewise, if you consider direct political communication, Enli's (2017) exposition on the topic of Twitter is confirmed by the presence of “I” and “We” topical Themes in Trump's posts.

With regards to political discourse, the results are consistent with van Dijk's (1997) conception of political discourse as a creation of ideology through the representation of actors and groups. Whereas Trump's Themes are about Iran as a threat, Masoud Pezeshkian's Themes are about Iran as a sovereign, united and legitimate country. Hence, this study is an extension of the previous studies as it demonstrates that ideology meanings in political tweets are not just formed with the help of the vocabulary and stance, but also with the help of Theme–Rheme organization at the clause level.

### **Theoretical Explanation**

In SFL, Theme selection can be considered a meaningful text choice. The Theme is the place where the clause begins and what the speaker brings to the reader as the first point to orient him/her. Thus, the theme recurrence can be regarded as the communicative motivations of the speaker and as an element in the development of coherence in discourse.

Trump's numerous uses of topics that are topical and are related to conflict suggest that he is using topics that prioritize agency, authority, threat and response in his discourse. The Rhemes that come after these Themes often take on the meanings of prevention, retaliation, surveillance, military action or success. This creates a rhetorical style that equates political power with action and aggression.

The repeated occurrence of institutional and value-based topical Themes in Masoud Pezeshkian's discourses suggests that diplomacy, legality, sovereignty, national unity and collective responsibility are key elements of his discourse. The Rhemes that follow these Themes often take on the connotations of peace, moderation, reform, stability, and political life. This results in a rhetorical effect that is characterized by the use of institutional values and diplomatic arguments for political legitimacy.

Theoretically, the results indicate that Theme–Rheme analysis is able to detect the ideological organization in short digital texts. Tweets are short, but they make deliberate text decisions that have an impact on the representation of political realities.

### **Unexpected Findings**

One interesting thing that stands out is that the topics of topical Themes are prevalent in both sets of data, even though the differences between the political styles of the leaders are quite evident. The analysis demonstrates that Trump's discourse is highly evaluative and confrontational, though to a great extent as a result of his topical organization and not the use of a high frequency of interpersonal Themes. His confrontational attitude is achieved by the use of the political actors, threats, military related entities that he repeatedly sets in thematic positions.

The other interesting result is that while Masoud Pezeshkian's talks are more explanatory and diplomatic, his tweets have a minimal number of textual Themes. This indicates that coherence is less direct in Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets, with more of it being evident from the repetition of value-based topical Themes, like “Dialogue”, “Diplomacy”, “Sovereignty,” and “National unity”.

### **Implications**

Methods and theories have been applied to the study. From a methodological standpoint, it proves that Theme–Rheme analysis can be applied to political microtexts, such as political tweets, even though they

are so short. Tweets can be analyzed as linguistic, structured texts in which thematic choices structure political meanings.

According to the theory, the study indicates that the textual metafunction can help in analyzing the political ideology in the text. The choice of theme highlights the actors, values, and institutions foregrounded in political discourse. It is especially useful for comparative political discourse analysis as a means of highlighting the differences in political positioning between leaders and political contexts.

The study also sheds light on the field of digital political discourse studies. It demonstrates that political tweets are not just random, inaccurate statements or informal public evaluations, but rather are linguistically structured texts that contribute to the creation of authority, legitimacy, threat, and national identity.

### **LIMITATIONS**

This research only includes 20 tweets for Donald Trump and 20 for Masoud Pezeshkian, which are selected tweets. Hence, the results may not be applicable across all tweets generated by both leaders. The study also investigates only Theme–Rheme organization, while other aspects of SFL (transitivity, mood, modality, appraisal, etc.) are not explored. A third restriction is that the analysis only takes into account the linguistic structure of the tweets. It doesn't look at the reactions of the audience, the number of times the tweets have been read, hashtags, multimodal components, or the political impacts of the tweets. These factors could offer clues and context to the reception and circulation of political meanings in digital spaces.

### **FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Future studies could increase the sample size of the tweets of both leaders and explore various phases of the conflict. It is also possible to consider other SFL tools in addition to Theme–Rheme analysis in future research, such as transitivity analysis, mood analysis, modality analysis and appraisal theory, in order to offer a more comprehensive analysis of political meaning-making. Comparative studies can also include research of tweets from other political actors in other geopolitical settings. These investigations would enable researchers to distinguish if the thematic patterns found in this study are unique to Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian or if they are representative of the general patterns in conflict-related political communication. The other suggestions for future research include combining Theme–Rheme analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis to further explore the link between discourse organization, power, ideology, and political persuasion in digital discourse.

### **CONCLUSION**

The present study investigated the Theme–Rheme organization in selected tweets of the two politicians, namely Donald Trump and Masoud Pezeshkian, during the US–Iran conflict using the textual metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Results found that topical themes were the major Theme type in both datasets, suggesting that both the leaders primarily focused their tweets on political actors, institutions, values, and conflict-related topics.

They were themed, though, for different ideological viewpoints. Trump's tweets emphasized state power, military preparedness, Iran as a security threat, and personal authority, making a discourse of confrontation and national security the main focus. Masoud Pezeshkian's tweets, on the other hand, emphasized diplomacy, sovereignty, legality, national unity and collective responsibility, and framed them as a discourse of restraint and institutional legitimacy. The study concludes that Theme–Rheme

organization can be a helpful tool to the linguistic investigation of ideological representation and political positioning in digital political discourse.

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