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A Critical Discourse Study of Populism: Donald Trump versus Zohran Mamdani

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores pronoun polarization in American politics and its role in i) ideological legitimization, ii) discursive victimization and iii) perception of political opponents. More particularly, it compares two discourses articulated by Donald Trump and Zohran Mamdani at the shift from political campaign to governance between 2025 and 2026. With this purpose, it addresses a significant gap in the literature by providing a comparative analysis of Mamdani's discourse against the populist rhetoric of Donald Trump. The term "populism" refers to a discursive variant in which a public speaker articulates "the common sense" in order to acquire political power (Canovan 243). After reviewing multiple approaches, this paper analyzed this term through the usage of personal pronouns (*we*/*us* and *they*/*them*) as markers of ideological polarization. In this manner, the studied politicians judge their social opponents through a system of values and position their group identity at the foreground of the discourse to achieve power (Chilton 4; Van Dijk 43). This work used a mixed-method approach by quantifying and analyzing personal pronouns to answer the proposed research questions. To this end, it integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with recent academic research in Corpus Linguistics (CL) to contribute to the existing gap in the combination of these two areas of linguistics research. The data analyzed consisted of Inaugural Speeches delivered by Donald Trump, and the recently elected New York City Mayor, Zorhan Mamdani. By comparing polarization strategies on two leaders from different political spectrums, this study offers a critical perspective of how the voter sphere is divided through identity appeal, engaging directly with modern politics and public debate.

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Introduction

Electoral alignment is crucial in political discourse and communicative strategies play a significant role in shaping democratic outcomes. Political figures use emotionally appealing rhetoric to integrate the voter in their speech [1]. This discursive strategy is commonly coined as "populism" and relies on an anti-elitist discourse that claims to speak on behalf of "the people" [2]. In this context, the use of personal pronouns becomes an effective tool for examining such strategies. Guided by the speaker's intentions, these linguistic makers function as a means for the construction of political identity and the polarization of social groups within discourse [3]. Through this mechanism, politicians seek ideological legitimacy by appealing to a shared system of values [4]. In consequence, individuals gather with those with a shared ideology, this paper referred to this strategy as political grouping [4].

Against this background, the purpose of this dissertation is to analyze group-pronouns in American politics and their effect on i) ideological legitimization, ii) discursive victimization and iii) perception of group opponents. These three issues will be examined through the usage of the pronouns *we*/*us* and *they*/*them* as markers of unity or antagonism within electoral spheres. On the other hand, this study compares discourses given by two ideologically opposed American politicians: Donald Trump and Zorhan Mamdani. It argues that in their inaugural speeches, both leaders aimed to achieve voting support by framing divergent yet similar discursive polarization [5,6]. Considering these contexts, the following research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. How does Zohran Mamdani use *we*/*us* and *they*/*them* to construct electoral grouping?
2. How does Donald Trump use *we*/*us* and *they*/*them* to construct electoral grouping?

Following this introduction, the research background reviews the academic debate surrounding populism and the chosen parameters for its definition. It then explores the contribution of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL) to the topic of pronoun polarization in the speeches of the studied politicians. This section also analyzes pronoun-choice through Chilton's Deictic Space Theory (DST) in combination with Van Dijk's Ideological Square to examine positive and negative attributions to political groups [3,4]. The methodology of this study explains the compiled corpus and the chosen conventions, tools and analytical parameters. The results and discussion focus on both quantitative and qualitative interpretations to the polarization strategies as well as political legitimization reflected in pronoun alternation. Finally, this study concludes by summarizing the main research findings, limitations of CDA and recommendations for future research.

Research Background

Populism and Polarization

In this section, the conceptual approaches regarding populism are discussed by reviewing its philosophical framework and its linguistic executions [2,7,8]. This term has been framed as a category of political analysis that mutes within divergent ideologies; within this groundwork, populist leaders are self-presented as the legitimate voice of "the common sense" to achieve political power and electoral alignment [7]. Furthermore, this study explains populism through linguistic parameters. First, populism functions as a linguistic phenomenon rooted in electoral division in which two homogeneous groups are opposed: "the pure people" against "the corrupt elite" [2,9]. Second, this discursive strategy operates through linguistic mechanisms in order to polarize public opinion [8]. Last, polarization functions as a discursive strategy that employs a dichotomy between "us, the people" and "them, the elites" [8]. With this notion in mind, populism and polarization recreate ideological segmentation within public opinion.

Moreover, this dissertation considers group division as the most fundamental maneuver of both populist and polarization discourse. In order to map this strategy through linguistics, populism recreates electoral grouping through the usage of personal pronouns. These linguistic markers embody the aforementioned pure people versus corrupt elite dichotomy to antagonize the public sphere. As Chilton (58) suggests, pronouns conceptualize group identity within insiders or outsiders. Similarly, Van Dijk (20) demonstrates how "we-they" polarization reflects a conflict of interest rooted in ideological division. These pronouns construct political identity based on the speaker's interests as they express social relations and interactions within public discourse [10]. Therefore, this study equally considers personal pronouns as fundamental tools for examining political grouping. The pronouns *we*/*us* construct in-group, coined as "the pure people" while *they*/*them* denote the out-group, portrayed as "the corrupt elite" [2,10]. In political speech, this personification serves propagandistic purposes by legitimizing political identity and reinforcing ideological disagreement [10].

This dissertation argues that pronoun polarization is codified differently depending on ideological orientations [8]. In this sense, it analyzes the two selected politicians through distinct populist articulations reelected in their linguistic deployment of the term. This approach aims to explore how the aforementioned "people versus corrupt elite" dichotomy operates depending on different ideologies through the appeal of *we*/*us* and *they*/*them*. Given the conceptual ambiguity surrounding notions such as *the people*, *corrupt elite, in-group and out-group*, this paper frames these concepts in two opposed articulations of populism: i) *anti-elitist* populism, in which a corrupt elite is presented as disconnected from the "common people" in favour of other social actors, (such as immigrants or lobbyists) and ii) *people-centered* populism which appeals to "the common sense" by denouncing social inequality by targeting economic elites [8]. These two forms of populism illustrate how partisan debate constructs the out-group according to distinct ideological parameters. In this sense, anti-elitist discourse frames a nationalistic polarization whereas people-centered discourse constructs political antagonism less explicitly [8].

Deictic Center and Self-Positioning

Language is not a neutral system, on the contrary, it serves to communicate, manipulate and drive public opinion towards the target message based on speakers' interests. In this sense, speakers position meaning within their on-going context [3]. This cognitive process is referred to as "deictic center" and describes the human capacity to establish a shared attention with other participants by pointing meaning through three-dimensional axes [3]. This system is driven by an egocentric actor coined as *self* (Cap, "Studying Ideological Worldviews" 18). The *self* is situated at the center of a geometric model and organizes space, time and morality based on its own subjectivity [3]. Consequently, speakers locate their interlocutors and social environment along a scale of remoteness from the *self* and establish how the *other* is located in discourse [3]. This theory was coined as Deictic Space Theory (DST) and examines how political speech employs a system of remoteness in order to manipulate meaning in discourse [3]. This study considers that the *self* embodies the in-group while the *other* is regarded as the out-group within populist discourse. These two linguistic elements serve to examine pronoun polarization in order to achieve electoral alignment.

In populist discourse, the *self* is constructed as the collective in-group through the personal pronouns *we*/*us* by foregrounding the in-group identity within the speech [11]. Through this pronoun-appeal, the *self* encodes social hierarchy to index the relationship between speakers and interlocutors in a communicative activity [12]. On the other hand, this element is antagonized against the corrupt elite (coined as the out-group) represented through *they*/*them* [11]. From this perspective, the populist leaders polarize their electorate across time, space and morality [3]. These three axes, respectively coined as t-axis, s-axis and m-axis, serve to recreate polarization mechanisms aiming to locate electoral alignment closer to the speaker's political interests.

This study considers that this polarization follows three respective strategies. First, spatial abstraction determines how social actors are positioned according to perceived similarities with the speaker [3].to position in-group proximate to the speaker, while isolating the out-group [13]. Spatial positioning also frames cultural boundaries, as speakers situate cultures within this system of remoteness to ensure a legitimate space [3]. Second, in order to achieve legitimacy, populist leaders commit to future actions by appealing to common historical ground close to *we*/*us* [14]. Time and space frame a nationalistic narrative in which the in-group locates social actors who share national values in proximity to itself [14]. From this moral engagement, time, space and value systems coordinate together to achieve a contextual effect [13]. Last, populist rhetoric establishes "right-wrong" dichotomies in order to reinforce the future actions of the in-group [14]. The out-group is located "far from the truth" whereas the in-group is "morally right" [14]. This moral polarization reinforces an aggression-victim narrative where the out-group is located morally far from the deictic center

Proximization while the in-group is presented as a victim of the corrupt elite. Consequently, political grouping is submitted to a system of values in order to legitimize political identity [14].

Van Dijk's Ideological Square

Van Dijk went a step further to propose his theory of the Ideological Square, which serves as a complementary dimension to the DTS in this study [4]. While the DTS remains the primary theoretical framework, Van Dijk's model is restricted to analytical rather than theoretical implications.

To achieve social legitimacy, populist leaders construct a group schema to categorize social actors. Accordingly, *they*/*them* not only activate the out-group, but these pronouns are also analyzed through descriptive attributions. Van Dijk coined this descriptive binarism as: *positive self-representation* and *other-negative*

prevention [4]. Within this logic of polarization, the in-group (we/us) emphasizes its positive attributes while omitting its negative aspects, whereas the out-group (*they*/*them*) is constructed through a negative narrative that suppresses its positive characteristics [5]. Within a system of values, *we* is substantially positive in regard to *they* [10]. By constructing a negative picture of the out-group, the in-group foregrounds its position within the discourse. It locates social actors not only through a scale of proximity and distance, but also through an evaluative language [4,5]. In this dissertation, evaluative language is examined as a mechanism through which out-group positioning demonstrates political attitudes [5]. The Ideological Square functions as a linguistic analogy to illustrate how social actors perceived as proximate in time, space and morality to the deictic center are positive whereas those perceived as distant are negatively described.

Combining Critical Discourse Analysis with Corpus Linguistics

The presented framework aims to combine two distinct yet complementary areas of linguistics: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL). This aimed to juxtapose traditional methods associated with CDA and the recent contributions of CL in academic literature [16]. The presented methodology builds on this literature to follow a mix-methods approach to create a comparative analysis of populist rhetoric.

Regarding the qualitative background, the selected speeches were chosen due to their importance in linguistic polarization [5,6]. In their respective methodologies, CDA aimed at revealing i) Trump's linguistic choices within populist rhetoric grounded on a CDA methodology and ii) Mamdani's pronoun-polarization within ideological implications [5,6]. The text in CDA remains a semiotic entity that reflects ideology of a studied society [15]. Language, therefore, operates as a source for political dominance by framing social identity.

On the other hand, CL enables analyzing linguistic patterns from a systematic and quantitative approach. Through this methodology, large amounts of linguistics data and representative samples can be systematically analyzed [15,16]. First, Wang et al. comparative data analysis of two populist variants, specifically Donald Trump's insights were fundamental for the analysis and discussions of findings [8]. Moreover, Baker et al. provided qualitative insights to corpus-based analysis (276), by providing positive and negative dichotomies, statistical significance was provided following Van Dijk (14)'s literature [4].

Methodology

Research Design

The present study employs a mixed-method approach to explore the use of pronoun polarization in inaugural speeches delivered by Donald Trump and Zohran Mamdani. The research combines a descriptive quantitative analysis and a content qualitative analysis. This quantification measures the frequencies of pronoun polarization employed by the two speakers. The qualitative analysis further explores the deictic and attributive strategies of the selected pronouns by creating a comparative analysis of Trump and Mamdani. Therefore, this section illustrates how the statistical findings identified in the quantitative section operate in populist discursive frameworks. In all, this combined methodology establishes comparative analysis of how both politicians employ polarization strategies in their inaugural speeches.

The data collected for this dissertation consists of two YouTube videos and their verbatim transcripts. The videos cover the inaugural speeches of two political figures: the established and widely recognized Donald Trump and the emerging figure in American political discourse, Zohran Mamdani. Starting with Trump, his inaugural speech was published on the *US Department of State* channel and he pronounced 2882 words in total. This speech was pronounced on January 20 2025. Regarding the recently elected New York mayor, Mamdani's inaugural speech was taken from *Fox 5 New York* channel articulating 3129 words. This speech was pronounced on January 1st 2026.

Corpus Annotation and Data Analysis

The annotation scheme employed in this study draws on Van Dijk's framework of "Categories of ideological analysis" (62) juxtaposed with deictic representations in Chilton's (58) literature. Table 1 illustrates how the corpus has been annotated according to the following parameters:

Table 1: Corpus Annotation Scheme

Type of strategy	Definition	Polarization Aims	Deictic Representation
Positive Self-Presentation	Self-definition of the in-group in ideological terms.	Attribution of positive traits to the in-group's ideology.	Positioning in-group at the deictic center
Victimization	Representation of the in-group as a victim of actions done by the out-group:	Reinforce in-group's legitimacy	Positioning the in-group at the deictic center through the m-axis
Negative Other-Presentation	Representation of the out-group as a burden for the in-group.	Division between the "good" and the "bad" people.	Positioning the out-group at far from the deictic center

As shown, these categories are examined as discursive strategies through which both politicians construct and delimit electorate groupings through ideological polarization. The first category (positive self-presentation) involves not only the attribution of positive to the in-group, but also legitimizes its moral rightness in relation to the out-group [3]. The second category constructs the in-group as victims abused by the out-group and, thus the out-group is both framed through negative connotations and as an aggressor. Through this, *they*/*them* is presented as negative to the pure *we*/*us*. These categories will demonstrate how the in-group achieves political authority by positioning its attributes at the the deictic center while locating their opponents at the background of the discourse.

The analyzed pronouns are not automatically categorized as indicators of in-group or out-group while those considered as neutral or non-significant have been categorized as "non-ideological". Following previous mixed-method literature, this study interprets pronoun positioning through their linguistic context [8]. The analysis of this dissertation focuses on two concepts: i) the instances of group-pronouns presented in each speech and annotation category, explored through a quantitative and statistical approach and ii) the linguistic positioning of these pronouns, examined through the lens of Chilton and Van Dijk revealing how these linguistic markers construct political identity [3,4]. Both authors employed their linguistic framework to analyze discourses comparable to those addressed in this paper. For clarity and consistency, pronoun pairs were grouped together in the analysis and normalized per 1,000 words. In Mamdani's speech, *we*/*us* appears 62 times whereas *they*/*them* 28 times. In contrast, Trump uses *we*/*us* 89 times and *they*/*them* 11. This study customized pronoun polarization through *SketchEngine*.

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Results and discussion

Quantitative Analysis of Inaugural Speeches

To quantify populist strategies, this analysis has submitted group pronouns to the aforementioned categories in order to measure the degree of polarization presented in both politicians. Figure 1 illustrates pronoun frequency in each category:

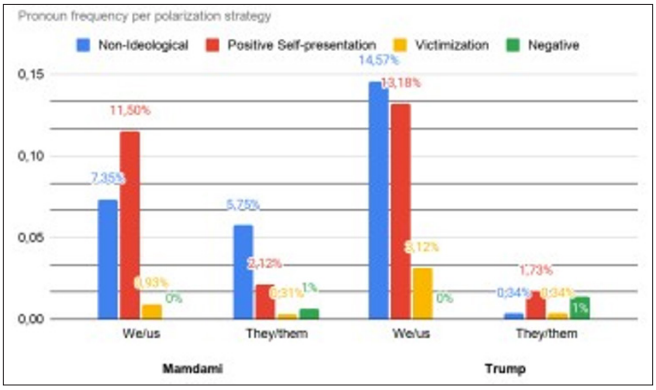

Figure 1: Pronoun Frequency Per Polarization Strategy

As shown, both Mamdani and Trump presented similar usage of we/us in positive self-presentation. Against this background, Trump demonstrated a higher frequency (13,16%) compared to Mamdani (11,50%). Both politicians reinforced this portrayal by presenting this in-group as victims of the out-group. As regards this strategy, Trump's discourse articulated a considerably higher frequency of instances (3,12%) in comparison to Mamdani's (0,93%). None of the speakers referred to their in-group in negative terms (0%).

In contrast, we/us was categorized as "non-ideological" based on the following reasoning. First, Trump uses repetition and refers to the subject out of context rather than to his in-group. The following example, "Los Angeles, where we are watching fires still tragically burn" and similar instances were classified in this category, which presents 14,57%. Lastly, Mamdani (7,35%) uses these pronouns to refer to his own administration rather than his in-group: "*We* won the primary last June". Regarding the usage of *they*/*them* as through positive categorization, Mamdani displayed a higher proportion (2,12%), since he uses this pronoun to also refer to his in-group through positive abstraction, for instance: "*They* will be Russian Jewish immigrants in Brighton Beach". Trump uses 1,73% of this strategy to refer to his citizens: "*they* were farmers and soldiers, cowboys and factory workers". Similarly, these pronouns were used to depict the in-group as a victim of the out-group, establishing a narrative of victimization (0,34% in Trump; 0,31% in Mamdani).

Furthermore, Trump's discourse framed this pronoun pair through negative attributes more frequently (1,38%) in comparison to Mamdani (0,63%). Trump used *they*/*them* in non-ideological terms in a lower frequency from Mamdani, presenting a 0,34% in comparison to Mamdani's 5,75%.

Qualitative Analysis of Inaugural Speeches

From a quantitative perspective, Trump articulated a "group-favourtisism" discourse (Van Dijk 28) not only through a higher usage of in-group instances (16,28%), but also by prioritizing its role in society [4,10]. While the Trumpist electorate is foregrounded in the discourse, Mamdani avoids a strict binarism between in-group and out-group through an inclusive orientated discourse [5]. Minimizing negative presentation, the out-group is described as 0,75% less in Mamdani than in Trump in negative connotation. Both politicians employed a "group-talk strategy" in which their respective in-group was presented in positive terms and as a victim of an injustice system [4]. Regarding the research questions, findings show that Trump's usage of in-group appeal is higher (18,51%) than in Mamdani (14,55%). Consequently, Trump emphasizes polarization through a negative other presentation [4]. Mamdani articulated lower discursive polarization since we/us and *they*/*them* are not strictly markers of ideological groups.

Trump's Inaugural Speech

Trump's speech constructs a pro-American narrative through an anti-elitist rhetoric designed to foreground audience allegiance [6]. He claims that previous administrations marginalized the true people in favor of a corrupt (non-American) elite, whereas Trump's administration situates "true American citizens" at the deictic center of the discourse by stating a people-centered government. This is exemplified in this quote: "we will immediately restore the integrity (...) of America's government". In this example, the t-axis is shaped by a sense of urgency while simultaneously framing a moral narrative. In doing so, Trump situated crisis rhetoric at the core of the communicative event in which a morally illegitimate social actor is presented [9]. Nevertheless, the s-axis situated the core point of Trumpism. From this indexicality, space abstraction and moral judgment will deliver. Trump delimits a strong and concise geographical abstraction in his discourse through a nationalist narrative embodied through this metaphor of Make America Great Again (MAGA). In this sense, the s-axis is correlated with a victimization narrative, since Trump denounces how previous administrations have neglected their patriotic duty: "We will not forget our country". Therefore, he would submit to a scale of "the true America" through different discursive strategies.

First, he presents the attributes of his in-group, seeking to establish closeness with his electorate through a praising narrative. Annotated as "positive self-presentation", Trump projects a strong and unwavering vision of his in-group's Americanness: "we will be the envy of every nation". His identity is delimited through the s-axis: his country. Yet, this positive construction is reinforced through urgency appeal, indicating that the nation needs immediate protection: "we now have a government that cannot manage even a simple crisis at home". In this example, the t-axis shapes the in-group through a sense of urgency while simultaneously framing a moral narrative. In such, Trump mobilizes urgency and crisis rhetoric in which a morally illegitimate social actor is presented [9].

Second, to legitimize his in-group (annotated as "self-legitimization"), he introduces a confrontational narrative where his in-group has been aggressed by an immoral social actor. However, Trump does not explicitly address an antagonistic narrative. Instead, he presents the rejection towards the out-group as a "natural" and justified response to its behaviour. In this manner, the Trumpist in-group is firstly portrayed as comprehensive while the out-group is depicted as opportunist: "to hate our country despite the love that we try so desperately to provide to *them*". As illustrated, *them* is negatively constructed in contrast to we. The in-group firstly aimed at sharing its s-axis, but due to the moral distance from the out-group, the in-group has been forced to self-distance from the out-group. As a result, Trumpism is framed as the legitimate voice to denounce this aggression [7].

Moreover, he reinforces this political polarization by depicting group distance through a negative abstraction of space. In the phrase "millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which *they* came", Trump utilizes the s-axis opposition, but social

antagonism. In moral terms, the out-group should not share the s-axis with the in-group and, as a result, they remain homogeneous through spatial separation. Drawing on Van Dijk's annotation system, referring to *they as aliens* presents a negative other-presentation due to the negative connotation of the term [4].

Accordingly, this paper considered that Trump situated the m-axis as the main central point of his discourse. Therefore, time and space correlated within the m-axis due to the emotional implications in Trump's discursive strategy. Through this indexicality, his in-group justifies future policies by assembling an emotional strategy juxtaposed from attacking the out-group to promising his in-group in order to achieve legitimization. As Zhu suggested, Trump frames populist strategies through an "attack-promise" narrative [6]. Within this group-talk, the in-group is presented through positive agency, as in the following excerpt: "[Americans] today is that it is time for us to once again act with courage" [4]. Within this framework, we is both located at the deictic center and foregrounded in the discourse. This will appeal to both electoral pathos and ethos in order to introduce Trump's discourse as a fact rather than an opinion [6].

Mamdani's Inaugural Speech

Mamdani's inaugural speech, on the contrary, communicates a "people-centered" narrative by denouncing an economic injustice [8]. He develops an emotional discourse in which the studied indexicality (time, space and morality) positions both the individual and the collective in common images and shared experiences in New York. From this perspective, Mamdani constructs "the people" as a community based on common experiences rather than polarized identity [5]. He reinforces his in-group through a shared label: New Yorkers. The following excerpt exemplifies this idea: "the words that most define us are the two we all share, New Yorkers". Through this appeal, Mamdani articulates a discourse of unity, where voters are unified against a common enemy in order to legitimize their right to their s-axis, their city: "Let us prove that when a city belongs to the people".

To reinforce this unity, he situates the out-group as a distant social actor associated with accumulation and exclusivity from the in-group, the working class [5]. In this sense, the corrupt elite is portrayed as an aggressor that prevents the in-group from achieving its legitimate role in New York: "We will answer to all New Yorkers, not to any billionaire or oligarch who thinks they can buy our democracy". As Aqdas et al., argued, Mamdani intensifies polarization by rejecting the elite (1635). He frames "the people" as a victim of economic injustice and positions New York (the s-axis) close to alignment with "the common people".

Through this strategy, he legitimizes the idiosyncrasies of his in-group by presenting a positive morality in regard to the out-group. He inferred the positive attributes of his in-group, presenting it as a "hard working" and multicultural collective that has constructed New York as it is today: "*They* will pray in mosques, at shul, at church (...)". Here, Mamdani praises collectiveness, where New York is a space of mutual respect regardless of cultural differences.

This multicultural identification frames the "common voter" as active collaborators with Mamdani in claiming New York back for in-group, thus, both audience and speakers are co-participants of a historical change [5]. Being more delimited, Mamdani will describe the out-group through different parameters. In such, *they*/*them* are not strictly markers of political antagonists, but markers of the in-group: "*They* will be young people in cramped Marble Hill apartments where the walls shake". As exemplified, the speaker frames a historical agency of New York, calling for metaphors and images owned by his collectiveness.

Described through positive attributes, *they* remains closer to the deictic center since it also embodies a shared cultural knowledge with the speaker's self-positioning. Through this strategy, Mamadani states a positive evaluation of *they* by affiliating it with the in-group [10].

Thus, this pronoun takes part of the victimization narrative and embodies the different types of New Yorkers: "*They* will be Palestinian New Yorkers in Bay Ridge" or "*They* will be black homeowners in St. Albans". In this manner, he expands the boundaries of the in-group beyond electoral support: "Regardless of whether we agree, I will protect you". As shown, Mamdani avoids political polarization through civic belonging in which New Yorkers pursue the same goal: reclaiming their democratic legitimacy [5]. By not framing a political ideology, Mamdani legitimizes his doctrine through rationality, protection of the weak and the rights of the in-group [3]. Through the first person pronoun, he situates himself and his collectiveness as the morally true and legitimate voice of "the people": "*we* will make the word "City Hall" synonymous with both resolve and results".

Finally, he states that his electorate is guided by the same common sense and legitimizes his groupness by tackling another social antagonist: Trump. "Some will be voters (...) who supported President Trump a year before *they* voted for me". The speaker presents himself as a "morally right" alternative to political corruption and positions "the people's will" close to his approach to reality through a moral perspective.

Discussion of the Qualitative Analysis

From a qualitative perspective, both politicians articulated pronoun polarization in their inaugural speeches, however, this strategy is manifested differently. This paper argues that pronoun appeal can be constructed from restrictive to inclusive perspectives. On the one hand, Donald Trump creates a national image grounded on patriotism, as he positions his in-group against an anti-American out-group. As exemplified, this paper considered that his indexicality can be summarized on his MAGA slogan as a form of group polarization. Trumpist in-group is self-legitimized by framing a secure and concise s-axis which is articulated through a narrative of temporal urgency [9]. To background this time-spacial appeal, America (embodying the in-group) is portrayed through positive attributes (great) while victimized by an external aggressor (immigrants). This dichotomy of aggressor-victim aligns with we/us political purposes, as it is legitimized by a melancholic t-axis reframing a nostalgic past where the in-group was intrinsically superior, embodied through "again", the in-group legitimizes its recovering of its legitimate space (America) [4]. Against this background, this in-group rejects cooperation with the out-group, as seen in the anti-elitist rhetoric, Trump articulates his ingroup distinction from the out-group [8].

Mamdani, on the contrary, unifies time, space and morality in order to present the audience as an actor in social transformation [5]. Through a people-centered framework, Mamdani articulates pronoun appeal to construct social unity rather than division. From a positive approach of "us vs. them", Mamdani shows an inclusive portrayal of his in-group willing to cooperate with the out-group despite political differences [8]. The aggressor, consequently, is reduced to a target actor: billionaires or technocrats. While

Trump frames a restrictive nationalism, Mamdani's in-group is legitimized by a historical justice that has not been accomplished: "every one of us is deserving of a decent life". His in-group has been a victim of the same aggression where the common people have lost their right to the city. Therefore, Mamdani uses this narrative in order to portray his in-group as a positive moral actor that acts on behalf of "the people": "we will make those buses fast and free" and "we will freeze the rent" where asymmetrical relationships between the in and out-group are a result of economic injustice.

Addressing the research questions, Trump articulates an *anti-elitist* form of populism [8]. His discourse positions the out-group as an actor disconnected from the in-group, which has been betrayed by previous political elites (particularly lobbyists). Trump appeals to *we*/*us* by constructing a nationalistic and pro-American narrative. In doing so, his speech embodies *we*/*us* as real American citizens who are confronted against an anti-American *they*/*them* [8]. Mamdani, on the contrary, articulates a *people-centered* populism where the in-group is not explicitly confronted against *they*/*them*, on the contrary, it denounces economic injustice by emphasizing collectivity [8]. They/them, therefore, is not an imminent marker of the out-group, since Mamdani addresses collectivity despite political differences. In this notion, the out-group is associated with an economically superior elite that prevents the working class from achieving a legitimate life [4,5]. Through this distinction, Trump articulates an exclusive form of pronoun polarization whereas Mamdani employs an inclusive-centered one. In all, this paper considers that both inaugural speeches demonstrate communicative events in which two social actors fight for legitimation in time, space and morality.

Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

The present study aimed to analyze linguistic polarization in political discourse by comparing two high-profile politicians as well as examining their similarities and divergent usage of populist rhetoric through pronoun choice. Findings revealed that Donald Trump uses an exclusive rhetoric by delimiting his in-group based on Americanness while Zohran Mamdani articulates a people-centered narrative designed to appeal to a wider in-group. Through this comparative approach, both leaders utilized strategies of mass manipulation to achieve electoral success.

Nevertheless, this study presents research limitations. Firstly, the analysis was limited to two discourses in electoral campaigns; for future research, the scope should include other discursive genres such as victory or office speeches. Secondly, future research should be expanded by incorporating a larger corpus or applying specialized frameworks such as Political Critical Discourse Analysis to deepen the investigation. Lastly, the corpus was restricted to three annotation categories and two theoretical frameworks; future research should analyze this corpus based on recent and diverse studies on linguistic polarization. The selected figures remain at different levels in political panorama, since Trump was elected as the 47th President of the United States, his figure remains more notable in public opinion than Mamdani, who is restricted to his city jurisdiction.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to a field crucial in democratic societies, as it aims to raise awareness of how populist strategies polarize public opinion into antagonized groups, preventing the voter sphere from being unified. By analyzing pronoun polarization, this study presents a reviewed perspective of how populism manipulates political identity, underscoring the importance of CDA awareness in present-day politics. More specifically, this study highlights the importance of CDA, as many other linguistic disciplines, in educating in political language. In this sense, studying populism through a critical and linguistic perspective enables democratic addressees (voters) to recognize how identity appeal is intrinsic in political discourse. CDA, therefore, builds analytical awareness of polarization language, a strategy frequently employed by political actors to antagonize the public sphere and transform democratic debate into a hierarchical-based narrative [17-19].

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