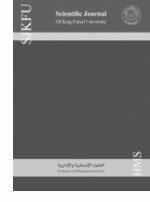




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Investigating Thematic Choices in Trump's Tweets on the U.S.–Mexico Wall: Political Discourse on Social Media

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دراسة أنواع المبتدأ في تغريدات دونالد ترامب حول الجدار الحدودي مع المكسيك: الخطاب السياسي في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي

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ABSTRACT

Trump declared his intention to build a wall along the U.S.–Mexico border during his presidential campaign in 2016. On 4 January, 2019, President Trump sent a letter to members of the U.S. Congress on the need to build a long wall to secure the U.S. border. This led local news reporters to discuss this political issue and its effects on the American and Mexican populations. Since Trump's decision to build the wall is one of the global issues that has been widely discussed in social media and American news agencies, it is pertinent to analyze thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.–Mexico border wall issue. The present study aims to investigate Trump's thematic choices, employing Halliday's systemic functional linguistics' approach. UAM CorpusTool software was employed in the annotation of theme types. The results of the study showed that topical theme was the most frequent theme type in Trump's tweets, followed by textual theme. Interpersonal theme was rarely employed. Trump tends to use simple, direct, and spontaneous language to make his communication style with his audience more natural and less complex. The study contributes to our understanding of theme types in political discourse on social media.

المخلص

صرح ترامب أثناء حملته الانتخابية في 2016 عن عزمه بناء جدار على طول الحدود الأمريكية المكسيكية. وأرسل الرئيس ترامب رسالة في الرابع من شهر يناير 2019 إلى أعضاء الكونغرس يشرح بها الحاجة لبناء الجدار من أجل حماية الحدود الأمريكية، مما دعا الصحف الأمريكية لمناقشة هذه القضية وتأثيرها على الشعب الأمريكي والمكسيكي. وتكمن أهمية تحليل أنواع المبتدأ في تغريدات ترامب حول الجدار الحدودي مع المكسيك في أن قرار ترامب أصبح أحد القضايا العالمية التي نوقشت في شبكات التواصل الاجتماعي والإعلام الأمريكي. تهدف هذه الدراسة لبحث أنواع المبتدأ في تغريدات ترامب باستخدام منهج هاليداي في علم اللغة الوظيفي الانتظامي. وتم استخدام برنامج يو ايه إم (UAM) في تحديد أنواع المبتدأ. وأظهرت النتائج أن أكثر أنواع المبتدأ استخداماً في تغريدات ترامب هو الموضوعي، ومن ثم يليه النصي، بينما ندر استخدام المبتدأ التفاعلي. وأظهرت النتائج أن ترامب يستخدم الخطاب البسيط والمباشر والتلقائي، مما يجعل أسلوب تواصله مع جمهوره طبيعياً وأقل تعقيداً. وتسهم هذه الدراسة في فهمنا لأنواع المبتدأ في الخطاب السياسي في وسائل التواصل الإعلامي.

1. Introduction

Donald Trump declared his intention to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico during his presidential campaign in 2016. On June 16, 2015, Trump stated that "I will build a great, great wall on our southern border" (Trump, 2015). In 2018, President Trump tweeted via his official Twitter account about the wall, asserting its importance in protecting the U.S. border. On 4 January, 2019, Trump sent a letter to Congress on the need to build a long wall to secure the U.S. border. Trump wanted Congress to cover the costs of building a high concrete or steel wall. Before Trump's presidency, there were various barriers extending just a few miles, which were not built according to Trump's wall's prototypes. Congress refused to fund most of the costs because no border walls based on these prototypes have been built or funded by Congress. As a result, Trump ordered a government shutdown in 2018–2019, which lasted for thirty-four days, the longest in the history of the U.S. (Zaveri et al., 2019).

The Democratic leaders Pelosi and Schumer criticized Trump's decision to shut down the government, arguing that it affected over 800,000 federal workers, as well as those working in airport security and law enforcement, as they had to continue their work without being paid (Pelosi & Schumer, 2019). Nancy Pelosi has served as the speaker of U.S. House of Representatives since 2019; she is the first woman in U.S. history to hold this position. Chuck Schumer, a member of the Democratic Party, serves as the senior U.S. senator from New York. Moreover, this issue, along with its effects on the American and Mexican populations, was also widely discussed on

social media and by news agencies (Abd'lillah, 2019). Trump and Congress, however, are still debating the ability to build the wall. The main purpose of Trump's tweets is to achieve his political goal of building the wall, as he always uses this platform to present updated news and information.

Since Trump's U.S.–Mexico border wall issue is one of the global issues that has been widely discussed on social media and by news agencies, it is pertinent to analyze the thematic choices in Trump's political social media discourse. This text-based study attempts to explain some of the causes underlying Trump's partial success in passing a resolution to build the U.S.–Mexico border wall to protect the country from illegal immigrants. The study is also significant for those interested in political social media discourse, as it aims to reveal the prominent thematic choices employed by Trump. Thus, the main aim of the present study is to investigate the thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.–Mexico border wall issue.

2. Literature Review

Language usually carries various meanings; writers or speakers use language to express different meanings. This has led linguists to introduce the field of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is "the study of the patterns of language across texts, as well as the social and cultural context in which the texts occur" (Paltridge, 2012, p. 1). It focuses on both written and spoken languages in different contexts, such as educational, economic, social, and political. Halliday's (2014) systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach to language is one of the theories used in the analysis of discourses.

The next section presents the theoretical background underlying SFL (2.1), followed by a review of the literature (2.2).

2.1. An Overview of SFL:

SFL is a linguistic theory developed by Halliday (2014). It is a social semiotic approach to language that focuses on how people use language to make meaning. According to SFL, language use is functional, i.e., its function is to make meanings that are influenced by social and cultural contexts. SFL aims to build a link between human language choices in a text and its function in a certain context to express meanings. According to Halliday, language has three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 2014).

The ideational meaning for constructing our experience of the world—experiential metafunction—is realized through the transitivity system and the logical connections between events in the world—logical meaning. The interpersonal metafunction refers to a function of creating interpersonal relationships and expressing attitudes that are realized through the grammatical systems of mood, such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative statements, and modality, i.e., judging the probability, obligation, usuality, or willingness of a theme. The textual metafunction refers to the organization of meaning into a coherent message, which is realized through thematic choices and theme patterns. These three types of meaning can be considered as powerful linguistic tools that help linguists to comprehend and analyze the linguistic choices in any text. As the study aims to investigate the thematic choices in Trump’s discourse, it is pertinent to provide an overview of the third metafunction.

The textual metafunction refers to the creation of discourse in which the ideational and interpersonal meanings are presented as information that can be shared by both listener and speaker in a certain context. Thus, the textual function can be considered as the linguistic expression of two metafunctions, ideational and interpersonal. It deals with the organization of the clauses in a text. The structure that gives the clause its character as a message is known as a thematic structure and it consists of two elements, theme and rheme (Table 1).

Table 1. Example of Theme and Rheme

He	Succeeded in the Final Exam
Topical	
Theme	Rheme

The major element in a clause is the system of theme. Theme is “the element that serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context” (Halliday, 2014, p. 38). In contrast, rheme, is “the part in which the theme is developed” (Halliday, 2014, p. 38). In a clause, there is a departure from a place that has familiar, or given, information to another place that has unfamiliar, or new, information to complete the message of the clause. Since new information is “typically marked by tonic prominence” (Alyousef, 2016, p. 489) in spoken discourse, it does not necessarily conflate with rheme. The phonological indices of given and new, therefore, are not examined in the present study of written texts. Theme works as a cohesive device that can help us understand the organization of ideas in discourse, how they can be interpreted, and how the meanings of messages are constructed (Halliday, 2014).

There are three major systems of theme: a choice between a marked or unmarked theme, a choice between a predicated and unpredicated theme, and choice of theme type. According to thematic markedness, a marked theme means one that is “atypical,” or “unusual,” while an unmarked theme—subject, a nominal group as theme—simply means the “most typical,” or “usual” (Halliday, 2014). Theme markedness explains the relationship between the mood and the theme structure of a clause. An unmarked theme conflates with the mood structure constituents, such as subject (in declarative clauses),

finite (in interrogative clauses), WH-element (in WH-interrogative clauses), and predicator (in imperative clauses). A marked theme conflates with other constituents, such as circumstantial adjuncts and complements. The system of theme predication was not investigated in the present study because it is mostly associated with spoken language, whereby new information is marked by intonation.

Theme is divided into three types: an obligatory topical, or experiential, theme, interpersonal theme, and textual theme (Table 2). The latter two are optional. Topical theme typically consists of a participant, circumstance, or process since it “has some function in the experiential structure of the clause” (Halliday, 2014, p. 66). A clause can include more than one topical theme only if themes are marked, since they provide context for the point of departure of the message, as in “*yesterday, behind the bed* [theme], John found his book [rheme].” The circumstantial element “*behind the bed*” is moved to the thematic position to create a marked theme. Interpersonal theme is a constituent that precedes the topical theme to construct the mood structure of a clause.

Table 2. Theme types

		Examples
Topical theme	Participant	Noun group
	Circumstance	Prepositional or adverbial group
	Process	Verbal group
Interpersonal theme	Finite elements	Modal auxiliaries, “be” auxiliaries
	Mood adjuncts	Maybe, probably, never, only, not, sadly,
	Comment adjuncts	obviously, surprisingly
	Vocative adjuncts	Marial Henry! Sir!
	Polarity adjuncts	Yes/No
Textual theme	WH-question words	Who, what, where, how, why
	Continuatives	Now, oh, well, no, yeah, umm, ...
	Conjunctions	And, but, or
	Conjunctive adjuncts	Therefore, although, so, however
	WH-relatives	Who, which, where, how, when

The third type of theme is textual theme, which occurs before the first topical theme; it does not express any interpersonal or experiential meaning. The role of the textual theme is to relate the clause to its context. It has an important role in increasing the cohesion of a text. Whereas continuity adjuncts construct semantic relations, conjunctive adjuncts construct logico-semantic relationships of expansion, thus contributing to cohesive texts. WH-relatives are both textual and topical themes rolled into one.

2.2. Review of Related Studies:

The choice of specific words and phrases in political discourse has a powerful effect on the audience (Quam & Ryshina-Pankova, 2016). Many studies in discourse analysis investigated the presidential speeches of Bush (Ajmi, 2014), Obama (Alvi & Abdul, 2011), and recently Trump (Chen 2018; Kreis, 2017; Murni, 2017; Rachman & Yuniarti, 2017; Wang & Liu, 2018; Wignell et al., 2019).

Wignell et al. (2019) investigated Trump’s supremacy, which enabled him to become the president of the U.S. They used a systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis framework in the analysis of Trump’s speeches, in addition to Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) approach for analysis of newspaper images. The results of the study showed that Trump was a dominant figure in all types of media which, in turn, led to his success. He gained dominance by increasing certainty and force in his tweets and by speaking the language of common people. Wignell et al. (2019) concluded in their study that Trump’s image and his political announcement on the Mexican border wall made him more noticeable than his rivals.

Kreis (2017) investigated Trump’s tweets past his inauguration and found that Trump used an informal and direct language to reinforce the concept of homogenous people. Additionally, Chen (2018) found that Trump used the first-person pronoun, simple words, and brief and declarative statements in his inaugural speech to achieve his political goals. This indicated that Trump attempts to establish

rapport with the audience and reach many voters. The study also revealed that Trump frequently employed marked themes to attract the attention of the audience and to increase the coherence of his speech.

Using an SFL-based engagement framework, Quam and Ryshina-Pankova (2016) examined the strategies used by the 2016 presidential candidates Trump, Clinton, and Sanders to align themselves with their audiences in their election speeches. The results revealed the two most used types of engagement strategy markers by the three candidates were heteroglossia and monoglossia. However, Trump's speeches relied more on monoglossic statements than heteroglossic assertions. Unlike heteroglossic text, monoglossic text includes bare assertions and the author's viewpoints on a proposition. Similarly, Ross, and Caldwell (2020) employed the SFL-based appraisal framework to investigate the interpersonal language resources—attitude, engagement, and graduation—Trump employed in his tweets. The findings indicated that "Crooked [judgement ^ veracity] Hillary Clinton" ranked most highly. Trump made use of a variety of appraisal resources as part of his de-professionalized strategies of "going negative." He placed the negative judgments of Hillary's veracity, "a liar," or propriety, "unethical behavior" in theme position. He also negatively judged Hillary's capacity, "incompetent" and appreciation, "bad /judgement decisions."

Degani (2016) examined the main theme and the language complexity in Trump's and Clinton's announcement speeches as candidates for the U.S. presidency. An analysis of the speeches revealed that Trump's most frequent words were names of countries and business-related words, e.g., China, Mexico; billion, money, Ford, while Clinton's most frequent nouns were people related, e.g., immigrants, nurses. The study indicated that the theme of Clinton's speech focused on developing more social and economic equality, while Trump's speech focused on problems related to business and the American border. Regarding the complexity of the language, both Clinton's and Trump's texts were readable, but Trump's speech was less complex than Clinton's; the readability indices were 2.4 and 7.8, respectively. Similarly, Liu and Lei (2018) found that Clinton's thematic words carried a positive vision, while Trump's thematic words indicated a more negative view.

Along similar lines, Wang and Liu (2018) examined the style of Trump's speech in contrast to the styles of both Clinton and Obama, using debates and campaign speeches as the data source. The findings showed that Trump's lexical diversity in debates was smaller than both Clinton's and Obama's. Trump's sentences were simple, and his campaign speechwriters sometimes employed a richer vocabulary and well-edited sentences (Wang & Liu, 2018). As for thematic concentration, Trump's campaign speeches contained more central themes than Clinton's and Obama's.

Rachman and Yunianti (2017) employed a descriptive qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze Trump's speech as part of his presidential campaign on November 16, 2015. The results showed that Trump attempted to focus his political discourse on national unity, using informal language to make the audience feel close and intimate with him. He utilized various strategies to gain power and become the president of the U.S. The central topic of his speech was the idea of making America great again. Trump's ideology is gaining power, which is associated with money, politics, and authority. Power also includes one's ability to influence the actions or decisions of others.

To the best of our knowledge, only two studies (Liu & Zhang, 2018; Murni, 2017) have employed SFL to investigate Trump's discourse. Murni (2017) employed the SFL approach to analyze the ideational,

interpersonal, and textual meanings in Trump's tweets from April 2017. However, the data selection was not based on a specific theme and it included only 62 clauses from 33 tweets. Thus, the unit of analysis was the clause rather than clause complexes. The findings revealed that material processes were the dominant process type in Trump's tweets. The interpersonal meaning analysis indicated that Trump used the declarative mood more than any other mood. Finally, the textual meanings in Trump's tweets were realized by 53 (81.53%) topical themes and 12 (18.47%) textual themes. The tweets lacked any instances of interpersonal themes. Similarly, Liu and Zhang (2018) employed SFL to investigate the textual meanings in Trump's victory speech and found that it contained unmarked themes to enable the audience to grasp what he was talking about. Trump also used marked themes to draw attention to particular information. The first-person pronouns "I" and "we" were more highly used in Trump's victory speech "emphasize the unity of him and all Americans and his own political ideas" (Liu & Zhang, 2018, p. 281). The researchers, however, did not provide information related to data size and the unit of analysis.

The reviewed literature shows that investigations of theme types in Trump's tweets on the U.S.–Mexico border wall issue remain unexplored. The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating theme types in Trump's tweets on this matter.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design:

This research study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.–Mexico border wall issue, utilizing Halliday's systems of theme type and thematic markedness.

3.2. Data Collection:

The corpus included Trump's 190 tweets (7,718 words) on the topic of the U.S.–Mexico border wall, posted between 16 November, 2018 and 11 February, 2019. The tweets were collected from Trump's official Twitter account @realDonaldTrump. The selection of this timeframe was due to time constraints for the researchers. The selection criterion for the tweets was that they must contain the following words: "Mexico," "Mexican," "the wall," "fence," "border," "southern border," or "border security." The times and dates of the tweets, retweets, and links were excluded as the study aims to analyze Trump's discourse. This process is called data condensation, whereby researchers revise the data to select, focus, simplify, abstract, and transform the data that appears in the full corpus (Miles et al., 1994).

3.3. Data Analysis Tools and Procedures:

The researchers employed the corpus annotation software UAM CorpusTool, developed by O'Donnell (2008), which is based on Halliday's (2014) SFL framework. This software facilitates the process of analysis by automatically tagging theme types and thematic markedness. Thus, the data was analyzed using UAM software. Complex clauses were the unit of analysis, which included both independent and dependent clauses. Analysis using the UAM CorpusTool of Trump's tweets revealed that the total units of analysis were 2,671. **Error! Reference source not found.**

Although the study is primarily qualitative, frequencies and percentages of the occurrence of each theme type were employed to validate our claims when comparing the use of thematic choices. Finally, each researcher manually revised 50% of the annotations to ensure the reliability of the results. Finally, any disagreements regarding the assignment of elided themes were discussed until a full agreement was reached.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings showed that the most frequent theme type in Trump's tweets on the border wall issue was topical theme, followed by textual theme (Table 3).

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages of theme types in Trump's tweets

Theme type	Topical		Interpersonal		Textual		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Tweets	653	78.20	15	1.80	167	20	835	100

These findings were supported by Murni's (2017) study of Trump's tweets, which showed that topical theme was the most frequent theme type (78.20%), followed by textual theme (20%); however, interpersonal theme rarely occurred in the present study (1.80%), Murni's (2017) study also indicated the low occurrence of this theme type. This could be ascribed to the sample size, which was only 33 tweets, while in the present study it was 190 tweets.

The most frequent topical themes in Trump's tweets were the first-person plural pronoun "we" (n=121) and the singular pronoun "I" (n=60). Trump typically employs the inclusive pronoun "we" in his discourse to establish a sense of commonality and trust with his readers and, thereby, achieve his political goals.

- "We [theme] lose 300 Americans a week, [rheme] 90% of which [theme] comes through the Southern Border. [rheme] These numbers [theme] will be DRASTICALLY REDUCED [rheme] if we [theme] have a Wall! [rheme]"¹
- "We [theme] must now work together, after decades of abuse, to finally fix the Humanitarian, Criminal & Drug Crisis at our Border. [rheme] WE [theme] WILL WIN BIG! [rheme]"²
- "The only reason they [Democrats] do not want to build a Wall is that [theme] Walls Work! [rheme] 99% of our illegal Border crossings [theme] will end, [rheme] crime in our Country [theme] will go way down [rheme] and we [theme] will save billions of dollars a year! [rheme]"³
- "I [theme] want to stop the Shutdown [rheme] as soon as we [theme] are in agreement on Strong Border Security! [rheme] I [theme] am in the White House ready to go, [rheme] where [theme] are the Dems? [rheme]"⁴
- "Humanitarian Crisis [theme] [is] at our Southern Border. [rheme] I [theme] just got back [rheme] and it [theme] is a far worse situation than almost anyone would understand, [rheme] an invasion! I [theme] have been there numerous times [rheme] - The Democrats, Cryin' Chuck and Nancy [theme] don't know how bad and dangerous it is for our ENTIRE COUNTRY.... [rheme]"⁵

This finding was in line with Liu and Zhang's (2018) study of Trump's presidential victory speech, which showed that the most frequent themes were "we" and "I." Liu and Zhang (2018) argued that Trump uses this theme to emphasize the unity between him and all Americans and to assure his political ideas. Trump attempts to persuade all American citizens to realize the urgent need to build the wall by using the strategy of appealing to emotions, which includes the use of loaded language. Thus, Americans need to be aware that 300 Americans are killed every week due to "our illegal Border crossings." Trump foregrounds "Border crossings" (Tweet 3) by placing it in the theme position because this information is evident to every American. These figures will be "DRASTICALLY REDUCED" when the wall is built. It should be noted here that Trump uses "ALL CAPS" in his tweets not only to amplify the positive impact of his plan but also to reveal the negative impact that will affect the "ENTIRE COUNTRY" in case the Democrats refuse to vote for the bill. Trump defended this use by tweeting "I capitalize certain words only for emphasis, not [because] they should be capitalized!"⁶ This finding was in line with Ross and Caldwell's (2020) study, which indicated that Trump employs the adverb "so" to add extra emphasis to the negative judgement of veracity, combined with "ALL CAPS," not only to amplify the negative sentiment underlying his tweets but also to increase their emotional impact. In Tweet 3,

Trump argues that the crime rate will decrease when 99% of illegal border crossings end, thereby billions of dollars will be saved every year. Trump employs the plural possessive pronoun "our" with the topical theme "country" (Tweets 3 & 5). The collocates "our country" and "our great country" were used 39 times to encourage the Democrats to care about border security. This finding converged with Kreis's (2017) study of Trump's tweets past his inauguration, which indicated that Trump's use of the notion of the homeland—"our country"—that needs to be protected from "evil." Tweet 3 includes an example of embedded-clause topical theme, "The only reason ... is that," which rarely occurred in Trump's tweets, compared to main-clause topical themes, which were more frequent. This result was expected since Twitter users are expected to use a direct style of writing. Trump argues that the Democrats could save the government shutdown if they reach an agreement on "Strong Border Security!" (Tweet 4).

The clause-initial deictic determiners, or demonstratives, "this" and "these" serving as topical themes minimally occurred in Trump's tweets (12 instances). Halliday (2014, 87) argued that "all deictic elements are characteristically thematic."

- "We [theme] lose 300 Americans a week, [rheme] 90% of which [theme] comes through the Southern Border. [rheme] These numbers [theme] will be DRASTICALLY REDUCED [rheme] if we [theme] have a Wall! [rheme]"⁷
- "Very sadly, Murder cases in Mexico in 2018 [theme] rose 33% from 2017, to 33,341. [rheme] This [theme] is a big contributor to the Humanitarian Crisis taking place on our Southern Border and then [Elided theme] spreading throughout our Country [rheme]"⁸

The deictic determiner "these" in Tweet 6 refers back to the theme "90% of which" in the previous clause. Similarly, the deictic determiner "this" in Tweet 7 refers to the theme in the previous clause. Rather than repeating the whole clause, Trump resorts to brevity by substituting the class with these deictic determiners.

Interpersonal themes were minimally employed in Trump's tweets (Table 4). They included unfused finite elements in interrogative structures (e.g., "Do the Dems [theme] realize that most of the people not getting paid are Democrats? [rheme]"), WH-question words (e.g., "Where [theme] are the Dems? [rheme]"), mood adjuncts (e.g., "No [theme] slamming [of the door] [rheme]"), and comment adjuncts ("Very sadly, Murder cases in Mexico in 2018 [theme] rose 33% from 2017, to 33,341 [rheme]").

Table 5. Frequency of interpersonal themes in Trump's tweets

Type of Interpersonal Theme	Interpersonal Theme	Freq.
WH-question words	Where, why	4
Finite elements	Are/Do & modal auxiliaries	6
Mood adjunct	Only, no	2
Comment adjuncts	Sadly, simply	3
	Total	15

Trump uses the WH-element "why" to request missing pieces of information, which in his view are obvious.

- "Why [theme] wouldn't any sane person want to build a Wall! [rheme]"⁹

This finding was in line with Ross and Caldwell's (2020, p. 25) study, which indicated that Trump's use of leading questions "point towards what he sees as an obvious answer, with no alternative." He also employs the WH-element "where" in Tweet 4 to hold the Democrats responsible for prolonging the government shutdown. It should be noted here that WH-elements have "a two-fold thematic value" (Halliday, 2014, p. 112) since they are both interpersonal and topical themes. They are topical—with a non-topical function—because they represent the missing participant or circumstance and interpersonal because they construct the mood structure of a clause. Instances of comment and mood adjuncts are shown below:

¹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 11, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

² Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 11, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

³ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 6, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁴ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁵ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 11, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁶ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (July 3, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

⁷ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 10, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁸ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 31, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

⁹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 31, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

- “Sadly, there [theme] can be no REAL Border Security without the Wall! [rheme].”¹⁰
- “Very sadly, Murder cases in Mexico in 2018 [theme] rose 33% from 2017, to 33,341 [rheme].”¹¹
- “Only a Wall, or Steel Barrier, [theme] will keep our Country safe! [rheme]”¹²
- “Only fools, or people with a political agenda, [theme] don’t want a Wall or Steel Barrier to protect our Country from Crime, Drugs and Human Trafficking. [rheme] It [theme] will happen [rheme] - it [theme] always does! [rheme]”¹³

Comment adjuncts express a writer’s opinion on the proposition being discussed. Trump employed interpersonal themes in his tweets to influence his audiences. Zompetti (2019, p. 50) states that “by claiming the Wall will address human trafficking, Trump appealed to a liberal demographic, as well as attempted to temper his misogynistic image with a new commitment against human sex trafficking.” Trump uses loaded language to affect his audience, e.g., “country,” (Tweets 3, 5, 11 & 12) “drugs,” (Tweets 2 & 12) “human trafficking,” (Tweet 12) and “crime” (Tweets 3 & 12). The strategy of using loaded language is among the idiosyncratic features characterizing Trump’s discourse (Lakoff, 2017). Kreis (2017, p. 5) states that “by using an informal and conversational language style in his tweets, [Trump] has been successful in reaching large audiences and appearing closer to the people.”

The most frequent textual theme type in Trump’s tweets on the border wall issue was conjunctions “and” and “but.” The conjunctive adjuncts expressing contrast “however” and “meanwhile” were rarely used (Table 5). The rare use of conjunctive adjuncts was expected since these are typically employed in academic discourse to link clauses and to facilitate comprehension.

Table 5. Frequency of textual theme in Trump’s tweets

Type of Textual Theme	Textual Theme	Freq.
Conjunctions	And/ &	82
	But	31
	If	27
	Also	1
Conjunctive adjuncts	While	3
	However,	3
	Meanwhile	0
WH-relatives	Which, where	17
Continuatives	Now, well	3
	Total	167

Writers use conjunctions to join two clauses into one sentence, while they use conjunctive adjuncts to link the content of the clause with the preceding text. According to McCabe and Heilman (2007), writers use textual theme to build a link between clauses and to guide readers to “the expectedness of the writer of the upcoming proposition in light to the previous preposition” (McCabe & Heilman, 2007, 150). For instance, the temporal conjunctive adjunct “while” in the following tweet serves as a textual theme that links the clauses together.

- “canceled my trip on Air Force One to Florida while we wait to see if the Democrats will help us to protect America’s Southern Border!”¹⁴

It indicates that the writer expects the reader to assume that there is a possibility that the border wall will not be approved by the Democrats. Like WH-question words, relatives also have a two-fold thematic structure: topical and textual. They are topical because they represent the missing participant or circumstance and textual because they construct the mood structure of the clause.

- “Would much prefer that [theme] Mitt focus on Border Security and so many other things [rheme] where he [theme] can be helpful...[rheme].”¹⁵
- “Now we [theme] know where Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer & the

Democrats stand [rheme].”¹⁶

- “With so much talk about the Wall, [theme] people are losing sight of the great job being done on our Southern Border by Border Patrol, ICE and our great Military. [rheme] Remember [theme] the Caravans? [rheme] Well, they [theme] didn’t get through [rheme] and none [theme] are forming or on their way [rheme].”¹⁷

The continuatives “now” and “well” rarely occurred in Trump’s tweets. Continuatives, or “backchannel-continuers,” signal a new move to the next point in discourse, as the audience is tracking, or “backchanneling,” the contribution of the speaker or the writer (Halliday, 2014).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that unmarked themes were more frequently employed (Table 6) as a point of departure (n=571) than marked themes (n=82). Trump tends to use a simple, direct, and spontaneous language in his discourse to make his communication style with his audience more natural and less complex; thus, he tends to use unmarked themes more than marked themes. This finding was in line with several studies, (Degani, 2016; Kreis, 2017; Liu and Zhang, 2018; Rachman & Yuniarti, 2017; Umiyati, 2019; Wang & Liu, 2018), which suggested that Trump tends to use simple language with unmarked themes to make his message more understandable. Kreis (2017) argued that Trump uses simple and direct language in his tweets to increase the concept of homogeneity with people. As stated in Section 2.1.1, the unmarked theme conflates with the subject (in declarative clauses), finite (in interrogative clauses), WH-element (in WH-interrogative clauses), and predicator (in imperative clauses).

Table 6. Frequency of unmarked theme types in Trump’s tweets

Typical Unmarked Theme	Mood of Clause	Freq.
Subject	Declarative	571
Finite	Yes/No interrogative	6
WH-element	WH-interrogative	4
Predicator	Imperative	19
	Total	600

The imperative is the only case in which the predicator, or the verb, serves as the theme of the clause. Trump uses this typical theme type to urge the Democrats to act immediately, i.e., pass the bill that secures the borders: “Let’s get it done!” Trump’s blunt and harsh, sometimes threatening, discourse appears in a few of his tweets.

- “Stop [theme] playing political games [rheme].”¹⁸
- “Shutdown [theme] today if Democrats do not vote for Border Security! [rheme].”¹⁹
- “Are you [theme] going to approve Border Security which includes a Wall or Steel Barrier? [rheme]”²⁰

Trump judges the ethics of the Democrats (Tweet 17). This finding converged with Ross and Caldwell’s (2020) study of Trump’s tweets, which utilized not only direct negativity but also delegitimized the character of his political opponent, Hillary Clinton. Although the predicator “Stop” occurs in theme position, it carries the focus of new information because the basic meaning of the message is “I want you [the Democrats] [theme/given] to stop playing political games [rheme/new].” Finite interrogatives function as unmarked themes because they express polarity, yes or no. However, theme extends over the following subject since they do not carry the experiential structure of a clause—participant, circumstance, or process. The basic meaning of finite interrogatives is “I want you to tell me whether or not” (Halliday, 2014, p. 101). Thus, the meaning of Tweet 19 is, “I want you to tell me whether or not you [theme] are going to approve Border Security which includes a Wall or Steel Barrier [rheme].”

As Twitter users are constrained by a maximum length of 280

¹⁰ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 2, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹¹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 31, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹² Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 15, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹³ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 26, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁴ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 22, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁵ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 2, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁶ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 26, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁷ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 20, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁸ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 15, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

¹⁹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 21, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁰ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 9, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

characters (with spaces) per tweet, Trump employs certain strategies, such as the omission of the subject theme, omission of finite in rheme position (e.g., "Tax & Reg cuts [are] historic"/ "Trade deals [are] great"), and the use of contracted forms, including "Reg" for "regulation," "Dems" for the "Democrats," and the "Fed" for the "Federal Reserve System." Trump also omits the subject theme from his tweets, which resulted in 31 elided themes to direct his audience to the point of his tweets (Tweets 20–22, elided themes are placed in square brackets).

- "[I] [theme] Would much prefer that Mitt focus on Border Security and so many other things [rheme] where he can be helpful [rheme]."²¹
- "[I] [theme] Will be going to Camp David tomorrow morning for meetings on Border Security and many other topics with @WhiteHouse senior staff [rheme]."²²
- "V.P. Mike Pence and team [theme] just left the White House. [rheme] [They] [theme] Briefed me on their meeting with the Schumer/Pelosi representatives. [rheme] Not much headway [theme] made today. [rheme] Second meeting [theme] set for tomorrow. [rheme] After so many decades, [theme] [we] must finally and permanently fix the problems on the Southern Border! [rheme]."²³

The topical themes "I" (Tweets 20–21) and "They" (Tweet 22) are elided to save text space. Elided topical themes are recoverable from the context. The communicative purpose of using elided themes in the present study contrasts with Refyantari's (2017) study, which revealed that Trump tends to omit the subject (theme) in his speeches to simplify the language and make it more direct.

Marked themes are employed to introduce a new stage in the discourse by providing readers with circumstantial details, expressed by prepositional or adverbial phrases. Eggins (2004, p. 320) argued that "skillful writers and speakers choose marked themes to add coherence and emphasis to their text."

- "Without strong Borders, [Marked theme] we don't have a Country [rheme]."²⁴
- "Without a Wall [Marked theme] our Country can never have Border or National Security. [rheme] With a powerful Wall or Steel Barrier, [Marked theme] Crime Rates (and Drugs) will go substantially down all over the U.S. [rheme]."²⁵
- "In the Great State of Texas, between 2011 & 2018, [Marked theme] there were a total of 292,000 crimes by illegal aliens, 539 murders, 32,000 assaults, 3,426 sexual assaults and 3000 weapons charges. [rheme] Democrats [theme] come back! [rheme]."²⁶
- "In 2018, [Marked theme] 1.7 million pounds of narcotics seized, [rheme] 17,000 adults [theme] arrested with criminal records, [rheme] and 6000 gang members, including MS-13, [theme] apprehended [rheme]."²⁷

Trump selects the marked themes "Without strong Borders," "Without a Wall," and "With a powerful Wall or Steel Barrier" (Tweets 23–24) to buttress his position and, thereby, gain the support of the Democrats. Trump argues in one of his tweets that, since at least 77 peace walls have been built around the world, it is pertinent to complete this wall. To place his arguments within the local context, Trump also employs temporal and location circumstances (Tweets 25–26) and marked themes to direct the attention of his audience to important information or events. As Liu and Zhang (2018, p. 281) stated, Trump employs some marked themes so that "the audiences pay attention to some special information." Trump uses the marked theme "Now" to stress the urgency of time (Tweet 28).

- "For those that naively ask why didn't the Republicans get approval to build the Wall over the last year, [theme] it is because IN THE SENATE WE NEED 10 DEMOCRAT VOTES, [rheme] and they [theme] will gives us "NONE" for Border Security! [rheme] Now we [theme] have to do it the hard way, with a Shutdown [rheme]."²⁸
- "The great people of our Country [theme] demand proper Border Security

[rheme] NOW! [theme]"²⁹

As stated earlier, the continuative "now" rarely occurred in Trump's tweets. The Democrats will be responsible for the government shutdown if they do not immediately vote for the wall (Tweet 27). Trump also stresses the urgent need to demand border security (Tweet 28). This finding converged with Chen's (2018) CDA of Trump's inaugural speech, which revealed that Trump widely used the marked themes "Now" and "Together" to attract the attention of his audience.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This research investigated thematic choices in Trump's tweets on the U.S.–Mexico border wall. The findings showed that the most frequent theme type was topical theme, followed by textual. Interpersonal themes rarely occurred in the tweets. Trump tries to present his decision of building the wall as a political issue for all Americans through the use of the inclusive pronoun "we" to establish a sense of commonality and trust and, thereby, achieve his political goals. Unmarked themes were more frequently employed as a point of departure than marked themes. Trump tends to use simple, direct, and spontaneous language to make his communication style with his audience more natural and less complex. Trump's tweets used more conjunctions—"and" and "but"—than adjuncts to connect his ideas. As each tweet is constrained by a limited number of characters, Trump's tweets were characterized by the use of contracted forms, the omission of the subject theme, and the omission of finite in rheme position.

SFL can aid in understanding how language is used in political social media discourse to construct events in specific ways. Studying thematic choices can shed a light on the tendency and characteristics of language. The results of this study indicated that thematization plays a salient role in political social media discourse. The findings of this study provided evidence to support the view that thematic choice is a useful and important tool in writing, especially in political texts. Therefore, it is recommended that politicians consider thematic choices in their text production.

What makes the present research different is the use of the SFL framework in the analysis of theme types in political social media discourse. Furthermore, the study analyzed spoken-like language in the Twitter genre on the topic of the U.S.–Mexico border wall, which was not explored in the literature. The present study contributes to our understanding of theme types in political social media discourse. Based on the findings of the study, several pedagogical implications can be drawn. English teachers can use SFL as an approach for teaching students how to analyze the clauses in texts. Since thematic choices increase the coherence of texts, teachers can encourage students to employ a variety of theme types, thereby developing their language skills (Alyousef, 2020).

Finally, the present study was limited to the investigation of thematic choices in political social media discourse. Further research is required to examine power and ideology, as well as thematic progression, in political social media discourse to reveal if there are any variations in terms of stance and the development of theme. Studying these patterns can support the current results of the study. Future studies could also investigate thematic choices in political social media discourse in other languages.

²¹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 2, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²² Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²³ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁴ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (February 25, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁵ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 22, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁶ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 12, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁷ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 5, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁸ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (December 29, 2018). @realDonaldTrump.

²⁹ Trump, Donald J. Twitter (January 14, 2019). @realDonaldTrump.

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