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Power, Persuasion, and Fallacy: A Critical-Pragmatic Analysis of Argumentative Fallacies in the Trump–Zelenskyy Discourse

Asst. Prof. Dr. Younis Ibrahim Al-Dalawi*

Department of English language, College of Languages and Human Sciences, University of Garmian, Sulaimani, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Younis.ibrahim@garmian.edu.krd

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Abstract

This study provides a critical-pragmatic analysis of fallacious argumentation in the February 28, 2025 Oval Office discourse between U.S. President Donald Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The encounter reveals how fallacies function not merely as reasoning flaws, but as strategic linguistic tools for discursive domination. Drawing on Walton's pragmatic theory of fallacy, the pragma-dialectical model, and CDA, the research examines how ad hominem attacks, straw man arguments, false dilemmas, and appeals to emotion are employed to assert control, constrain responses, and construct ideological binaries.

The study adopts a qualitative-critical approach. It analyzes a transcribed ten-minute segment of the meeting using speech act theory, Gricean implicature, and CDA

* **Corresponding Author:** Younis Ibrahim Al-Dalawi, Email: Younis.ibrahim@garmian.edu.krd

Affiliation: University of Garmian – Iraq.

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principles. The findings demonstrate that Trump and Vance deploy fallacious reasoning to construct conversational contexts and coerce Zelenskyy into performative compliance. In contrast, Zelenskyy uses hedging, politeness, and discursive mitigation as resistance strategies to preserve face and diplomatic balance.

The analysis shows that fallacies are not rhetorical coincidences, by-products, or incidental occurrences but deliberate speech acts embedded in broader claims to communicative authority, legitimacy, and symbolic power. As such, this study contributes to political linguistics and argumentation theory by illustrating how critical pragmatics can reveal the ideological functions of language in power-imbalanced political dialogues.

Keywords: Fallacy, critical pragmatics, political discourse, power, argumentative strategy

القوة والإقناع والمغالطة: تحليل نقدي براغماتي للمغالطات الحجاجية في خطاب ترامب-زيلينسكي

أ. م. د. يونس ابراهيم الدلوي

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية اللغات والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة كرميان، السليمانية، إقليم كردستان، العراق

المستخلص

تُقدّم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً نقدياً تداولياً للحُجج المُغالطة ضمن خطاب المكتب البيضاوي الذي جرى في 28 فبراير 2025 بين الرئيس الأميركي دونالد ترامب، ونائب الرئيس جي. دي. فانس، والرئيس الأوكراني فولوديمير زيلينسكي. يكشف هذا اللقاء، الذي اتسم بعلاقات قوى غير متكافئة، كيف أن المغالطات لا تُعد مجرد أخطاء في الاستدلال، بل تُستخدم كأدوات لغوية استراتيجية للهيمنة الخطابية. وبالاستناد إلى النظرية التداولية للمغالطة، والنموذج التداولي، وتحليل الخطاب النقدي، تفحص الدراسة كيفية استخدام المغالطات مثل الهجوم الشخصي، ورجل القش، والخيارات الزائفة، والمناشآت العاطفية، لفرض السيطرة، وتقييد الردود، وبناء ثنائيات أيديولوجية.

منهجياً، تتبنى الدراسة مقارنة نقدية نوعية، حيث تُحلل مقطعاً مفرغاً مدته عشر دقائق من الاجتماع باستخدام نظرية أفعال الكلام، وتضمنيات غرايس، ومبادئ تحليل الخطاب النقدي. وتُظهر النتائج أن ترامب وفانس يوظفان أساليب مغالطة لصياغة أطر الحوار ودفع زيلينسكي إلى الامتثال الأدائي. في المقابل، يستخدم زيلينسكي استراتيجيات مقاومة مثل التحفظ، والتهديب، والتخفيف الخطابي للحفاظ على ماء الوجه والتوازن الدبلوماسي.

تُظهر التحليلات أن المغالطات ليست حوادث بلاغية عَرَضِيَّة، بل هي أفعال كلامية متعمَّدة مُتَجَذِّرة في صراعات أوسع تتعلق بالصوت والشرعية والسلطة الرمزية. وبناءً على ذلك، تسهم هذه الدراسة في اللسانيات السياسية ونظرية الحجاج من خلال توضيح كيف يمكن للتداولية النقدية أن تكشف الوظائف الأيديولوجية للغة في الحوارات السياسية غير المتكافئة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المغالطة، التداولية النقدية، الخطاب السياسي، السلطة، الاستراتيجية الحجاجية

1. Introduction

Political language, particularly in high-stakes diplomatic contexts, is rarely neutral or purely informational. Rather, it is inherently strategic, ideological, and deeply entangled in relations of dominance and resistance (Chilton & Schaffner, 1997; Fairclough, 1995). This paper focuses on the discourse from the February 28, 2025 Oval Office meeting involving the U.S. President Donald Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. This moment offers more than political event; it serves as a critical case study of argumentative asymmetry, where rhetorical maneuvers are deployed not only to persuade, but to reframe hierarchies, exert ideological control, and test the limits of discursive diplomacy.

The study draws on a critical-pragmatic framework, combining Walton's (1995, 2007) theory of fallacies as context-dependent dialogue violations, the pragma-dialectical model (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 2006). These perspectives enable a layered exploration of how argumentative fallacies—such as ad hominem attacks, false dilemmas, and emotional appeals—are used not as errors in reasoning but as deliberate linguistic acts aimed at asserting dominance and delegitimizing interlocutors.

Although this paper aims to examine a specific event, its implications extend beyond the immediate context. The Trump–Zelenskyy interaction exemplifies broader dynamics of discursive power in global political encounters, where linguistic inequality and institutional authority intersect. In such settings, fallacies become instruments of symbolic control, and responses to them, particularly from less powerful actors, must be negotiated through hedging, politeness, and strategic ambiguity.

By situating fallacies within a pragmatic and ideological framework, this study highlights how language itself constructs, resists, and regulates power relations. It contributes to ongoing debates in political linguistics, critical discourse studies, and argumentation theory by showing how fallacious argumentation, far from being peripheral, is central to the mechanisms of persuasion and exclusion in diplomatic discourse.

2. Literature Review

The academic study of fallacies has developed considerably, moving away from classical logico-formalist approaches toward analyses that emphasize context, drawing on perspectives from pragmatics, rhetoric, and critical discourse studies. Early work in informal logic, such as Hamblin (1970), questioned the sufficiency of defining fallacies as simply invalid arguments and called for a dialogical, context-aware framework. This shift was advanced by Douglas Walton (1995, 2007), who conceptualized fallacies as “dialogue shifts or violations of argumentation schemes.” According to Walton, fallacies derive rhetorical strength from their surface plausibility, often functioning effectively in political communication despite violating underlying principles of sound reasoning (Walton, 2010).

Walton’s work is pivotal in identifying how argumentation schemes (e.g., *ad hominem*, argument from authority, appeal to emotion) become fallacious when misused in dialogue. For instance, an *ad hominem* attack, while irrelevant in critical discussion, may be strategically effective in undermining an opponent’s ethos—especially in adversarial settings like political debates (Walton, 2006). Similarly, appeals to fear or pity may bypass critical scrutiny by triggering affective responses (Walton, 2000), a phenomenon particularly visible in high-stakes, media-mediated discourse.

The pragma-dialectical framework, developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004), provides a systematic framework for identifying fallacies based on violations of ten ideal rules of critical discussion. These rules cover elements such as freedom of speech, burden of proof, and relevance. A false dilemma, for example, violates the rule against misrepresenting standpoints by excluding valid alternatives, thereby coercing acceptance of a binary viewpoint (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2002). This framework has been widely applied to political discourse, especially in examining how strategic maneuvering shifts argumentative practices toward rhetorical gain at the expense of reasonableness (Eemeren et al., 2015).

While these frameworks provide analytical precision, critical discourse scholars such as Teun van Dijk (2006, 2008) and Ruth Wodak (2015) emphasize the ideological dimensions of fallacious argumentation. Van Dijk views fallacies, especially those involving exclusion, binary thinking, and misinformation, as discursive instruments of manipulation and dominance, used by powerful actors to shape public opinion. Fallacies such as straw man arguments or guilt by association work to de-legitimize opposing perspectives and reinforce hegemonic narratives (van Dijk, 2005). Wodak’s historical-discursive approach also identifies fallacies as part of broader discursive strategies that construct in-groups and out-groups, often using appeals to fear or nationalism to justify biased or exclusionary policies (Wodak & Reisigl, 2001).

From a linguistic-pragmatic perspective, fallacies are best understood as speech acts that violate cooperative norms or exploit implicatures to mislead. Thomas (1995) emphasizes how implicature and presupposition contribute to covert manipulation, while Capone (2010) sees fallacies as contextually grounded pragmatic failures. For example, a straw man may rely on pragmatic misrepresentation, violating the maxim of quality and attributing an opponent's position inaccurately through selective quotation or rephrasing. Similarly, false dilemmas often exploit presuppositional structures to restrict interpretive possibilities while appearing logically valid on the surface.

Recent empirical studies further reinforce the widespread occurrence of fallacies in political contexts. Haboobi and Rikabi (2022) found that ad hominem and straw man fallacies frequently functioned as face-threatening acts in U.S. presidential debates, employed to weaken credibility and provoke defensive responses. El Hadi (2021) observed similar patterns in Middle Eastern political rhetoric, where emotional fallacies were used to avoid argumentative responsibility and stimulate support. These findings support the claim that fallacies in political discourse are linguistically integrated, pragmatically strategic, and ideologically loaded.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a qualitative-critical approach grounded in critical pragmatics and discourse analysis, with methodological guidance from Walton's theory of fallacies (1995, 2007), pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). The rationale lies in the need to analyze fallacies as both linguistic-pragmatic acts and ideological strategies. By examining how language encodes power through argumentative violations, the study explores the discursive construction and contestation of dominance in political talk.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data consists of a transcribed public segment (approx. 10 minutes) from the Oval Office meeting on February 28, 2025, involving Donald Trump, J.D. Vance, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, alongside members of the press. The segment was chosen for its unscripted, high-stakes nature, reflecting authentic political discourse under asymmetrical power relations. The transcript was obtained from public archives (e.g., AP News, Wikisource), representing a rare instance of spontaneous international dialogue involving competing rhetorical goals.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in three phases:

3.3.1 Identification and Coding of Fallacies

Using manual coding informed by Walton's typology and pragma-dialectical discussion rules, instances of argumentative fallacies were identified and labeled. Each occurrence was categorized under a specific fallacy type—e.g., ad hominem, straw man, false dilemma, appeal to fear—and interpreted in terms of its pragmatic function (e.g., face-threatening act, relevance violation, presupposition trap).

3.3.2 Contextual-Pragmatic Analysis

Each fallacy was then analyzed for its pragmatic structure, including speech act type, implicature, presupposition, and illocutionary force. This phase focused on how the fallacy affected the turn-taking structure, discursive framing, or relational dynamics between participants. For instance, ad hominem attacks were examined for their face-threatening content and implications for epistemic authority (Thomas, 1995; Brown & Levinson, 1987).

3.3.3 Critical Interpretation

Using Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework and van Dijk's (2006) work on manipulation, the discourse was interpreted in terms of power asymmetry, ideological positioning, and rhetorical coercion. This stage emphasized the discursive consequences of fallacies: how they constrained Zelenskyy's agency, framed the U.S. position as epistemically superior, or excluded alternative perspectives through rhetorical closure.

3.4 Validity and Limitations

This is an in-depth case study; its goal is not generalizability, but interpretive depth. The selection of real-world political discourse ensures ecological validity, while triangulation across pragmatic, dialectical, and critical frameworks strengthens analytical reliability. Limitations include the absence of non-verbal data (e.g., intonation, gesture), which may influence interpretation. However, the verbal content alone reveals extensive use of covert fallacious strategies that align with broader patterns of political manipulation in asymmetric contexts.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents a critical-pragmatic analysis of the Oval Office discourse, focusing on how argumentative fallacies are linguistically enacted and pragmatically deployed to serve power-related goals. The analysis highlights how Trump and Vance utilize fallacious reasoning to control the discourse and frame Zelenskyy's responses, while Zelenskyy employs mitigation strategies to navigate rhetorical pressure. Each subsection

addresses a distinct fallacy type, examining its structure, function, and interactional consequence within the dialogue.

4.1 Ad Hominem as a Face-Threatening Strategy

Throughout the meeting, Trump and Vance frequently used ad hominem attacks to undermine Zelenskyy's credibility rather than addressing the substance of his arguments. For example, when Trump stated, "You're gambling with WWII," the lexical choice of "*gambling*" conveys recklessness and irresponsibility, attributing moral fault to Zelenskyy. The use of the acronym *WWII* heightens emotional salience and constructs an immediate sense of catastrophic risk. The short declarative sentence functions as a bald-on-record face-threatening act (FTA), leaving no room for dialogue or mitigation. The presupposition is that Zelenskyy's actions alone could precipitate a global conflict, and the implicature is that he is personally responsible for averting disaster. The illocutionary force is assertive and evaluative, aimed at delegitimizing Zelenskyy's authority. The ad hominem is reinforced by moral judgment embedded in the verb choice, creating a strong negative evaluation of Zelenskyy's competence and character. Vance also contributed ad hominem remarks, such as implying Zelenskyy's ingratitude when he stated, "You should be thanking the President for trying to bring it into this conflict." This phrasing attacks Zelenskyy's positive face by framing him as ungrateful, and the directive nature of the statement constrains his negative face, pressuring a compliant response. Both instances exemplify how personal attacks were systematically used to shift the dialogue from policy issues to character assessment.

4.2 Straw Man and Misrepresentation of Position

Strawman fallacies were employed by Trump to misrepresent Zelenskyy's arguments and simplify them for easier rebuttal. When Trump stated, "You are not ready for peace," he distorted Zelenskyy's strategic requests for security guarantees into a categorical refusal of peace. "*Not ready*" conveys incompetence and absolute incapacity, and syntactically, the simple declarative form reinforces rhetorical finality. Moreover, the statement presupposes obstructionist intentions and implies that Zelenskyy is incapable of responsible leadership. The illocutionary force is assertive and evaluative, functioning to delegitimize Zelenskyy's stance rather than invite dialogue. Face-threatening elements are evident as positive face is attacked (questioning competence), and negative face is constrained (limiting freedom to act). The strawman effect is realized through categorical phrasing, absolute negation, and evaluative lexis, converting a policy argument into a personal critique and reinforcing the speaker's dominance in the discourse.

4.3 False Dilemma as Constraining Dialogue

False dilemma fallacies were employed to present Zelenskyy with limited, binary choices. Trump stated, "Either you comply with this request, or consequences will

follow.” The connectors “*either...or*” establish a rigid, polarized choice, while syntactically, the declarative structure emphasizes finality. This constrains Zelensky’s options and frames the scenario as a binary problem, ignoring alternative solutions. The implicature is that non-compliance is inherently risky, creating coercive pressure. The illocutionary force is directive and coercive, violating the freedom rule from a pragma-dialectical perspective. Face-threatening elements constrain negative face (freedom to act) and indirectly threaten positive face by framing compliance as the morally or strategically correct choice.

4.4 False Cause as a Coercive Narrative

False cause fallacies appear in Trump’s statements attributing Zelensky’s actions to presumed motivations without sufficient evidence. For instance, Trump asserted, “I have determined that President Zelensky is not ready for Peace if America is involved, because he feels our involvement gives him a big advantage in negotiations.” The verb “*determined*” signals unilateral authority, while the phrase “*big advantage*” emphasizes opportunism, portraying Zelensky as self-serving. The causal connector “*because*” simplifies the relationship between Zelensky’s perception and his behavior, ignoring complex geopolitical factors. This presupposes that Zelensky is motivated by opportunism, and the implicature is that his intentions are morally suspected. The illocutionary force is assertive and evaluative rather than dialogic. Face-threatening elements attack positive face (trustworthiness, competence) while constraining negative face (freedom to act independently). Linguistically, false cause is reinforced through causal connectors, evaluative adjectives, and narrative simplification, creating a coercive framework that pressures compliance.

4.5 Appeal to Authority as a Dominance Strategy

Trump frequently employed appeal to authority fallacies to assert dominance and establish his credibility. When he remarked, “We’ve actually known each other for a long time. We had little negotiations, but that worked out great,” he draws on past experience to frame himself as the knowledgeable and authoritative interlocutor. The lexical choices “*long time*” and “*worked out great*” highlight reliability and success, while the coordinated sentence structure constructs a cumulative narrative of competence. The utterance presupposes that past familiarity ensures correctness in present decision-making. The implicature is that Zelensky should defer to Trump’s judgment, reflecting asymmetrical power. The illocutionary force is assertive rather than collaborative, signaling epistemic superiority. Evaluative adjectives, narrative flow, and subtle minimization of effort convey authority and control, threatening Zelensky’s negative

face by limiting autonomy and undermining his positive face by framing his input as secondary.

4.6 Appeal to Fear as Emotional Coercion

Trump's utterances often incorporated appeal to fear, aiming to manipulate Zelenskyy's decisions. The statement, "You're gambling with WWII," uses emotive, catastrophic lexical items to trigger anxiety and urgency. Structurally, the short, unmitigated declarative maximizes impact. It presupposes that Zelenskyy's actions could directly trigger a global conflict, with the implicature that he is personally responsible. The illocutionary force is coercive, directing behavior through fear rather than reasoning. This FTA targets positive face (casting Zelenskyy as incompetent) and negative face (constraining freedom of choice). Besides, the strategic use of emotive vocabulary, brevity, and high-stakes framing demonstrates how fear is leveraged as a discursive tool of power.

4.7 Appeal to Tradition as a Conservatism Strategy

Trump occasionally employed appeal to tradition to reinforce the status quo. In saying, "We had little negotiations, but that worked out great," he implies that following past approaches ensures similar success. "*Worked out great*" presents past actions as effective and reliable, while syntactically, the narrative form emphasizes continuity. This presupposes that established methods are superior to alternatives, implying that Zelenskyy should adopt these strategies. The illocutionary force is assertive, promoting adherence to precedent. Face-threatening elements appear in constraining negative face (reducing freedom to challenge tradition) and subtly undermining positive face (casting alternative strategies as naïve or risky). Linguistically, evaluative adjectives and narrative emphasis function to legitimize authority and enforce conservative discourse.

4.8 Zelenskyy's Resistance: Hedging, Politeness, and Strategic Silence

Despite repeated fallacious moves, Zelenskyy adopts politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), hedging ("I think...", "We are grateful...") and honorifics ("Mr. President") to preserve face and counter power imbalances. While these moves may seem deferential, they function as pragmatic resistance. For example, his response:

"I am thankful. I said it many times."

challenges the false dilemma without direct confrontation. It constitutes a face-repair act and implicitly critiques the moral framing imposed by Trump. From a critical-pragmatic view, Zelenskyy's speech acts exhibit discursive diplomacy, maintaining relational harmony while resisting epistemic dominance.

Tables 1-3 provide a comparative overview of the rhetorical strategies used by the three interlocutors.

Table 1: Types of Fallacies Identified in the Meeting

No.	Type of Fallacy	Example Utterance	Speaker	Primary Function
1	Ad Hominem	“You’re gambling with WWII”	Trump	Undermining credibility; face-threatening
2	Ad Hominem	“You should be thanking the President for trying to bring it into this conflict”	Vance	Questioning moral character; pressuring compliance
3	Strawman	“You are not ready for peace”	Trump	Misrepresenting Zelenskyy’s argument for easier rebuttal
4	False Dilemma	“Either you comply with this request, or consequences will follow”	Trump	Constraining options; coercive pressure
5	False Cause	“I have determined that President Zelenskyy is not ready for Peace if America is involved, because he feels our involvement gives him a big advantage in negotiations”	Trump	Attributing actions to presumed motives without evidence
6	Appeal to Authority	“We’ve actually known each other for a long time. We had little negotiations, but that worked out great”	Trump	Establishing dominance through past experience
7	Appeal to Fear	“You’re gambling with WWII”	Trump	Inducing anxiety to influence decision-making
8	Appeal to Tradition	“We had little negotiations, but that worked out great”	Trump	Reinforcing status quo and discouraging alternative solutions

Table 2: Linguistic, Pragmatic, and Face-Related Features

No.	Type of Fallacy	Lexical/Syntactic Features	Pragmatic Features	Face-Threat/Management
1	Ad Hominem	“gambling” (recklessness), short declarative	Assigns moral fault, presupposes responsibility	Threatens positive face (competence), constrains negative face
2	Ad Hominem	Directive phrasing, evaluative	Implies ingratitude, pressures	Threatens positive face (morality), constrains negative face

			compliance	
3	Strawman	Absolute negation “not ready”, simple declarative	Misrepresents position, presupposes obstructionist intent	Attacks positive face, limits negative face
4	False Dilemma	“either...or” connector, declarative	Limits perceived options, creates coercive pressure	Constrains negative face, indirectly threatens positive face
5	False Cause	“because” connector, evaluative adjectives	Imposes causal narrative, simplifies complex reality	Threatens positive face, constrains negative face
6	Appeal to Authority	Evaluative adjectives, narrative structure	Signals experience, asserts epistemic dominance	Threatens negative face, undermines positive face
7	Appeal to Fear	Emotive words, short declarative	Induces anxiety, pressures compliance	Threatens positive face (competence), constrains negative face
8	Appeal to Tradition	Evaluative adjectives, narrative continuity	Reinforces status quo, discourages alternatives	Constrains negative face, subtly threatens positive face

Table 3: Pragmatic Features of Zelenskyy's Resistance Strategies

Strategy Type	Example	Linguistic Device	Pragmatic Purpose
Hedging	“I think...”, “We are grateful...”	Modal verbs, qualifiers	Mitigate assertion, reduce threat
Politeness	“Mr. President”	Honorifics	Preserve rapport, defer to power
Face-repair	“I said it many times.”	Repetition + assertion	Maintain dignity, resist coercion

5. Discussion

The analysis of the Trump–Zelenskyy discourse reveals how **fallacious reasoning**, when embedded in political language, serves as a mechanism of rhetorical domination rather than a failure of logic. Drawing from the frameworks of **critical pragmatics**, **pragmatics**, **pragmatics**, **pragmatics**, and **critical discourse analysis**, this section interprets the identified fallacies

as strategic speech acts designed to assert institutional authority, control the narrative, and marginalize dissent.

The **systematic use of ad hominem, straw man constructions, false dilemmas, and emotional appeals**—as illustrated in Table 1—confirms that fallacies in this setting are not accidental. Rather, they function as **discursive tools that exploit asymmetrical power relations**. Trump and Vance’s language operates under the assumption that logical precision is subordinate to political performance; hence, their arguments often appeal to **emotion, obligation, or binary thinking**. These tactics resonate with Walton’s (1995, 2007) view of fallacies as **derailed argumentation schemes**—strategies that appear reasonable on the surface but violate norms of fair dialogue.

Crucially, these fallacies also **reinforce and reproduce ideological hierarchies**, particularly through the framing of Zelenskyy as morally indebted and diplomatically subordinate. The expectation that he must perform gratitude in return for support, as expressed in Trump’s repeated interruptions and ultimatums, reflects what van Dijk (2006) describes as *symbolic coercion*—where power is exercised through implied expectations and delegitimizing presuppositions rather than overt threats.

At the same time, **Zelenskyy’s responses**, summarized in Table 2, illustrate a contrasting discursive strategy grounded in **mitigation, politeness, and pragmatic resistance**. His consistent use of hedging, honorifics, and speech acts of gratitude operates not only as face-saving behavior (Brown & Levinson, 1987) but as a **subtle counter-framing mechanism**. Zelenskyy does not overtly challenge the U.S. representatives but maintains a position of moral clarity and national dignity, subtly resisting the imposed binary of *compliance or ingratitude*. This aligns with Thomas’s (1995) view that **pragmatic devices such as implicature and presupposition** can be used not only to manipulate but also to **defend communicative agency** in unequal dialogues.

The asymmetry in the **use and function of fallacies** supports van Eemeren and Houtlosser’s (2002) concept of **strategic maneuvering**, where dominant speakers push the boundaries of reasonableness to maintain control. However, as the analysis shows, this maneuvering is not unchallenged. Zelenskyy’s responses, though less aggressive, function within the same pragmatic domain to **preserve voice** and resist discursive suppression.

Thus, the interaction serves as a case study in how **fallacies become linguistic manifestations of power**, not just flawed arguments but instruments of dominance, pressure, and exclusion. The Trump–Zelenskyy exchange illustrates how language can both enact and resist power, and how argumentative fallacies, viewed through a critical-pragmatic perspective, are central to the politics of discourse.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the role of argumentative fallacies as strategic linguistic devices in the Oval Office dialogue between Donald Trump, J.D. Vance, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Using a critical-pragmatic framework that integrates Walton's theory of fallacies, pragma-dialectics, and critical discourse analysis, the research demonstrates that fallacies in political discourse are not simply logical errors. Rather, they function as deliberate discursive maneuvers designed to assert dominance, reshape power relations, and construct the expectations and responses of less powerful participants.

The analysis demonstrated that **Trump and Vance employ fallacies**, including ad hominem attacks, straw man arguments, false dilemmas, and appeals to emotion, to assert ideological superiority, suppress critical engagement, and enforce perceived ethical responsibilities. These fallacies serve as **illocutionary acts** for muting opposition, coercion, and rhetorical positioning. In contrast, **Zelenskyy manages these pressures** through hedging, politeness strategies, and face-saving acts, exercising pragmatic resistance to maintain national dignity and diplomatic balance.

The findings highlight that **language is central to the performance of power** in political discourse, especially in asymmetrical interactions. Fallacies, when understood through a critical-pragmatic framework, reveal not only violations of rationality but **tools of control and exclusion** situated within institutional discourse. They also highlight how less powerful participants can use linguistic strategies to **resist discursive** suppression, even without direct confrontation.

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