

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT BIDEN'S REMARKS ON 'PANDEMIC POLITICS

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ABSTRACT:

The literature is enriched with different linguistic studies on world leaders' speeches delivered to respond to COVID-19. However, studies that investigated speeches of Presidents on pandemic politics are still in want. This study carried out a critical discourse analysis of the pandemic politics in the remarks of President Biden on fighting COVID-19. The September 9, 2021 speech of the US's President Biden was purposively selected for this research because of its relevance to the subject matter. After the speech had been downloaded from the White House Official website, it was closely read. Copious extracts which convey hidden meanings and help to illustrate Biden's discourse themes were noted and analysed qualitatively. The research adopted an adaptation of van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theoretical frameworks to espouse meanings in the speech. The interdependence of the two tools for analyzing socio-political discourse makes them suitable for the analysis. Results found that, in a bid to navigate vaccination issues, Biden carefully deployed language to communicate three main discourse themes; negotiating with people, legislating rules and ventilating anger against those peddling pandemic politics. Thus, by appealing, educating and begging, vaccine shots were negotiated, and by condemning, blackmailing and threatening, compulsory vaccination compliance was legislated. Emphasizing those discourse themes served not only to conscript the people into accepting vaccination but also to flatten the curve against COVID-19. The study provides useful insights on the responses of government to the dissenting people's opinions on the issue of compulsory vaccination during pandemic. It is, however, suggested that other researchers could explore a comparative analysis to investigate how different political leaders globally have framed vaccination policies and pandemic responses through different rhetorical strategies.

KEYWORD: Critical Discourse Analysis, Pandemic Politics, President Biden, Remarks, Vaccination.

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 became a serious threat not only to individual or public health but also to the economic and social ways of life of people across the world on March 11, 2020 after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic. Although the emergency committee had recommended that it was no longer a global emergency on May 5, 2023, but while it poured out its venom, especially between 2020 and 2022, it paralyzed economic activities, stiffened social interactions, posed serious health hazards to people and brought the whole world to a stand-still through series of lockdowns and other stringent measures. Different institutions, particularly governments of nations, spontaneously swung into action by carrying out massive orientation programmes to warn and prepare people, and also mapped out various proactive responses for its containment. Some of these responses, especially from world leaders, were relayed to the public through speeches, press briefings and public remarks.

For President Biden, compulsory vaccination of the entire US population became the safest way to stem the tide of the highly communicable disease, and it does not really matter what opinion the citizens hold. This warranted the public remarks of September 9, 2021, which he made to communicate his government's intension. This address, which was termed as remarks on "Pandemic Politics", provides a critical lens through which to analyze the intersection of public health and governance, in the height of a section of the citizen expressing dissenting opinions about it. Consequently, the pandemic was not only seen as a health crisis, it was also conceived as a political battleground which influenced different public perceptions and governmental actions. A critical discourse analysis of the speech will, therefore, reveal the complexities of communicating health information in a politically charged environment.

Linguistic studies that explore presidential speeches on pandemic politics are scarce. There is need to interrogate the intricate relationship which COVID-19 pandemic has

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brought to the forefront between politics and public health, and how leaders' remarks have significantly influenced the narrative. President Biden's comments on "pandemic politics" warrant critical examination to uncover underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and implications for policy decisions. This study aims to investigate how President Biden's discourse shapes public perception and informs pandemic response strategies. Undertaking a critical discourse analysis of the President Biden's remarks will therefore be a worthwhile enterprise in order to unravel the discourse strategies employed to interrogate the delicate socio-political issue.

Thus, this study has it as its objective to examine a critical discourse analysis of the pandemic politics in the remarks of President Biden on fighting COVID-19. The research will endeavour to find answers to the following research questions: How do President Biden's remarks on "pandemic politics" construct and reinforce specific ideologies? What power dynamics are at play in President Biden's discourse on pandemic politics? How do President Biden's comments influence policy decisions and public health outcomes?

Although President Biden has delivered a number of speeches, both prepared and extempore on the issue of COVID-19 since its sudden outbreak in December 2019, but this study focuses solely on his remarks of September 9, 2020, potentially overlooking other influential voices in pandemic politics. Future researches could explore comparative analyses with other leaders' discourse.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Political Speech

Generally, the importance of political speeches cannot be overemphasised. One of the ways through which politicians connect with people is by delivering speeches on burning issues to the people. Speeches delivered by political leaders usually represent their responses to the ongoing debates. No wonder Ayeomoni and Akinkulere (2012: p. 461) note that "the primary purposes of political speeches are to influence, educate, inform, persuade, incite, or entertain people". The way the people perceive the speech and the impact such a speech has on them will depend, to a large extent, on the way the political leader presents the speech and the language used in presenting it. A political speech wields force. The nexus between the speech and the force it carries can be seen in the effectiveness of the language used. The language is effectively used when it achieves politically motivated results. The force which is transmitted by the use of political language is manifested in persuasion. It, therefore, means that to study and understand politics is to study and understand the language used by a politician to convince his/her audience into accepting his/her views on controversial national issues. Therefore, language remains the manipulative tool that can be used to condition people's thought and consequently the, society. That is why the study of language of politics will necessarily be to explicate political discourses.

The above idea supports Adetunji (2006: p. 177) that "politics is a discursive domain, not because it situates language in action but also because the action is contextualized". Thus, language and politics are

intertwined. Opeibi (2009: p. 162) also notes that "one of the core goals of political discourse analysis is to seek out the ways in which language choice is manipulated for specific political effect". That assertion foregrounds the significance of meaning in political discourse, and this meaning is shaped by the choice of linguistic elements within the discourse.

2.2. COVID-19

According to Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, COVID-19, coined from Coronavirus disease 2019, is a contagious disease caused by Coronavirus Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV-2). Page et al (2021) claim that Wuhan, China recorded the very first known case of this deadly disease in December 2019. The symptom of the disease is fever, accompanied by fatigue, cough, breathing difficulties, loss of smell, and loss of taste. COVID-19 has high a potential for transmissibility and pathogenicity. While it lasted, it resulted in high level of morbidity and mortality worldwide. The pandemic did not only pose health challenges but also had profound economic consequences, influencing labor supply and economic output.

2.3. Literature Review

A major notion in this study is pandemic politics. And since that concept became popular in America with the outbreak of COVID-19 in January 2020, it may be expedient to first of all examine what pandemic politics is through a brief systematic review of each of the concepts that constitutes it, before considering it as a single idea. Merrim-webster, an online dictionary, sees a pandemic as "an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affects a significant proportion of the population". Also, according to a free health advice gotten online from *healthdirect* (2024), a pandemic "is the worldwide spread of a new disease, viral respiratory diseases, such as those caused by a new influenza virus". Going by the second definition, one can glean that a pandemic is usually new, that is, never happened before. It is also global and has to do with respiratory issues. Therefore, it is deadly. The source argues further that a pandemic is different from an epidemic.

While it is true that an epidemic also results in more cases of health condition, the fact is that the spread is limited to only a community or region, and may not spread further than that. The origin of a pandemic can be traced to animal influenza viruses rather than seasonal influenza.

In the event of a pandemic, it is the WHO that reserves the right to promptly alert the world about it in addition to taking up the responsibility to monitor and contain its spread by reeling out certain measures, which the people must follow. To flatten the curve of infection, medical advice may be given on the importance of maintaining hygiene; washing hands regularly, coughing or sneezing into the elbow and keeping social distance from infected persons (*healthdirect*, 2024). By adhering to this advice, the possibility of transmitting the virus becomes minimized. In addition, personal protective equipment (PPE), such nose/face masks may be distributed to health workers in order to prevent the transmission of the virus when they come close to infected people. In some

situations, vaccines may be advised to contain the spread of a pandemic.

Now to the issue of pandemic politics, Utzinger (2023) says the politics of pandemics is about more than just health. It is about how we work across sectors, balancing the complex interplay between health, politics and conflicts, ensuring equity and security in times of crisis. However, the issue of pandemic politics is more than what have been stated above. The politics of pandemic actually has to do with the way people are playing politics with the government's initiative to flatten the curve against the spread of the virus.

As part of his numerous responses, on September 9, 2021, the President of the United States of America, President Joe Biden, broadcast his remarks on fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. In the about ninety-one paragraph address, President Biden identified what he dubbed the 'pandemic politics', which can be understood to mean a sabotaging attempt traceable to a section of the elected government officials who aimed to frustrate and undermine the concerted initiatives of his administration at containing the dreaded and deadly disease through vaccination for all Americans. But it may be important to find out who the people that were involved in this pandemic politics were, to whom President Biden was probably referring in his September 9, 2021 speech. According to Kirzinger, et al (2021) in the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) COVID-19 vaccine monitor, partisanship was observed as a strong factor for the different responses expressed towards COVID-19 and its containment. Their report found that "Republican make up an increasingly disproportionate share of those who remain unvaccinated and political partisanship is a stronger predictor of whether someone is vaccinated than demographic factors such as age, race, level of education, or insurance status".

KFF polling which was conducted in May 2020 also found out that Republicans were less likely than Democrats to report wearing masks and practicing social distancing. This is in addition to some early views of the COVID-19 vaccine which were similarly divided along party lines with a majority of Republicans saying they would not get vaccinated in September 2020 compared to Democrats who were more equally divided in whether they would or would not get a COVID-19 vaccine once it became available. Also, before President Joe Biden assumed office, Goodman, Gadarian and Pepinsky (2022) note that there had been an allegation raised against Donald Trump for politicizing COVID-19 by tying the pandemic to his political fate in the election year, choosing partisanship over public health, which has disastrous impacts for Americans. All these validates the fact of a pandemic politics in place in the US, as alleged by President Biden, which, as confirmed by the above findings, became obviously traceable to the oppositions in government. As a result, many American citizens became hostile towards vaccination proposition of the US government to contain COVID-19 because of this 'pandemic politics' and this raised serious national concerns which were expressed by Biden in his September 9, 2021 remarks.

Biden's remarks are not only poignant but pregnant with meanings, and are not only an effort to respond to the pandemic but also an attempt to openly react to and attack the detractors of his COVID-19 intervention initiatives,

who refused to show enough cooperation in spite of the obvious indications, ravaging and devastating escalations of the effects of the virus which has yet defiled all medical interventions and which has seen thousands of citizens either dead or hospitalized in America. Linguists have examined different presidential speeches that bother on COVID-19 employing various methodologies and theoretical frameworks to analyse the speakers' use of language and rhetoric in the speeches. Salayo (2020), Al-Rikaby et al (2021), Awawdeh (2021), Adegbenro (2022) and Hameed et al (2023), are some examples. These studies offer insights into how presidents use language to address the pandemic, shape public opinion, and project leadership.

3. METHOD

President Biden's remarks of September 9, 2021 focused on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the need for increased vaccination efforts. The speech was delivered to the American public and lasted approximately thirty minutes. It aimed to address rising COVID-19 cases and promote vaccination as a critical tool in combating the virus. The event took place at the White House, and Biden delivered it in a direct and assertive manner, emphasizing the urgency of the situation and calling for collective action to overcome the pandemic. Prominent expressions were identified from the speech and interrogated through an eclectic approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

3.1. Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative content analysis to examine the language, tone, and themes used in President Biden's remarks. This design became useful in identifying patterns, biases, and underlying power dynamics in the speech.

3.2. Sampling Procedure

President Biden has delivered a number of speeches during the period COVID-19 lasted. However, he has delivered only one speech to tackle or address the issue of 'Pandemic Politics' and that was his national broadcast of September, 9 2021. The sample for this research thus remains the particular Biden's remarks on 'Pandemic Politics', which was purposively selected to interrogate the discourse.

3.3. Tools

Two theoretical models were used in the research. These are van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. Each of them is briefly explained in this section.

3.3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Teun A. van Dijk's (1993) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed in this research. The model emphasizes the interplay between language, power, and ideology, focusing on how discourse shapes and reflects social inequalities. Central to his approach is the concept of mental models, which are cognitive structures that individuals use to interpret and produce discourse based on their experiences and social knowledge. Van Dijk categorizes discourse analysis into three interrelated dimensions: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. Macrostructure pertains to the overall

themes and global meanings of a text, identifying the central topics being discussed. Superstructure examines the organization of discourse, including the arrangement of arguments and the textual framework that guides the reader through the content. Microstructure focuses on the linguistic details, such as word choice, syntax, and stylistic elements that convey nuanced meanings. This multidimensional framework allows for a comprehensive analysis of how discourse operates within specific social contexts, revealing underlying ideologies and power dynamics that influence public perception and behavior.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views language as a form of social practice. There is an interaction between social practice and linguistic practice because according to Fairclough (2013) societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use. Ayoola (2005: p. 2) attests to that assumption when he says that “critical discourse analysis is context sensitive, acknowledges that real texts are produced and disseminated in situational contexts”. And according to Norgaard, Montoro and Busse (2010: p. 69), CDA “investigates the relations between language and society”. What it means is that CDA is interested in what discourse participants use language for in the society. It is one of the latest attractions to investigating or exposing the ‘hidden or ideological meaning in texts.

The above assertion is supported by Wodak (2001: p. 2) who asserts that CDA is noted for analyzing “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language”. The above depicts that CDA pays attention to everything which constitutes language; starting from lexical items, clauses and sentences in text to, unravel meaning. And according to Akinkuolere (2011: p. 2) “language is a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders as they use it to suit their purposes”.

3.3.2. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Since the speech being studied borders on socio-political issue, the second theoretical framework considered for capturing the linguistic resources used in the explication of hidden meanings and communication of messages is Halliday’s (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This theoretical underpinning becomes necessary because the analysis to be conducted in the research tends towards context and situation. Systemic Functional Linguistics views language as a kind of functional behavior that is related to the situation in which it occurs. By this, it accords primary importance and emphasis to the use of language in the social situation. As Berry (1975: p. 24) puts it; “Systemic Linguistics is interested in relating the internal organisation of language, the various kinds of patterning which language exhibits to the function of language and to the social situation of language”. This means that the Systemic Grammar emphasizes the sociological function of language and it sees language as a form of ‘doing’ rather than as a form of ‘knowing’. And since meaning is essential in human affairs, it can be said that the function which language performs in a social context is the meaning which it conveys.

This function of language is what Halliday calls metafunctions, which are ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. While the ideational deals with the

participants in a discourse thereby presenting language as doing something, the interpersonal deals with the construction of experience through language and the textual component complements both the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions by creating what is known as relevance in both situation and cultural environments. According to Halliday (1987: pp. 39 - 40), all languages in this regard are organized in line with these three metafunctions in terms of what a speaker of any language “can mean, can say and can do” as he/she interacts with others in the society.

Mixing SFL and CDA as models for the analysis in this work will help to bring out the various ‘hidden’ meanings in President Biden’s remarks on Covid-19 because the two frameworks are “grounded on systematic and textual analysis” Fairclough (1995, p. ; 187). Thus, the study will be exposing what President Biden is using the sampled address to mean or say or do in the socio-political contexts of an America in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic on one hand, and on the other, against the peddlers of ‘pandemic politics’.

3.4. Research Locale and Data Collection

The research locale for this study is the United States, focusing on President Biden's speech delivered on September 9, 2021. The study made use of a purposively sampled remark of President Biden of the USA which was delivered on September 9, 2021. The text of the speech was downloaded from the White House website. It was solely selected because of its relevance to the subject matter of this paper. After reading through the broadcast, prominent expressions which are used to espouse power politics and social functions were extracted as data and analysed qualitatively using an eclectic theoretical frameworks of Halliday’s (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and van Dijk’s (1993) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, President Biden’s remarks of September 9, 2021 on fighting COVID-19 was found to display the use of language to communicate at least three themes; to express his anger and frustration against those he claimed to be playing pandemic politics, to negotiate with the citizens on the issue of vaccination and to legislate a compulsory vaccination for all. In other words, President Biden blamed the lack of success in the attempt to exterminate COVID-19 in America on the people who were playing politics with it, he went further to entreat the people to get vaccinated and he also, as a matter of last solution to the crises, ordered the people to get vaccinated compulsorily. He achieved these three objectives in several ways, and each of them will be textually analyzed qualitatively but systematically.

4.1. Expressing Anger against Those Peddling Pandemic Politics

President Biden vented his anger and anguish against an undisclosed section of the ruling class who were involved in deliberately frustrating the efforts of the government to reduce or even completely exterminate the spread of coronavirus in America. Part of his expression of anger is revealed in the excerpt below:

And to make matters worse, there are elected officials actively working to undermine the fight against COVID-19. Instead of encouraging people to get vaccinated and mask up, they're ordering mobile morgues for the unvaccinated dying from COVID-19 in their communities. The above is a blame game on those playing politics with the issue of pandemic. The President did not mince words to launch an open attack on the detractors of his initiative drives to fighting COVID-19. Earlier, he mentioned the negligence of people for not subscribing to the vaccine, despite the fact that there were solid plans, enough facilities and materials to get every citizen vaccinated. However, he went on to allege that what made the matter worse were the deliberate activities of the saboteurs of the government's effort to contain the virus. The people, who were surprisingly from 'elected government officials' (emphasis mine), he said, were not only 'actively working to undermine the fight against COVID-19', but were also 'ordering mobile morgues' for the victims of the pandemic who get killed for refusing vaccination. Considering the use of antithetical verbal elements 'actively working to undermine' in the above statement, the President is condemning or ventilating his anger/anguish and lashing out an open rebuke/disapproval on the people who were engaging in the counter-productive actions against COVID-19 containment initiatives.

... But what makes it incredibly more frustrating is that we have the tools to combat COVID-19, and a distinct minority of the Americans – supported by a distinct minority of elected officials – are keeping us from turning the corner. These pandemic politics, as I refer to, are making people sick, causing unvaccinated people to die.

The above makes the second attempt that President Biden will be making reference to the people who were not supporting his initiatives at stemming the tide of COVID-19 in America. This emphasis is significant. It shows the President's anger and anguish. It reveals his frustration and displeasure towards his colleagues in the government circle. It reveals a backlash in his government. The President makes use of powerful descriptive adjectives to paint the picture of his anguish by labelling the people's action as 'incredible' and 'frustrating', and by referring to these people as mere 'distinct minority' riddling the efforts of the government. There is a reiteration or repetition of the same supposition as is in the first extract; and that is the fact that these saboteurs' efforts are making unvaccinated people get 'sick' and 'die'. That appears to be the height of the frustration and anger.

4.2. Negotiating the Issue of Vaccination with the People

The next thing Biden did in his remarks on fighting COVID-19 is to negotiate with the people on the need to take the vaccine against the virus. This happens to be his first approach or attitude to the issue before he did otherwise. In negotiating with the people, he was found using different means to entreat them, captivate their minds and make them buy into the idea of vaccination. He started by updating the people with his government's efforts to fight against Covid-19, then educating them on the veracity of the pandemic, appealing passionately to them on the need to be vaccinated, and finally encouraging a teeming support for the vaccination drives. We can see

examples of the use of the above discourse strategies in the excerpts below:

Good evening, my fellow Americans. I want to talk to you about where we are in the battle against COVID-19, the progress we've made, and the work we have left to do.

With the above friendly opening remarks, President Biden sets the direction of the speech in the right perspective by exercising candour and courtesies, and identifying with the people through the use of social deictic elements. The endearing greetings, such as 'good evening, my fellow American', is a humble ploy to cement relationship, win people's hearts and gain their attention and support. The use of the personal deictic element, 'my' does not only suggest personal belongingness; it is used to show his personal fondness for the people. He went further by letting the people know, straight away, about the current status of America with regards to COVID-19 pandemic. This discourse strategy is essential not only to crave their indulgence but to give them a sense of judgment about his administrative initiatives in the period of pandemic. The adverbial clause "where we are" directs attention to a particular deixical reference point in his administrative journey, and also presupposes a far reaching destination. It also implies that his administration has been working and that the work, as it were and contrary to people's thought, is tough and can best be described as a "battle". In addition, he categorically mentioned that his government's initiatives have yielded some progress although there may still be some work left to do.

... let me give you some clear information about where we stand. First,... we have made considerable progress in battling COVID-19. When I became the President, about 2 million Americans were fully vaccinated. Today over 175 million Americans have that protection

The above excerpt is to further apprise the people with the progress his administration has recorded since becoming president of America. He deployed the use of statistics, concrete figures, to compare the number of Americans vaccinated by his government (175 million) with that of his predecessor (2 million). And by selecting the adjective 'considerable' to describe his achievement, he tries to reveal the wide margin which he maintained in the fight against COVID-19 compared to that of his predecessor. This is a further attempt to show to the Americans that he was actually performing as a President and to subtly discredit his predecessor. By sounding tautological with the use of adverbial clause 'where we stand' and the gerund 'battling', Biden builds a strong connection between the achievements recorded and different giant strides his administration has embarked upon.

The next thing Biden did was to educate the people on the veracity of Coronavirus to cause sickness, death and wreck the economy. He also enlightened the citizens on the potency of a vaccine and attributed these negative effects to the reluctance/unwillingness of the people to take the vaccine. This discourse strategy was initiated to delicately touch on their sensational psych and probably grip them with fear so that they would think of no other option than to seek alternative in the vaccination provision of the government.

While the vaccines provide strong protection for the vaccinated, we read about, we hear about, and we see the

stories of hospitalized people, people on their death beds, among the unvaccinated over these past few weeks.

Looking at the above statement delivered by the President, two things become clear; while subtly canvassing for the vaccine, he deliberately created intense fear for those who did not take the vaccine. He let the people know that it was only those who did not take the vaccine that were sick, hospitalized and dying. Although this is an attempt to enlighten the people, it was purely a climactic discourse strategy to coax the people to take the shots by revealing the gradual, imminent and devastating power of the virus. The emphasis of his appeal is made strong by the paralleled structures ‘we read about’, ‘we hear about’ and ‘we see stories...’ This is powerful use of language to deliberately evoke mental images of the wide-spread negative report of the pandemics and its effects, so that people would know that they are not mere stories but live and vivid daily occurrences. This strategy becomes necessary to heighten people’s fear of the pandemic.

I want to emphasize that the vaccines provide very strong protection from severe illness from COVID-19. I know there’s a lot of confusion and misinformation. But the world’s leading scientists confirm that if you are fully vaccinated, your risk of severe illness from COVID-19 is very low.

In the above extract, Biden makes a strong case for the inoculation. In the frantic effort to enlighten the people on the potency of the vaccine, the US President Biden resulted to using testimony strategy by referring to the authority of the scientists arguing in favor of the vaccine, which is dependable and can be relied upon. This is in order to underpin his argument and make his message on the vaccine more acceptable and credible. With that strategy, he also cleared the air on the ‘confusion’, punctured people’s disorientation/‘misinformation’ and skepticism which they have held on the matter. He also used that strategy to build people’s confidence in the vaccine.

In fact, based on available data from the summer, only one of out of every 160,000 fully vaccinated American was hospitalized for COVID-19 per day. These are facts.

The above discourse further validated the President’s argument for the vaccine. He successfully achieved this by giving concrete evidence and further verifiable testimony to persuade the people about taking the shots. The strength of the testimony or evidence lies in the ‘available data’. By resulting to the use of mathematical ratio and figure, he aimed to empirically prove the efficacy of his claims about the vaccine. He also wishes to attest to the effectiveness of the vaccine and to impress it upon the people that the unvaccinated are more at risk than the vaccinated. The declarative sentence ‘these are facts’ sounds emphatic, incontestable and final. The brevity of the sentence summarizes the truth of Biden’s enlightenment.

... I issue this appeal: To those of you running large entertainment venues – from sports arenas to concert venues to movie theaters – please require folks to get vaccinated or show a negative test as a condition of entry.

As a way of achieving positive response from the public, Biden resulted to begging. He became passionate about it so much that he was found tenderly “issue(ing) an appeal” first, and then humbly “pleading” with the people to ensure that they have proofs of vaccination before they can access public places and utilities. The collocational clash in “issue

appeal” presents the President as being mild with words carefully selecting words in order not to hurt the people. Usually, decrees are issued, while appeals are made. But Biden has decided to swap the verbs to maintain a balance between what sounds like a decree and an appeal. However, he succeeded in making a subtle decree which people must follow.

4.3. Legislating Compulsory Compliance

This was the last straw reserved by President Biden to break the camel’s back on the issue of vaccination as the major alternative to containing the spread of coronavirus. According to one of his statements in the remarks, ‘we have been patient, but our patience is wearing out’. Thus, after a lot of pleading, appeal, encouragement and advice, the President had no option than to put on a stern face in condemning the activities of detractors, indicting/blackmailing them, threatening them and then enforcing a compulsory vaccination for all citizens through legislative statements. Each of these discourse themes will be analyzed with sampled extracts in the succeeding paragraphs.

The first is to condemn. Example:

... This is totally unacceptable. We cannot allow these actions to stand in the way of protecting the large majority of Americans ...

The sentences above were deployed to oppose and condemn the activities of the officials who were undermining the efforts of the government to ensure that all Americans were vaccinated. The use of negative words such as ‘unacceptable’ and ‘cannot’ are unequivocal rejection of these people’s actions and the use of adverb ‘totally’ shows that the actions are rejected in its entirety. The simple sentences were also used to state the government’s resolve and readiness to take drastic action against the perpetrators. The thematised words in the two sentences point to the actions of the officials and that of Biden’s government respectively. ‘This’ which places importance on the action of the people rather than the people themselves shows that Biden is rejecting the action and not the people. It also shows that the action is nearer, current and obvious. Meanwhile, the personal inclusive plural deixis ‘we’ emphasizes Biden’s administration.

Secondly, there is the stern voice of President Biden in the remarks to blackmail/indict those government officials who are playing pandemic politics. Example:

Instead of encouraging people to get vaccinated and mask up, they’re ordering mobile morgues for the unvaccinated dying from COVID-19 in their communities.

... a distinct minority of Americans – supported by a distinct minority of elected officials – are keeping us from turning the corner. These pandemic politics, as I refer to, are making people sick, causing unvaccinated people to die.

The above two extracts are examples of indictments directed against those believed to be playing pandemic politics. They were not only being blamed for the failure of the different moves of the government to contain the pandemic, such as the use of masks and vaccination, they were also being blackmailed for being responsible for the sickness and consequently deaths of many Americans whom they have not encouraged to get vaccinated. This is in a way to force them into accepting the responsibility for

their ignominious and inglorious action, and to make them feel guilty. The hyperbolic statement of ‘ordering mobile morgues’ is weighty, critical and bespeak of their actions. In the same veins, the US President Biden deployed language to threaten the people sabotaging his effort at flattening the curve of coronavirus cases. For instance:

Let me be blunt. My plan also takes on selected officials and states that are undermining you and these lifesaving actions.

Right now, local school officials are trying to keep children safe in a pandemic while governor picks a fight with them and even threatens their salaries or their jobs. Talk about bullying in schools.

If they'll not help – if these governors won't help us beat the pandemic, I'll use my power as President to get them out of the way.

As your President, I am announcing tonight a new plan to require more Americans to be vaccinated, to combat those blocking public health.

The statements of President Biden above are no doubt intimidating. Right from the first sentence to the last, it is observed that the use of language is harsh, sternly warning those frustrating government's efforts to contain the virus. For the first time, the President let the cat out of the bag concerning those who were playing pandemic politics when he mentioned ‘their governors’. He did not mince words to let them know that he was ready to take confront them. That was mentioned twice with ‘takes on’ and ‘combat’. And in fighting them, he was going to use his power position as the President to remove them from office if they refused to desist from their negative actions. This is not only a threat but a stern warning for them to change their attitude.

Lastly, one other thing noticed in the use of language about the remarks of President Biden on fighting COVID-19 is the deployment of personal deictic element ‘I’ to legislate laws into guiding the people's conducts during the pandemic. The following examples of statements from the remarks illustrate that:

Tonight, I'm using that same authority to expand that to cover those who work in hospitals, home healthcare facilities, or other medical facilities – a total of 17 million health workers.

... I will sign an executive order that will now require all executive branch federal employees to be vaccinated – all. And I've signed another executive order that will require federal contractors to do the same.

What is displayed in the above two excerpted sentences is the use of ‘I’ to legislate and enforce rules on the citizens to keep to the guidelines of coronavirus, of which the major one is compulsory vaccination for everyone. Here, governance is personalized through the use of first person pronoun ‘I’ and the strong anomalous finite. This he used to show his power and position as the President that must be obeyed. Also, there is an emphasis on the indefinite pronoun “all” to conceptualize the extent of his definite fiats. The President is seen dishing out directives to people in various categories and in different public sectors, and making vaccination not an option. He relied on his executive power and authority to veto and sign this into law and thus sounds an imperative death knell, ‘... get vaccinated’ ‘if you want to work with the federal government’.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has carried out a critical discourse analysis of the ‘pandemic politics’ in the September 9, 2021 remarks of US President Joe Biden on fighting COVID-19, using a combination of framework of Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics and van Dijk's (1993) model of Critical Discourse Analysis. It was discovered that a section of the elected people in government were playing politics that undermine the government's proposition to get the people vaccinated against COVID-19. While ventilating his anger and dissatisfaction against these people, it behooves on President Biden to address this issue of national concern in his speech by deploying two discourse strategies, which include negotiating and legislating. While negotiating with the people, he was found to be appealing, educating, begging/pleading with them. And in legislating laws, he was found to be condemning, blackmailing, threatening and finally vetoing a compulsory vaccination for all Americans. The outcome of this research is in line with the usefulness of critical discourse analysis to address the relationship between power and knowledge and how they can be used to influence the society.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that other researchers should consider the rhetorical strategies employed by the US President Biden to find out how his language frames vaccination as a civic duty and a collective responsibility. It will also be necessary to investigate the responses from various stakeholders, including public health officials, political opponents, and the general public. This will provide an insight into the broader societal impact of his remarks. In addition, examining the interplay between Biden's remarks and the obvious vaccine hesitancy or resistance may reveal underlying tensions in public health communication, and this will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of pandemic politics in the United State.

7. SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Having considered a critical discourse analysis of President Biden's remarks on “pandemic politics” in this paper, it is suggested that public perception studies should be conducted to gauge public reactions to Biden's vaccination mandates and then analyse how these perceptions align with or diverge from his intended messaging. Other studies could also consider a comparative analysis to investigate how different political leaders globally have framed vaccination policies and pandemic responses through different rhetorical strategies.

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