

Self-Image Projection in Mohammed Bin Salman's Political Interviews: A Pragma-Semantic Approach to Political Discourse Analysis

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Abstract—This paper presents a political discourse analysis (PDA) of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) interviews. The main purpose of the paper is to show how the image of a competent political leader is linguistically rendered by various linguistic practices in the selected interviews. The paper draws on political discourse analysis as discussed by Chilton (2004) and Chilton and Schaffner (2002). The analytical focus is on demonstrating how a positive self-image is communicated linguistically and deciphering the socio-political meanings encoded in the selected interviews at the pragmatic and semantic levels of analysis. The corpus of this study constitutes four interviews conducted with MBS: his interview with CBS TV in 2019, his interview on Vision 2030 broadcast on Saudi national TV in 2021, his interview with The Atlantic in 2022, and his interview with FOX News in 2023. The study depends on a mixed-method approach manifested in the employment of both quantitative and qualitative analyses. There are three main findings in this paper: First, in the selected interviews, MBS not only does politics but also projects a positive self-image by presenting himself as a solidary and collective, decisive, diplomatic, human-rights observer, and broader-goals-seeking leader. Second, these positive characteristics of a competent leader have been linguistically manifested at the pragmatic and semantic levels of analysis. Third, political interviewing is a form of mediated political discourse that communicates a specific ideology-laden message of politicians.

Index Terms—Mohammed bin Salman, political interviews, pragmatics, self-image projection, semantics

I. INTRODUCTION

The speeches of politicians in general and their political interviews in particular are communicative sites wherein their ideological attitudes and political positions are entirely divulged to the public. Interviews as a dialogic discourse genre mirror the way an interviewee responds to the questions produced by interviewers. Such a response is usually ideological in nature and clarifies the political behavior of the interviewed politician. Arguing from this position, this study offers a political discourse analysis (PDA) of some selected interviews of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (henceforth MBS). The central purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which the image of a competent political leader is linguistically rendered by various linguistic practices communicated in the selected interviews and manifested in the pragmatic and semantic levels of analysis. Thus, by decoding the socio-political meanings encoded in the selected interviews, one can obviously understand the way politicians think. Within politics, investigating the conversational behavior between interlocutors necessitates the perception of political communication not only as text and talk (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002) but also as a practice of professional and media discourse (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006). As such, a political encounter cannot be performed without the use of language because the act of doing politics is essentially constituted in language (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002).

This study is anticipated to contribute to the field of political discourse studies, particularly in terms of the linguistic investigation into political interviews. Political discourse analysis contributes to comprehending the intricate relationship between language, power, and society (van Dijk, 2015), and it offers insights into the workings of political influence by looking at how politicians use language to negotiate power, create reality, and alter perceptions (Wodak, 2009). Political discourse is closely linked to the use of power, from speech acts to rhetorical devices, metaphors, and framing techniques (Charteris-Black, 2005; Fairclough, 1998; Lu, 2021). Significantly, understanding the role of language in the political process is very crucial in managing interactions among interlocutors. In political interviews, language is used persuasively to achieve the goals of politicians, or, as Livingstone and Lunt (1994) put it, a political interview is a part of a culture of persuasion where "the elite try to persuade and the mass consume according to personal taste" (p. 20). Political interviews, therefore, are sites of rhetorical conflict, wherein politicians intentionally employ certain argumentative and persuasive strategies in their speech to guarantee a successful delivery of their political and ideological message.

Categorized within the domain of mass media communication, an interview is a type of verbal interaction between two persons: an interviewer and an interviewee(s), wherein the former attempts to elicit answers to specific questions from the latter. Political interviews are one of the formal types of interviews that are purposive encounters and always occur in a particular institutional context, i.e., in an official room or television studio without any audience. In such a political encounter, everything is organized and structured in a much more disciplined manner, and the targeted addressees of the whole communicative event are the audience. Although the ultimate goal of political interviews is the demand for accountability, politicians' purpose in an interview is to expose a brilliant and favorable image of themselves. According to Garfinkel (1994), politicians 'do' politics in and via their communication, and they can be viewed as both bringing their discourse identities as political actors into and bringing them out in a communicative context (Gumperz, 1996). Politicians, however, 'do' more than just 'discuss' politics in the media. In addition to showcasing their various tasks and responsibilities, politicians also try to demonstrate a good image for themselves in context. Accordingly, political interviews can be perceived to be one of the most influential channels through which politicians can communicate their ideologies and project positive conceptualizations of their self-images.

This study raises three questions. First, how is the image of a competent political leader rendered to MBS in the discourse of the selected interviews? Second, what are the linguistic practices encoded in the interviews that extend such an image for MBS at the pragmatic and semantic levels of analysis? Third, how are the four selected interviews linguistically structured to communicate specific sociopolitical meanings? The answer to these research questions constitutes the study's main objective: to explore how the image of a competent political leader is rendered to MBS in the discourse of the selected interviews. The study draws on a pragma-semantic approach to political discourse analysis. According to Fairclough (1998), political discourse articulates the discourse orders of the media, the political system (conventional, official politics), science and technology, grassroots sociopolitical movements, everyday private life, and so on, all in an unstable and changing configuration. A pragma-semantic approach is mainly concerned with both the pragmatic (contextual and communicative interpretations) and semantic (surface propositions) sides of political interviews. This approach attempts to reveal how meaning is constructed in political language to influence public opinion, deliver messages, and negotiate intricate social and political contexts (Khafaga, 2023a).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Political Discourse Analysis

Political discourse analysis (PDA) is a particularly politics-oriented genre of discourse that is mainly concerned with addressing issues related to politics and ideologies. Numerous linguists and philosophers approached political discourse analysis from various perspectives and viewpoints by discussing the term as an analytical method of argumentation by which the different argumentative strategies are decoded by the linguistic analysis of texts (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012), approaching the concept from a critical discourse analysis standpoint, as it serves to reveal the different power relations in and beyond discourse (van Dijk, 2004), and investigating PDA's analytical agenda in terms of the cognitive, social, and persuasive dimensions of discourse analysis (Khafaga & Alqahtani, 2024; Schaffner & Chilton, 2002). Despite the various perspectives via which PDA is approached in previous literature, almost all previous works have come to terms that it is entirely linked to the different contexts wherein the various interactional practices are delivered (Chilton, 2004). Van Dijk (2004) argues that comprehending the various discursive activities in discourse is contingent upon comprehending the contexts wherein these practices are generated and experienced. He contends that political discourse analysis provides answers for a wide range of political problems when it addresses the fundamental qualities of speech.

Chilton (2004) perceives PDA as an important model that is often utilized in political discourse studies to discuss the idea of how to manipulate political discourses to acquire, legitimize, and preserve power. For him, PDA offers intriguing explanations for the reciprocal relationship between the use of language and the various political issues. Such a connection is treated cognitively to demonstrate the way language operates dexterously in shaping politics and is connected to both cognitive science and cognitive linguistics. Chilton (2004) summarizes his perspective on political discourse. These include some captivating claims that can be explored in PDA, especially if one focuses on representational issues. In her discussion of PDA's analytical and theoretical agenda, Wodak (2009) postulates that the discourse historical method emphasizes a strong link between politics and public opinion, political control, and political administration. Her method presents a convincing image of the infinite diversity of political speech, which makes it possible to view it as classificatory.

B. Political Interviewing

Political interviews are defined by Feldman (2022) as a structured kind of mass media coverage that aims to elicit answers from prominent figures, including politicians and subject matter specialists, on issues that the general public finds crucial and of interest to them. For Feldman (2022), political interviews present various themes and topics that are of interest to the public. These include inquiries about policy matters and their advancements, positions taken on political and social agenda problems by rival political candidates and organizations, and potential alternatives to the current political system. Feldman (2022) maintains that the popularity of the politicians interviewed in these media

discourses sheds light and importance on the topics addressed. As a type of media performance, political interviews have some distinctive features that characterize this media discourse type from other discourse genres. For Hutchby (2022), political interviews are characterized by the type of interviewed participants, the mode of discourse delivery, turn-taking strategies, communication management and arrangement, settings, and timing. Hutchby maintains that political interviews are a site where political views and ideologies can be communicated from famous politicians to their addressees.

Feldman (2022) argues that political interviews are a prearranged type of discursive activity in which a politician is interviewed by a journalist, a social critic, or a scholar. For Kantara (2022), the interaction process in political interviews adopts a discourse scenario of questions and answers on the surface, but usually, these questions are not only to seek information on the part of the interviewed politician but also to target further clarification and/or confirmation of specific arguments. As is mentioned before, the discourse thematization pertaining to political interviews is not confined to only one topic. However, the majority of political interviews witness topic shift practices, as they are often presenting a variety of topics that are of importance to the public. Feldman (2022) postulates that there are some elements constituting the communication process of any political interview. These include (i) the participants (the interviewer and the interviewed), (ii) the questions of the interview, (iii) the responses of the interviewed participant to the questions, (iv) the sequence of questioning and answering, (v) the sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts of the interview, and (vi) the interview setting.

Within the scope of face negotiation, Heritage (1985) accentuates the fact that political interviews are a site for face-to-face confrontation. Therefore, the communication process is supposed to witness some sort of face-threatening acts, impoliteness, violations of Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, interruption practices, etc. This makes us claim that political interviewing has its own conversational criteria that, in most cases, are different from ordinary interactional practices. This scenario involves the interviewer asking the candidate about their policy positions and then pressuring them to defend them against criticism. However, these interviews actually assume the shape of speech situations that are governed by rules and depend on certain rituals (Baym, 2007). According to DeLuca and Peebles (2002), political interviews and other forms of broadcast political discourse prioritize style, image, and emotion over reasoned discussion. Political interviews, thus, are useful tools that offer simple and convenient means of recognizing, comprehending, and evaluating social and political concerns.

C. Related Studies

Numerous studies have investigated political interviews from different perspectives. Gnisci et al. (2022) addressed the face-threatening acts in political interviews of some Italian politicians by focusing on the threatening way through which questions in political interviews are produced as well as the extent to which answers to these questions are equivocal. Also, Tan et al. (2022) investigated the role political interviews play in the Malaysian political context. Their study was based on the Aristotelian framing of persuasion strategies, as they discuss the extent to which political interviews in the Malaysian context are sites for persuasion and attitude change. Bavelas et al. (1990) approached political interviews from the perspective of face. Their study highlighted the assumption that political interviews are mainly arranged to create interactional confrontations on the part of the interviewee. Other studies have discussed political interviews from other perspectives, including the discussion of the adversarial rhetoric in political interviewing in Brazil (Marques et al., 2022), pejoration strategies in political interviews of the USA presidents (Íñigo-Mora, 2022), construction of the speaker's persuasive image in public discourse (Žmavc, 2018), and the role of political interviewing in the normalization of the far-right in Australia (Sengul, 2022).

In the Saudi political context, there are two studies that are closely relevant to the current one. The first study is conducted by Alaufi and Obeng (2025), in which they adopt a critical discourse analysis approach to investigate the persuasive strategies encoded in MBS's interview with Abdullah al-Mudaifer on Saudi's Vision 2030. Their study identifies a number of strategies of persuasion and argumentative tactics used in the conversational encounters during the interview, including positive self-presentation, power relations, terms of address and reference, and antithetic constructions. This study concludes that MBS and al-Mudaifer use particular argumentative strategies to communicate specific meanings. The second study is presented by Alsalem (2025), and it also uses critical discourse analysis to examine an opinion piece about Bret Baier's 2023 interview with MBS that was written by the political anchor for Fox News. The premise of this study is that the rules and values that underlie any writing are typically implicit rather than overtly stated. A complex network of linguistic mechanisms, including framing, lexical choice, selectivity, and content sourcing, surfaced through Fairclough's (1989) model of critical discourse analysis. Although all these studies have come to terms with the assumption that political interviews are sites of power negotiation and persuasion, none of them highlights how a pragma-semantic approach might contribute to the linguistic investigation of political interviews and how the pragmatic level of analysis is incorporated into its semantic counterpart to reveal strategies of self-image projection in political interviewing, the core concern of the current study.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A PRAGMA-SEMANTIC APPROACH TO POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The study uses a pragma-semantic approach to political discourse analysis to investigate how political self-images are linguistically projected in political interviewing. Understanding how language is used to accomplish political

objectives and how the audience interprets it depends on the applicability of pragma-semantic analysis in political discourse. A pragma-semantic analysis, which focuses on the interface between the semantic propositions and the use of such expressions in everyday situations, sheds light on how politicians use language to sway public opinion and construct their public images (Patriarche & Zienkowski, 2022). Researchers can gain a better understanding of the intended messages and how the audience interprets them by using a pragma-semantic analysis to find the implicative meanings in political speeches (McDonnell, 2020; Shevchenko et al., 2020). The significance of pragmatic and semantic analyses in comprehending political communication is highlighted by the pragma-semantic approach to political interviews, which provides a way to explain the meaning of speakers' messages and their anticipated influence on the audience (Shevchenko et al., 2020).

The many communication tactics used by politicians to accomplish their political goals are included in the pragma-semantic analysis of political language in political interviewing. Among these tactics are the use of specific verbs, lexicalization, the use of first-person plural/singular references, the use of perfective aspects of the employed verbs, the use of collocations, specifically in terms of the semantic combination between various linguistic components such as the collocation of the pronouns and event verbs, the use of implicatures, the use of particular linguistic markers such as adverbs, nominalization, etc. As such, in political discourse analysis, numerous strategies are employed to communicate particular meanings within the theoretical umbrella of political discourse analysis. One of these linguistic manifestations is the use of pronouns. Pronouns, particularly the first-person singular and the first-person plural, are recurrently used in political speeches to convey specific meanings and ideologies of the speakers (Fairclough, 1989). The first-person singular references (I, me, my) are often employed to communicate competency of the speaker, and the first-person plural references (we, us, our) are often used to convey solidarity and collective identity. According to Fairclough (1989), pronouns are linguistic markers of agency used to convey particular meanings. The selection of pronouns and their placement within a phrase can textually depict a specific action or event or uphold a particular kind of relationship between discourse participants.

Furthermore, politicians commonly employ implicatures, or implied meanings that are not stated directly, to avoid controversy and deliver subtly communicated political messages (Surahmat et al., 2023). Lexicalization, or the use of specific words in specific discourse situations, is another strategy used to communicate meanings (Fowler, 1991). According to Khafaga (2023a), politicians often favor particular lexical choices to influence public opinion by activating political and social ideologies and attitudes. Fairclough (1989) asserts that words and phrases always have meanings that come from their frequent usage. He contends that the skillful use of language can convey ideological meanings. Abdi and Basarati (2016, p. 37) echo Fairclough's view when they claim that "every word carries an implicit connotation and a hidden power." Furthermore, specific language markers, such as certain words and/or phrases, are strategically employed to create a strong political identity and deliver particular political messages (Shevchenko et al., 2020). Richard (2018) links the employment of particular lexis with the political meanings communicated in political contexts and claims that distinct lexemes are frequently utilized to represent particular communicative objectives within particular political situations. For Boris (2012), these communication goals are pragmatic in nature, meaning they are used strategically to accomplish certain pragmatic goals. Similarly, Goźdz-Roszkowski (2021) emphasizes the value of lexis in political contexts, contending that it can be semantically enhanced and contextually driven to transmit additional meanings in political debates. Goźdz-Roszkowski (2021) maintains that spoken language more accurately reflects this kind of semantic extension than does the written form. Thus, Goźdz-Roszkowski's (2021) argument stresses both the semantic meanings that individual lexemes give as well as the pragmatic meanings that they provide when collocated with other words. This kind of lexicalization is strategic in that language users choose particular words to express particular meanings in their speech.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection, Description, and Rationale

The corpus of this study constitutes four interviews conducted with MBS: his interview with CBS TV in 2019, his interview on Vision 2030 broadcast on Saudi national TV in 2021, his interview with The Atlantic in 2022, and his interview with FOX News, the American TV channel, in 2023. Links to the interviews used in this study are provided in an appendix at the end of this paper. Only MBS's interview with FOX News is delivered in English, whereas the other three interviews are conducted in Arabic on the part of MBS. An English translation of the Arabic turns of conversationalists is used in the analysis of this study. Also, a brief reference to the interview used is provided at the end of each excerpt used in the analysis. Table 1 adds more clarification to the description of the selected interviews.

TABLE 1
DATA DESCRIPTION

Interview	Time duration	No. of words	Participants	No. of conversational turns
MBS's interview with CBS TV in 2019	56:00	1350	Interviewer (Norah O'Donnell)	25
			Interviewee (MBS)	25
MBS's interview on Vision 2030 in 2021	1:27:02	13950	Interviewer (Abdullah al-Mudaifer)	70
			Interviewee (MBS)	69
MBS's interview with The Atlantic in 2022	9:45	10035	Interviewer (Graeme Wood)	81
			Interviewee (MBS)	81
MBS's interview with Fox News in 2023	33:35	7614	Interviewer (Bret Baier)	59
			Interviewee (MBS)	59
Total	3:05:82	32949	2 in each interview	Interviewers 235 Interviewee 234 Total 469

The rationale for selecting these four interviews is twofold: first, the four interviews cover almost all critical issues pertaining to Saudi political, social, and economic affairs; and, second, they abound in pragmatic and semantic strategies that are dexterously employed to project a positive self-image for MBS.

B. Design of the Study and Macropropositions

The study depends on a mixed-method approach manifested in the employment of both quantitative and qualitative analyses to investigate the linguistic representation of self-image projection in MBS's political interviews. The four selected interviews were transcribed for coding and analysis as part of the data-gathering process. The four interviews of MBS are characterized by six macro-propositions that allow us to understand how MBS manages to project a positive self-image during his conversational encounters in the interviews. These macro-propositions include the Saudi Vision of 2030, normalizing relations with Israel, Saudi oil policy, the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi foreign relations with Iran and the United States of America, peace in Yemen, the Palestinian issue, the Saudi economy, human rights in Saudi Arabia, and future energy policies of Saudi Arabia.

C. Procedure

The procedures followed in this study are of five stages. First, the data collection stage, in which the four selected interviews are gathered from their original sources. Second, the data transcription and preparation stage, which comprises the process wherein the interviews are watched, transcribed into a textual format, and then compiled in Word Office files, arranged in divisions, and categorized in sections in order to be ready for the analysis. Third, the stage of identification of key pragma-semantic strategies employed to communicate self-image projection in the selected interviews. Fourth, the contextual analysis stage that comprises the understanding of the political contexts in which the interviews occur. Fifth, the interaction analysis, in which the focus is on how the speaker responds to questions, avoids direct answers, shifts topics, or uses rhetorical techniques to maintain control of the conversation and to communicate a positive self-image to addressees. Emphasis through italicization is made by the researcher for analytical reasons.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

A. The Solidary and Collective MBS

In many of his conversational turns in response to his interviewers, MBS demonstrates the image of a political leader who advocates solidarity and collectivity in his speech. His frequent use of collective language, especially the pronouns *we* and *our*, is one of the most intriguing features of his leadership style and mirrors how he projects a positive image for himself.

Excerpt 1.

MBS: *We will continue* to grow and to prosper and compete at a world level. (Interview with CBS)

Our role is to work day and night to overcome this and to make sure *our future* is much better than anything that happened in the past. (Interview with CBS)

MBS: *Our country* is founded on a set of views and beliefs that are based on Islam, on tribal culture, Arab culture; that's *our soul*. (Interview with the Atlantic)

We want to put *our country* on the right path for the sake of *our Saudi people*, for the sake of the region, and for the sake of the whole world based on *our belief* in peace and coexistence and the need for *us* to add value to the rest of the world. (Interview with the Atlantic)

MBS: When *we* do change we look to *our needs* to *our people's needs* and to *our economy* needs. (Interview with Fox News)

Without *our citizens*, there is no doubt that *we* would not have been able to achieve anything. (Interview on Vision 2030)

MBS's use of the first-person plural pronouns in the above excerpt has many other linguistic functions beyond showing solidarity and collectivity: first, to express a high level of certitude communicated by the semantic combination

between *we* and the truth modal *will* in *we will continue to grow*. Such a high level of certitude is also emphasized by the collocation of the verb phrase *continue to grow*, which further extends an image of not only a competent leader but also a decisive one. Second, to show explicitness of future plans, an idea that is accentuated by the semantic combination between the first-person plural *we* and the verb *want* in *we want to put our country on the right path*. Such a semantic collocation entails MBS's intention and future plans and thus shows him as having control over the situation. Third, to emphasize achievement collectivity, which is conveyed by the use of *we* and the event verb *achieve* manifested in the perfective aspect in *we have achieved*. Again, such a semantic collocation between *we* and *have achieved* supports the creation of collective and ideological coherence, expanding the realm of validity from the unexpected and non-anticipated past to the present and the future. Crucially, MBS's use of the present perfect tense indicates that his accomplishments were made in the past, but they still have relevance to the present and the future (our future). Furthermore, MBS' employment of expressions such as *our country*, *our people*, *our needs*, *our role*, *our belief*, *our economy*, *our people's needs*, and *our citizens*, explores a more expansive notion of togetherness that communicates a strong emotional bond with the Saudi people and a sense of solidarity and collective identity.

B. The Decisive MBS

MBS extends an image of a decisive leader who stands as an example of a visionary yet practical leader due to his premeditated use of decisive language and dedication to action.

Excerpt 2.

MBS: *We have made* great breakthroughs in this regard during the past 3 years... *We did* many huge projects there. (Interview on vision 2030)

MBS: *We will take action* based on Saudi law, based on international laws and based on other countries' laws. And that's the procedure *we did* in the past, and that's what *we are going to do* in the future. (Interview with the Atlantic)

Host: It's been five years since the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. U.S. intelligence linked you to ordering the attack. What do you say to those who still have concerns?

MBS: *We took* all the legal measures, just as any country would when mistakes are made. *We reformed* our security system *to ensure this does not happen again*, and we have not seen anything like this in the past five years. It was a painful mistake, but *we have done everything* to ensure it will not happen again. (Interview with Fox News)

Host: You're saying tonight that you want to negotiate an end to the war in Yemen?

MBS: *We are doing* this every day. (Interview with CBS)

As indicated in the above excerpt, decisiveness is linguistically realized by the use of particular event verbs collocated with personal pronouns. MBS employs some event verbs, such as *made*, *did*, *take*, and *reformed*, to communicate an image of a decisive, competent, and principled leader who has the ability to decide for his country's future. By using first-person plural self-references that collocate with event verbs in *we have made*, *we did many huge projects*, *we will take action*, *we took all the legal measures*, *we reformed our security system*, *we are doing this every day*, etc., MBS shows unity while portraying himself as an active, principled, and decisive political agent. Also, putting the semantic construction of (we + event verb) within various tenses, including the present, progressive, past, and perfect, serves to convey facts, continuity of action, action verification, and perfective validity for the non-expected past to the present and future, respectively. Furthermore, the semantic collocation of the first-person plural pronoun and the event verbs functions to mirror a collective decisiveness that enables MBS to delegate accountability while promoting a feeling of group purpose. Such a semantic collocation presents MBS as a component of a larger movement that is backed by both the government and the Saudi people and extends an image of a decisive leader, who is a team player rather than an authoritarian leader.

C. The Diplomatic MBS

MBS has skillfully used his political interviews to extend an image of a diplomatic leader. His responses to many conversational encounters demonstrate his capacity to handle intricate geopolitical situations with cool-headed reactions that prioritize communication and respect for one another.

Excerpt 3.

Host: I spoke with a prominent U.S. senator before I came here. And he said because of what happened with Jamal Khashoggi and what's happened in Yemen that in his words there's not a lot of good will around here in Congress for Saudi Arabia. How much has it hurt the relationship?

MBS: The relationship is *much larger* than that and this is a heinous incident and painful to all of us. Our role is *to work day and night* to overcome this and to make sure *our future is much better* than anything that happened in the past. (Interview with CBS)

Host: What would it take for you to agree to normalize relations with Israel?

MBS: There is an effort from President Biden's administration to get to that point. For us, *the Palestinian issue is fundamental*. We need to solve that, and we have good negotiations ongoing. We hope it will reach a place that improves the lives of Palestinians and *gets Israel back as a player in the Middle East*. (Interview with Fox News, 2023)

In the above excerpt, MBS extends an image of a diplomatic leader who has the ability to manage a challenging situation without offending anyone. This is evident when he is asked about Saudi Arabia's relations with the USA and how this relation is or is not influenced by Khashoggi's murder and the Yemeni war, the normalization of relations with Israel, and the Saudi political position concerning the Palestinian issue. MBS emphasizes that the USA-Saudi relation is *much larger* than to be influenced by Khashoggi's case. MBS's diplomacy is clearly shown by three things: first, by claiming common ground between him and the international opinion, including the USA, concerning Khashoggi's murder by his statement, *this is a heinous incident*, which indicates that he shares the same political position; second, by expressing his sympathy towards what happened to Khashoggi by describing the latter's murder as *painful to all of us*; and third, he uses the quantifier *much* with the comparative adjectives in *much larger* and *much better*, to accentuate the strength of the Saudi relationship with the USA, which will never be shaken by any subsidiary incidents. Such a semantic construction that is used to describe the degree of the good relations between the USA and Saudi Arabia is linguistically heightened by the event verbs *work* and *make* in *to work day and night to overcome this* and *to make sure our future is much better than anything that happened in the past*. Crucially, shifting the focus from a specific point to a more general scope of argument implies that MBS is a diplomatic leader, as he avoids delving into details about Khashoggi's murder and shifts the argumentative wheel towards a focus on future efforts to improve USA-Saudi relations.

In the same vein and in response to a question regarding the normalization of relations with Israel, MBS skillfully uses implicatures to communicate his diplomatic personality. This is conducted by directly linking the normalization of relations with Israel and the Palestinian issue. He does not offer a direct answer to the interviewer's question and shifts the discourse topic towards the Palestinian issue. Pragmatically, such an implicature is manifested in the violation of Grice's (1975) maxim of quantity, as he provides less information than is required. Here, the diplomatic MBS purposefully disregards the quantity maxim by not disclosing details of the Saudi-Israeli conversations. He gives his audience the impression that the Palestinian issue is a major concern for Saudi Arabia by only stating that there are *good negotiations ongoing*, which is less detail than the topic requires. Because of this indirectness, the entire meaning of the implicature depends on the background information about Middle Eastern geopolitics, especially Saudi Arabia's long-standing support for Palestine.

D. The Human Rights Observer MBS

Another positive image linguistically projected for MBS is delineating him as a human rights observer. This positive attribute is manifested in his interview with CBS, particularly when he is asked about the detention of the female activist Loujain Al-Hathloul:

Excerpt 4.

Host: Is it time to let her (female activist Loujain Al-Hathloul) go?

MBS: This decision is not up to me. It's up to the public prosecutor, and it's an independent *public prosecutor*.

Host: Her family says that she has been tortured in prison. Is that right?

MBS: If this is correct, it is very heinous. *Islam forbids torture*. The Saudi laws forbid torture. *Human conscience forbids torture*. And *I will personally follow up on this matter*.

Host: You will personally follow up on it?

MBS: *Without a doubt*.

The above excerpt shows MBS as a human rights defender who is highly concerned with observing the different aspects of human rights in Saudi Arabia. When MBS is asked about the detention of the female activist Loujain Al-Hathloul, he replies in a very diplomatic way that clearly communicates his interest in observing human rights. MBS firstly dissociates himself from the direct responsibility beyond Al-Hathloul's imprisonment, stating that *this decision is not up to me*, in reference to her detention. Such dissociation is directly followed by associating the whole case with *the public prosecutor*, who is described by him as *an independent public prosecutor*. The use of the adjective *independent* to modify the noun phrase *public prosecutor* is strategic, as it signifies that MBS has no hand in the detention of the female activist. Consequently, MBS's response sheds light on how he handles legal defense and maintains a positive image of a human rights defender. Furthermore, when the interviewer tells him that Al-Hathloul *has been tortured in prison*, MBS responds by using the conditional *If this is correct, it is very heinous*, which implies that the news of torture is not true. MBS immediately follows his conditional statement with three declarative sentences that function to highlight his close concerns with human rights in Saudi Arabia by religionizing, legalizing, and humanizing his counterargument to the issue being raised (i.e., Al-Hathloul's torture in jail) in his *Islam forbids torture*, *the Saudi laws forbid torture*, and *human conscience forbids torture*, respectively. MBS attempts to convey a positive image of a human rights defender whose interest in observing human rights in Saudi Arabia stems from the foundations of the religion of Islam, the principles of the Saudi laws, and the human conscience. MBS entails his argument with *I will personally follow up on this matter*, wherein the adverb *personally* is highly indicative of delineating him as the political leader who advocates human rights in his country and will *follow up* on this by himself.

E. The Broader-Goals-Seeker MBS

Another *positive* image extended by MBS in his political interviews is the image of a broader-goals seeker, who intends to communicate that Saudi Arabian leadership is entirely pursuing and targeting the broader goals, regionally

and internationally, as is shown in his responses to questions related to Saudi foreign relations with Iran, the normalization of relations with Israel, and the war in Yemen:

Excerpt 5.

Host: What kind of effect would a war between Saudi Arabia and Iran have on the region?

MBS: The region represents about 30% of the world's energy supplies, about 20% of global trade passages, about 4% of the world GDP. Imagine all of these three things stop. This means a *total collapse of the global economy*. (Interview with CBS)

MBS: We do not want the situation with Iran to be difficult. On the contrary, we want it to prosper and grow as we have Saudi interests in Iran, and they have Iranian interests in Saudi Arabia, which is to *drive prosperity and growth in the region and the entire world*. (Interview on Vision 2030)

MBS's above response illustrates how systemic global framing has replaced conventional national security language. He reframes the Gulf as not just a regional issue but a pillar of the global economic architecture by escalating the consequences of conflict to a worldwide economic collapse rather than merely arguing that it would hurt Saudi Arabia or its neighbors. His discourse, which is globalized and quantitative, portrays Saudi Arabia as a guardian of world stability. Here, the rhetorical approach is straightforward: MBS shifts the focus from military posture to shared vulnerability by highlighting energy supply routes and commerce corridors. Redefining Saudi national interests as being indistinguishable from global interests is an example of the broader-goals rhetoric. He does this by appealing to the international community, particularly to economic countries that rely on the stability of the Middle East. Similarly, in response to his host in his interview on Vision 2030, MBS uses a reciprocal discourse based on gain-sharing. He emphasizes common economic interests over differences in ideology or religion. The focus on interdependence, growth, and prosperity embodies the spirit of Vision 2030, which views geopolitical peace as a prerequisite for internal change. His use of words like *grow*, *prosper*, and *interests* repeatedly indicates a constructivist approach to diplomacy.

The broader-goals perspective is again evident when MBS responds to a question related to the Saudi Arabian stance concerning Yemen and Houthis:

Excerpt 6.

Host: You have mentioned Yemen and the importance of a stable region for Saudi Arabia to achieve its goals. Do you think the talks with the Houthis could lead to peace soon?

MBS: Yes, definitely. Our goal from the start has been to give the Yemeni people a better life. For Saudi Arabia to progress and achieve its ambitious goals, the entire region must be stable. That means no problems in Yemen, Iraq, or elsewhere in the region. We are working with the GCC, Egypt, and global players like the U.S. to achieve peace. (Interview with Fox News, 2023)

MBS projects a further positive image of himself as a broader-goal seeker who saves no time to address global interests for the whole world. MBS's response to his host's question concerning the Yemeni war and talks with Houthis highlights a basic tenet of his leadership philosophy: peace and progress are inextricably linked. His use of expressions like *our goal from the start* and *ambitious goals* conveys moral positioning and long-term planning. Instead of portraying Saudi Arabia as an aggressor in Yemen, he presents it as a stabilizing force that serves the interests of the Yemeni people. This type of language stresses intentionality and vision, which is known as goal-oriented discourse. MBS also positions Saudi Arabia as a stakeholder in the stability of the whole Middle East by the regional framing in his expression, *no problems in Yemen, Iraq, or elsewhere*. As such, he expands the focus to include regional architecture in addition to bilateral conflict. Individual state aims are raised to regional imperatives in this classic broader-goals discourse. Table 2 summarizes the results obtained from the analysis of the selected data:

TABLE 2

PROJECTED IMAGES, THEIR PRAGMA-SEMANTIC STRATEGIES, DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS, AND TARGETED MEANINGS IN MBS'S POLITICAL INTERVIEWS

The projected image	Pragma-semantic strategy	Discourse function	Targeted pragmatic meaning
The solidary and collective MBS	- first-person plural references (<i>we, us, our</i> + event verbs/intention verbs)	collective identity	projecting an image of both a top-down and bottom-up leader whose leadership reflects a solidary and collective will.
The decisive MBS	- collocation of event verbs+ first-person plural/singular pronouns - using perfective aspects (I/we + have + past participle)	decisiveness	projecting an image of a competent and decisive leader who is a doer rather than just a talker.
The diplomatic MBS	- implicatures - lexical choices	equivocation and hedging	projecting an image of a leader who is able to manage a challenging situation without offending anyone or causing any trouble.
The human rights observer MBS	- lexical choices - if-conditional	association and dissociation	projecting an image of a human rights defender
The broader-goals seeker MBS	- lexical choices	addressing global interests	projecting an image of a leader who places national interests in a framework of justice, stability, and progress at the regional and international levels.

VI. DISCUSSION

The above analysis and results show that MBS, in the four selected interviews and through the dexterous use of some pragmatic and semantic strategies, manages to project a positive image of himself as a competent political leader who has the ability to lead a country like Saudi Arabia. As such, the main finding of this study comes to terms with the majority of studies in political discourse (e.g., Chilton, 2004; Chilton & Schäffner, 2002; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; van Dijk, 2015; Wodak, 2009), whose contributions highlight the assumption that in political speeches and debates, politicians tend to construct favorable conceptualizations of self. In the majority of his conversational turns in the four selected interviews, MBS presents himself positively as a competent leader whose actions speak louder than his words, which also correlates with van Dijk's (1997) notion of positive self-presentation, arguing that politicians often present themselves positively in their political encounters. Such a positive image is manifested in a number of characteristics ascribed to MBS in his selected political interviews under investigation. These positive self-image characteristics include the description of MBS as a solidary and collective, decisive, diplomatic, human rights observer, and broader-goals seeker.

In terms of projecting an image of a solidary and collective leader, MBS's employment of the first-person plural pronouns *we* and *our* to convey a sense of unity establishes him as a leader who is involved with the people and acts in their best interests. This also reconciles with previous studies (e.g., Fairclough, 1989; Fowler, 1991; Khafaga, 2021; van Dijk, 2015), which emphasize the significance of using pronouns not only as function words but also as ideology markers used to communicate particular meanings in discourse. These pronouns also help him establish himself as a communal leader who collaborates with the Saudis to accomplish shared objectives, especially through Vision 2030. As Saudi Arabia continues to evolve into a more modern and diverse society, this rhetoric fosters a sense of national cohesion and common purpose. In addition to bolstering his legitimacy, MBS's constant use of collective language contributes to the development of a narrative that positions his leadership as the embodiment of the nation's goals. By doing this, he challenges the Saudi public to view themselves as active contributors to the nation's destiny rather than as passive objects of top-down rule. The collective solidarity discourse adopted by MBS further fosters togetherness and supports the notion that these reforms are the product of a shared desire for advancement rather than just the monarchy's purpose. MBS presents himself as a leader who is working on behalf of the entire nation to make these ambitious aspirations a reality by framing them as national imperatives and bringing the nation together in support of shared objectives.

Concerning his image as a decisive leader, MBS presents himself as a decisive and determined leader through a purposeful blending of strategic content and language choices. His frequent use of event-driven verbs (Quirk et al., 1985), strong personal pronouns, and statistical data creates a powerful story of a leader who not only has big ideas but also accomplishes them. MBS's interviewing approach carefully uses *I* when claiming responsibility and *we* when highlighting unity and common objectives, balancing individual authority with group mission. He creates the impression of a strong and visionary leader who shapes Saudi Arabia with his own hands but with the support of his supporters thanks to his constant use of these rhetorical devices. MBS's leadership communication in his interviews is a deliberate mix of assertiveness and collaboration. He presents himself as a determined, active, and forward-thinking leader by using the first-person singular/plural pronouns in conjunction with action-oriented verbs like *make*, *do*, *work*, *stand*, and *take*. His language reflects the core of the bold reforms he aspires to implement by serving as a vehicle for both making change and articulating ideas.

Regarding the image of the diplomatic MBS, he has done a good job of projecting an image of himself as a diplomat dedicated to communication and respect for one another. His diplomatic reactions to intricate geopolitical problems, which are entirely based on using specific lexemes, demonstrate a practical leadership style that emphasizes the value of collaboration and discussion in resolving local and international difficulties. Such a lexicalization process to extend a positive image of a diplomatic leader tunes with many previous studies (e.g., Abdi & Basarati, 2016; Goźdz-Roszkowski, 2021; Khafaga, 2023b), whose contributions emphasize that the employment of particular words and/or phrases has a pragmatic weight in communicating specific meanings intended by language users. Whether regarded as a visionary or a controversial figure, there is no doubting that MBS has redefined diplomatic leadership in the twenty-first century. MBS's approach to diplomacy encompasses a combination of reformist rhetoric, media engagement, and strategic nationalism. Whether through economic modernization, regional power plays, or diverse alliances, MBS continues to reshape not only Saudi Arabia's global role but also the broader contours of international diplomacy in the twenty-first century. A multifaceted diplomatic leader, MBS has been characterized by ambition, controversy, and strategic recalibration.

As a broader-goals seeker, MBS presents a vision that goes beyond particular crises and recasts Saudi Arabia as a force for modernization and regional integration. MBS indicates a strategic shift from reactive politics to proactive diplomacy through language choices that emphasize objectives, regional integration, and shared prosperity. It is unclear if this vision will come to pass, but the message is clear: peace is a necessary condition for something much greater rather than an objective in and of itself. MBS's changing views on Iran and regional issues are indicative of a larger-goals approach based on interdependence, economic pragmatism, and an eye toward the future. Instead of using adversarial rhetoric, he highlights opportunities and vulnerabilities that both parties share. By doing this, MBS presents

Saudi Arabia as a revolutionary force that connects regional stability with global prosperity rather than as a reactive Gulf power.

VII. CONCLUSION

By drawing on a pragma-semantic approach to political discourse analysis, this paper presented a linguistic investigation into MBS's political interviews. The paper showed how the image of a competent political leader is linguistically rendered by various linguistic and argumentative practices in the selected interviews. It also clarified how politicians use language to navigate and control the social, political, and emotional contexts in which they talk. Theoretically, the analysis revealed the nuances of political discourse and offered a deeper comprehension of the ways in which language mediates social interaction, persuasion, and power. It was analytically revealed that the employment of a pragma-semantic analysis of political interviews is relevant in comprehending political communication, as it provides a way to explain the meaning of speakers' messages and their anticipated influence on the audience. The analysis of the selected data further demonstrated that political interviewing as a dialogic political discourse genre mirrors the way an interviewee responds to the questions produced by interviewers. Such a response is usually ideological in nature and clarifies the political behavior of the interviewed politician. It was analytically demonstrated that MBS manages to project a positive image of himself as a solidary and collective, decisive, diplomatic, human-rights observer and broader-goals seeker. These positive characteristics are linguistically manifested at the pragma-semantic level of analysis. The positive self-image of a competent leader is communicated through a clever use of first-person references, lexical choices, implicatures, event verbs, collocation, and the use of specific linguistic markers such as modifiers.

For future research, this study recommends the use of the same pragma-semantic approach to investigate discourse genres other than the political, such as religious discourse, particularly the discourse of religious sermons and debates. This might reveal similar and/or different findings than those demonstrated in this study, particularly in terms of the pragma-semantic strategies used to communicate various religious and ideological meanings. Also recommended is a study in which a linguistic investigation of politicians' use of language in their individual political speeches and their political interviews is conducted, with a focus being made on whether or not they adopt the same linguistic strategies in both political genres to communicate particular meanings.

APPENDIX

1. Link to MBS's interview with CBS TV in 2019
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDz0redciFs>
2. Link to MBS's interview on Vision 2030 in 2021
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnKoES8rcKA>
3. Link to MBS's interview with The Atlantic in 2022
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciCoHZolBQI>
4. Link to MBS's interview with FOX News in 2023
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVtKH1N1czE>

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