

## Hedging and Boosting in Political Press Briefings: A Critical Discourse Analysis of U.S., U.K., and Iraqi Political Discourse with an Introduction to Cultural-Ideological Linguistic Model

Asst. Lect. Ali Taha Ali<sup>1</sup> & Asst. Prof. Muneer Ali Khudhayer<sup>2</sup> & Raqib.Abbas Jeryo<sup>3</sup>

Islamic University / Babylon Campus<sup>1&2</sup> & Al mustaqbal University<sup>3</sup>

Corresponding Author: Asst. Lect. Ali Taha Ali<sup>1</sup> - [ali.taha348@yahoo.com](mailto:ali.taha348@yahoo.com)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study develops and validates the Cultural-Ideological Linguistic Model (CILM), a framework for analyzing political discourse strategies across diverse cultural and political contexts. Combining macro-level sociopolitical factors (political systems, conflict involvement, Hofstede's cultural dimensions) with micro-level linguistic analysis (hedging and boosting strategies), the model examines how power dynamics shape diplomatic communication and how these linguistic choices are filtered through media reception. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research compared U.S., U.K., and Iraqi political briefings, revealing distinct discourse patterns: U.S. officials employ boosting for dominance (18.7/1k words) and hedging for flexibility (12.4/1k words); Iraqi discourse favors hedging (22.1/1k words) for conflict mitigation, while U.K. communication balances both for consensus-building. The study identifies cultural-linguistic interfaces, showing that individualist cultures correlate with directness, while high power distance predicts hedging frequency. Empirical validation demonstrates how macro-context (e.g., unipolar power position) shapes micro-linguistic choices (e.g., U.S. "unequivocally" vs. Iraqi "possibly"), mediated by journalistic reception norms (media-political relationships, conflict proximity). The findings challenge universalist assumptions in political discourse analysis, highlighting culture-specific risk management in international relations. The CILM advances theoretical debates in critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, and cross-cultural communication, offering practical tools for diplomacy, media analysis, and conflict resolution.*

**KEYWORDS:** Political discourse, hedging and boosting, cultural linguistics, diplomatic communication, media reception, power dynamics.

## Introduction

Political discourse is a vital component of communication within democratic societies, serving as a means through which political entities convey their messages, policies, and ideologies to the public. It encompasses various forms of communication, including speeches, debates, and press briefings, all of which play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing political outcomes. Political discourse is characterized by its strategic use of language, where speakers often employ specific rhetorical devices to achieve their communicative goals (Fairclough, 1995).

Among the various formats of political discourse, political press briefings stand out as pivotal moments where government officials, political leaders, and spokespersons interact with the media. These briefings are designed to disseminate information, clarify policies, and respond to inquiries, thereby serving as a direct channel between the government and the public (Bennett, 2009). In the context of political press briefings, the language used is often carefully crafted to manage perceptions and convey authority, making it a rich area for analysis.

In political discourse, the concepts of hedging and boosting are particularly significant. Hedging refers to the linguistic strategies used to express uncertainty or to soften statements, thereby allowing speakers to navigate controversial or sensitive topics without committing fully to a stance (Hyland, 1998).

Conversely, boosting involves the use of language that emphasizes certainty and confidence, often to reinforce authority and persuade the audience (Biber et al., 1999). The interplay of these strategies is crucial in political press briefings, where the stakes are high, and the implications of language can have far-reaching consequences.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework for examining the intricate relationship between language, power, and society, particularly in political contexts. CDA seeks to uncover the ways in which discourse shapes and is shaped by social structures, ideologies, and power dynamics (Gee, 2014). By applying CDA to the analysis of political press briefings, researchers can reveal how language is used to construct political realities, manage public perception, and negotiate power relations.

Cultural issues also play a significant role in political discourse, particularly in multicultural contexts such as the U.S., U.K., and Iraq. Each of these nations has distinct cultural norms and values that influence how political messages are crafted and received. For instance, the directness of communication may vary, with some cultures favoring explicit statements while others may rely more on implicit meanings (Hofstede, 2001). Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for analyzing how hedging and boosting are employed in political press briefings across different contexts.

The objectives of the current study were to explore the use of hedging and boosting in political press briefings from the U.S., U.K., and Iraqi political discourse, employing a CDA approach to examine how these linguistic strategies reflect and shape power dynamics and cultural contexts. By comparing the use of these strategies across different political environments, this study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of language in political communication and the implications for public perception and engagement.

## **Literature Review**

Hedging and boosting are critical linguistic devices in political discourse, shaping how speakers convey certainty, authority, and diplomatic caution. Hedging involves mitigating statements to reduce commitment, avoid confrontation, or express politeness (Hyland, 1998). In contrast, boosting reinforces assertions to project confidence, authority, and persuasive force (Holmes, 1984). These strategies are particularly salient in political press briefings, where officials balance transparency with strategic ambiguity (Partington, 2003).

Previous studies have examined hedging and boosting in political communication. For instance, Fetzer (2010) analyzed British parliamentary debates and found that hedging was frequently used to soften criticism and maintain diplomatic relations. Similarly, Bull (2008) explored how politicians use boosting in election campaigns to project leadership and decisiveness. These studies highlight the pragmatic functions of hedging and boosting in political discourse, demonstrating their role in power negotiation and persuasion.

Cultural norms significantly influence the use of hedging and boosting in political discourse. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory suggests that high-power-distance cultures (e.g., Iraq) may employ more hedging to show deference, while low-power-distance cultures (e.g., U.S., U.K.) may favor directness and boosting. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) compared political speeches across cultures and found that Middle Eastern politicians used more indirect hedging strategies compared to Western politicians, who often employed assertive boosting.

Additionally, Wodak (2009) argued that political discourse in collectivist societies (e.g., Iraq) emphasizes indirectness to maintain group harmony, whereas individualist cultures (e.g., U.S., U.K.) prioritize clarity and assertiveness. These cultural differences suggest that the frequency and function of hedging and boosting vary depending on national communication styles.

CDA provides a framework for analyzing how language constructs power relations in political discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Van Dijk (2006) emphasized that political press briefings are sites of ideological struggle, where language is used to legitimize policies and marginalize opposition. Hedging and boosting, in this context, serve as tools for controlling information flow and shaping public perception. For example, Chilton (2004) examined U.S. presidential briefings and found that hedging was often used to evade accountability, while boosting reinforced policy legitimacy. Similarly, Wilson (2015) analyzed U.K. press briefings and noted that officials strategically alternated between hedging and boosting to manage media narratives. These studies underscore how CDA can reveal hidden power structures in political communication.

Recent scholarship has begun exploring hedging and boosting in Middle Eastern political discourse, though comparative studies involving Iraqi press briefings remain limited. Khalifa (2020) examined Iraqi parliamentary speeches and found that politicians frequently employed hedging to navigate sectarian tensions and maintain diplomatic relations, while boosting was reserved for moments requiring strong nationalistic appeals. In contrast, Harris (2018) analyzed U.S. White House briefings and noted a predominance of boosting strategies to project policy certainty, with hedging primarily used in foreign policy discussions where ambiguity was strategically advantageous.

For the U.K., Atkinson (2021) investigated Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) and found that British politicians used hedging to soften criticisms in coalition governments while boosting was prevalent in Brexit-related speeches to reinforce political stances. These findings suggest that institutional and geopolitical contexts shape hedging and boosting patterns. However, no existing study has systematically compared these strategies across U.S., U.K., and Iraqi press briefings—a gap this research aims to fill.

The reception of hedging and boosting by media and audiences also varies culturally. Clayman et al. (2010) demonstrated that in the U.S., excessive hedging by politicians often led to media framing them as “weak” or “evasive,” whereas boosting enhanced perceptions of leadership. Conversely, Al-Haidari (2019) found that Iraqi audiences viewed hedging as a sign of prudence in politically volatile contexts, while unchecked boosting risked appearing authoritarian.

This divergence highlights how societal expectations influence the effectiveness of these strategies. By integrating CDA with media analysis frameworks (e.g., Entman 2007), this study examined how journalists and publics in each country interpret hedging/boosting, adding a reception dimension to existing production-focused research.

Existing research has made significant strides in understanding the pragmatic functions of hedging and boosting in political discourse (Hyland, 1998), their cultural variations across different speech communities (Blum-Kulka, 1989), and their role in reinforcing or contesting power structures (Van Dijk, 2006). However, critical gaps remain that this study seeks to address. First, while hedging and boosting have been examined in Western political contexts, particularly in the U.S. and U.K., there is a lack of comparative studies that include non-Western political discourse, such as Iraqi press briefings. This oversight limits our understanding of how these linguistic strategies operate in different geopolitical and cultural settings.

Second, while CDA has been widely used to examine power dynamics in political language, few studies integrate it with cultural pragmatics to explore how macro-level ideological structures interact with micro-level linguistic choices. Such an approach would provide a more nuanced understanding of how hedging and boosting are shaped by—and in turn shape—political and cultural norms. Finally, while some research has investigated media and public reception of political discourse in Western contexts, the impact of hedging and boosting on audience perception remains underexplored in non-Western settings, where cultural norms of communication may lead to different interpretations of these strategies.

To address these gaps, this study employed a multi-method approach. First, it compared the frequency and function of hedging and boosting in political press briefings from the U.S., U.K., and Iraq (2022–2025) using corpus-assisted CDA. Second, it incorporated interviews with journalists from each country to

assess how media professionals interpret these linguistic strategies, thereby adding a reception-based dimension to the analysis. Finally, it proposed a theoretical model that links linguistic choices in political discourse to broader cultural and ideological norms, offering a framework for future cross-cultural research on political communication. The current research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the frequency and function of hedging and boosting differ in political press briefings across the U.S., U.K., and Iraq?
2. How do cultural and ideological norms influence the use of hedging and boosting in these contexts?
3. How do journalists and media professionals in each country perceive and interpret these linguistic strategies?
4. What theoretical model can explain the relationship between linguistic choices (hedging/boosting) and cultural-ideological norms in political discourse?

By answering these questions, this study aimed to contribute to the fields of political discourse analysis, cross-cultural pragmatics, and media studies, while offering practical insights into how political communication strategies are employed and perceived in diverse cultural contexts.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design that combines corpus linguistics with CDA and qualitative interviews to examine hedging and boosting strategies in political press briefings. The methodology was divided into three main components: data collection and corpus compilation, linguistic analysis, and media reception analysis. All data was drawn from the period between 2022 and 2025, a timeframe marked by significant geopolitical conflicts including the Ukraine war, Gaza conflict, and tensions between Iran and Israel.

For data collection, a specialized corpus was compiled consisting of 30 press briefing transcripts, with 10 from each country under study - the United States, United Kingdom, and Iraq. The U.S. corpus includes White House and State Department briefings addressing key international crises. The U.K. corpus comprises Prime Minister's Questions and Foreign Office statements related to these conflicts. The Iraqi corpus contains government and Foreign Ministry briefings discussing regional stability issues, particularly concerning Iran and the Gaza conflict. All transcripts were sourced from official government records and verified media outlets to ensure authenticity and representativeness. The selection criteria focused specifically on briefings that directly addressed the major conflicts of the study period.

The linguistic analysis employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis utilized corpus linguistics tools to identify and compare frequencies of hedging and boosting markers across the three national corpora. Keyword-in-context analysis helped examine how these linguistic

features are employed in different political contexts. Qualitative analysis applied CDA frameworks to interpret the pragmatic functions of these strategies, examining how they reflect power dynamics, ideological positioning, and cultural communication norms during times of international crisis. The combination of these methods allowed for both broad pattern recognition and nuanced interpretation of discursive strategies.

To complement the textual analysis, the study incorporated interviews with journalists who cover political affairs in each country. Six journalists in total, with two from each national context, were selected from major media organizations. The semi-structured interviews explored how media professionals perceive and interpret hedging and boosting strategies in political communication, particularly in high-stakes diplomatic contexts. Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in how these linguistic features are received and understood by key intermediaries in the political communication process.

Methodological rigor was maintained through several validation measures. Inter-coder reliability procedures ensured consistency in the identification and classification of hedging and boosting features across analysts. The research design incorporated triangulation by comparing findings from different methodological approaches and data sources. Ethical considerations included protecting the anonymity of interview participants and carefully contextualizing sensitive political content.

**Results**

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings for each research question, incorporating detailed linguistic extracts, statistical comparisons, and interpretive frameworks. The results are organized thematically to address the study’s four central research questions.

**Research Question 1: Comparative Frequency and Functional Distribution of Hedging and Boosting**

Quantitative Analysis: A corpus-based examination revealed significant variation in the use of hedging and boosting across the three political contexts. As shown in Table 1, normalized frequencies (per 1,000 words) demonstrate distinct patterns:

**Table 1**

*Normalized Frequency of Hedging and Boosting Markers (per 1,000 words)*

Linguistic Feature	U.S. Briefings	U.K. Briefings	Iraqi Briefings
Hedging Devices	12.4	15.2	22.1
Boosting Devices	18.7	14.9	9.3

Functional Analysis with Textual Evidence



1. U.S. Political Discourse: The American corpus exhibited the highest frequency of boosting markers, particularly in contexts involving:

- Attribution of responsibility: *“We have irrefutable evidence that clearly demonstrates Iran’s direct involvement in these attacks”* (White House briefing, March 2023). This extract shows the strategic use of boosting (“irrefutable,” “clearly”) to establish an authoritative narrative.
- Policy declarations: *“The United States will absolutely maintain its military presence in the region”* (State Department briefing, January 2024). The adverb “absolutely” functions as a strong commitment signal.

Hedging in U.S. discourse typically appeared in:

- Conditional policy statements: *“We might consider additional sanctions depending on the situation’s evolution”* (White House briefing, November 2022). The modal “might” creates strategic ambiguity.

2. U.K. Political Discourse: British briefings showed a more balanced distribution:

Complex position-taking: *“While we undoubtedly condemn these actions, there may be mitigating circumstances we should examine”* (Foreign Office briefing, May 2023). This illustrates the simultaneous use of boosting (“undoubtedly”) and hedging (“may”) characteristic of U.K. diplomatic language.

3. Iraqi Political Discourse: Iraqi briefings contained the highest hedging frequency:

Diplomatic caution: *“We suggest that all parties should perhaps reconsider their current positions.”* (Iraqi Foreign Ministry, July 2023) The verbs “suggest” and “should” combined with “perhaps” create multiple layers of mitigation.

## **Research Question 2: Cultural-Ideological Influences on Linguistic Choices**

### **Cross-Cultural Comparison**

#### **1. Power Distance and Directness**

- High power distance in Iraqi culture correlated with: *“It would be preferable if the international community could potentially intervene”* (Iraqi government briefing, September 2022). The conditional “would” and adverb “potentially” reflect hierarchical communication norms.
- Lower power distance in U.S. culture facilitated: *“We know exactly who’s responsible and we’re going to hold them accountable”* (White House briefing, October 2023). The boosting verbs “know” and “going to” demonstrate directness.

#### **2. Collectivist vs. Individualist Orientations**

- Iraqi collectivism manifested in: *“Our brothers in the region might want to consider...”* (Iraqi briefing, February 2024). The kinship term “brothers” combined with “might” shows group-oriented mitigation.

- American individualism appeared in: *“I firmly believe our position is correct”* (State Department briefing, December 2022). The first-person pronoun with boosting adverb “firmly” emphasizes individual conviction.

### Research Question 3: Media Reception and Interpretation

#### Journalist Interview Findings

##### 1. U.S. Journalist Perspectives

- On boosting: *“When officials say ‘we know without doubt,’ they’re trying to control the narrative before questions arise”* (Senior U.S. political correspondent).
- On hedging: *“Hearing ‘we may pursue options’ makes me suspect internal disagreements”* (White House reporter).

##### 2. U.K. Journalist Interpretations

- *“The careful balance between ‘certainly’ and ‘possibly’ reflects the government’s need to maintain cross-party and international consensus”* (BBC political editor).

##### 3. Iraqi Journalist Readings

- *“Our leaders use many soft words because direct statements could have dangerous consequences in our region”* (Baghdad-based political journalist).

#### Reception Patterns

Table 2 summarizes interpretation trends:

**Table 2**

#### *Interpretation Trends*

Country	Boosting Interpretation	Hedging Interpretation
U.S.	Strength/leadership	Weakness/indecision
U.K.	Necessary emphasis	Prudent caution
Iraq	Potential aggression	Diplomatic necessity

### Research Question 4: Integrated Linguistic Model

The Cultural-Ideological Linguistic Model (CILM) emerged from these findings as a comprehensive framework for understanding political discourse strategies. At the macro level, the model incorporates fundamental contextual factors that shape communication patterns, including different political system types (such as coalition governments versus presidential systems), degrees of conflict involvement (ranging from direct parties to mediators), and established cultural dimensions as measured by Hofstede’s



indices. These broad structural elements create the foundational context in which political communication occurs.

Moving to the micro level of linguistic realization, the model identifies two key strategic functions. Hedging consistently appears as a mechanism for face-protection in high-stakes diplomatic contexts, allowing speakers to maintain relationships while navigating sensitive topics. Conversely, boosting serves as a tool for power projection, particularly in hegemonic discourses where demonstrating authority and certainty is paramount. These linguistic choices operate within the constraints and opportunities created by the macro-level factors.

The model also accounts for reception filters that mediate how these linguistic strategies are interpreted. Journalistic expectations form a crucial layer of these filters, being shaped by three primary influences: the nature of media-political relationships in each context, prevailing cultural communication norms, and the relative proximity of journalists to conflict situations. These filters explain why identical linguistic strategies may be interpreted differently across cultural and political contexts.

To validate the model, we can examine representative examples from the data. A prototypical U.S. boosting statement like “We will unequivocally defend our allies” demonstrates the model’s explanatory power. At the macro level, this reflects America’s unipolar power position; at the micro level, the adverb “unequivocally” functions as an intensifier; and in terms of reception, journalists consistently interpreted this as expected superpower rhetoric. Conversely, an Iraqi hedging statement such as “It appears some progress could possibly be made” illustrates different dimensions of the model. The macro context shows regional power balancing concerns, the micro analysis reveals double hedging through “appears” and “possibly,” and journalists uniformly understood this as necessary diplomatic caution rather than weakness.

The synthesis of key findings revealed several important patterns in discourse strategy variation. Quantitative analysis showed boosting predominated in U.S. discourse (18.7 instances per 1,000 words) compared to Iraqi discourse (9.3 instances), while Iraqi hedging frequency (22.1 instances) nearly doubled the U.S. rate (12.4 instances). Functional specialization appeared clearly across contexts: U.S. discourse employed boosting primarily for blame assignment and hedging for policy flexibility; U.K. discourse showed balanced use for consensus-building; while Iraqi discourse relied on hedging for conflict mitigation, reserving boosting for rare domestic audience messages.

These patterns demonstrate significant cultural-linguistic interfaces. Directness in communication correlated strongly with individualist cultural orientations, while mitigation strategies associated with high-context communication styles. Most notably, the study found that power distance measures effectively predicted hedging frequency across different political contexts, with higher power distance

cultures employing significantly more hedging devices in their diplomatic communications. These findings collectively support the CILM as a robust framework for analyzing political discourse across diverse contexts. The model's strength lies in its ability to connect macro-level political and cultural factors with micro-level linguistic choices, while accounting for how these choices are filtered through media interpretation.

### **Discussion, Conclusion, Implications and Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study contribute significantly to existing theoretical frameworks in political discourse analysis, particularly in understanding how linguistic strategies reflect and reinforce power dynamics in international relations. The developed CILM extends previous work by van Dijk (2006) on discourse and power by incorporating cultural dimensions as mediating factors in political communication. While earlier studies like Chilton (2004) established the connection between political language and power structures, our model provides a more nuanced understanding by demonstrating how these structures manifest differently across cultural contexts. The identification of boosting as power projection in hegemonic discourses aligns with Fairclough's (2013) conceptualization of discourse as social practice, but adds the crucial dimension of cultural variation in how such projection is executed and interpreted.

Empirically, the study's findings both confirm and challenge previous research in political linguistics. The higher frequency of boosting in U.S. political discourse corroborates Beard's (2000) observations about American political rhetoric tending toward certainty and assertiveness. However, our data reveals this tendency is particularly pronounced in foreign policy contexts compared to domestic issues, a distinction not fully explored in earlier studies. The British data shows patterns similar to those identified by Partington (2003) in parliamentary discourse, particularly in the strategic balancing of certainty and caution. However, our findings extend this observation to international communications, demonstrating how such balancing serves coalition-building purposes beyond domestic politics. The Iraqi data presents the most significant departure from existing literature, as previous studies of Middle Eastern political discourse (e.g., Suleiman 2004) have focused more on rhetorical devices than pragmatic strategies like hedging.

The study's methodological approach bridges an important gap between corpus linguistics and CDA, addressing Wodak's (2009) call for more integrated methods in political discourse research. By combining quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative examination of contextualized examples and journalist interviews, we overcome limitations of purely text-based analyses that dominate the field. This multi-method approach allows for more robust claims about both the prevalence and interpretation of linguistic strategies than previous studies relying on single methodologies. The inclusion of journalist perspectives

particularly strengthens the study's validity, as it moves beyond analyst interpretation to examine how discourse strategies are actually received by key intermediaries in the political communication process.

The cultural-linguistic interfaces identified in the study offer important correctives to universalist claims in political discourse analysis. While previous work (e.g., Wilson 2015) has noted cultural differences in political communication, our systematic comparison across three distinct contexts provides stronger evidence for the relationship between cultural dimensions and linguistic choices. The finding that power distance predicts hedging frequency particularly contributes to ongoing debates about the cultural specificity of politeness strategies in political discourse (Kádár & Haugh 2013). Our data suggests that Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, while useful, requires significant modification when applied to high-stakes political contexts across cultures.

The study's findings about discourse strategy evolution during prolonged crises add new dimensions to research on political communication in conflict situations. While previous studies (e.g., Hodges 2011) have examined framing in conflict discourse, our focus on pragmatic strategies like hedging and boosting reveals how political actors linguistically manage the tensions between maintaining consistent positions and adapting to changing circumstances. The observed shift from boosting to hedging as conflicts prolong suggests an understudied aspect of political communication - the linguistic management of uncertainty in protracted disputes. This finding has important implications for understanding how governments maintain credibility while navigating complex international crises.

The practical implications of the study connect with growing interest in applied political discourse analysis (Chilton et al. 2010). The CILM's diagnostic value for interpreting diplomatic communications addresses real-world needs in international relations and media analysis. For practitioners, the model offers a framework for anticipating how communications might be interpreted in different cultural contexts, potentially reducing cross-cultural misunderstandings in diplomacy. For media professionals, the insights into how linguistic strategies signal policy intentions could enhance the accuracy of political reporting. These applications suggest promising directions for future interdisciplinary research bridging linguistics, political science, and communication studies.

The study's limitations point to several fruitful avenues for future research. While the focused comparison of three countries provides depth, expanding the model to more diverse political systems would test its generalizability. The exclusive focus on English-language briefings (including translations for Iraqi statements) raises questions about how these patterns manifest in original language communications. Future studies incorporating multilingual analysis could address this limitation. Additionally, while journalist interviews provide valuable reception data, broader audience studies would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how these discourse strategies are interpreted by various publics.

Theoretically, the study invites reconsideration of several assumptions in political discourse analysis. The consistent patterns found across contexts suggest that hedging and boosting may represent fundamental dimensions of political communication rather than culture-specific strategies. This observation aligns with emerging work in evolutionary linguistics (e.g., Dunbar 1996) that views such strategies as adaptive mechanisms for managing social relationships. At the same time, the cultural variations in frequency and interpretation support constructionist views of language as shaped by social and historical contexts. Reconciling these perspectives remains an important challenge for future theoretical development.

In conclusion, this study advances our understanding of political discourse by systematically examining how cultural and ideological factors shape linguistic strategies in international communications. The findings demonstrate that while certain discourse patterns may be universal in form, their frequency, function and interpretation vary significantly across political and cultural contexts. The developed CILM provides a framework for analyzing these variations that integrates micro-linguistic choices with macro-social factors and reception processes. By bridging theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, the study offers both empirical insights into specific political communications and conceptual tools for broader analysis of language in international relations.

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