

Original Research

Received 15 May 2026

Revised 18 June 2026

Accepted 08 July 2026

Natural Resources for Human Health 2026, Vol. 6 (6s): 152–159

KEYWORDS:

Discourse , War, Representation , Strategies , media , Gaza , and Isreal.

Discourse Analysis and Media Attitudes: The Representation of the War on Gaza in CNN News Coverage

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ABSTRACT: War reporting is shaped by ideological and institutional perspectives, with different media outlets using distinct linguistic strategies to construct and represent conflicts and legitimacy in different ways. The present study aims to (1) revealing how the social actors are named and referred to linguistically; (2) figuring out the characteristics and attributes which are assigned to the social actors ; (3) exploring the construction of the argumentation schemes and topoi that are used to legitimize representation of the war ; (4) determining how the perspectives of the representation of the war on Gaza are constructed ; (5) conducting the realization of the intensification and mitigation strategies in the selected data under the study .To achieve the aims and test the hypotheses, this study is structured according to the following procedures: presenting a theoretical framework that surveys the study's key concepts; collecting data and providing an adapted model of (Reisigl & Wodak) five discursive strategies ; conducting a discourse analysis for analysing the twenty eight news reports ; discussing the results of analysis, and arriving at some conclusions.

The study concludes that many linguistic devices of nomination strategy are used to refer to the social actors in the news coverage of Al-Jazeera and CNN like proper names, professional anthroponyms; adjectival phrases and explicit predicates are utilised in attributing the social actors ; topoi and argumentation schemes are employed to legitimize claims of truth and normative rightness; both channels predominantly employ a distance perspective over an involvement perspective, Al Jazeera foregrounded Palestinians perspectives more than the Israel's voice, while CNN foregrounded the Israel's voice more than the Palestinian's voice ; and intensification was mainly realized through hyperbole and metaphor, whereas mitigation was predominantly achieved through the use of modal verbs.

1.INTRODUCTION

Media representation is crucial to mass audiences' understanding of conflicts because meaning is not directly transmitted from event to audience but constructed via language. "Representation in this sense is not a neutral record of reality , it is the linguistic and discursive resources used to give meaning to events, actors and social practices" (Anita, 2005, p.90). The premise for the current research is that if war reporting makes meaning rather than simply reflecting it, then the language through which a conflict is reported cannot be seen as a transparent or ideologically neutral way of information. This constructive function becomes particularly significant in war reporting. Coverage of armed conflict is inherently selective, no outlet can provide a full and impartial account of a war, so journalists inevitably privilege some events, actors and perspectives over others constrained by space, time and institutional position (Baker et al., 2013; Topkev , 2014). This selection is mediated by the hierarchies of

professionalised newsrooms and the coverage produced is not just abbreviated but shaped into discourse that may legitimate some actors' claims and marginalising others.

War reporting therefore functions as an argumentative, ideologically inflected genre rather than a neutral chronicle (Richardson, 2007). Because war reporting operates discursively and ideologically, it is well suited to discourse-analytic investigation; the same conflict can be constructed through markedly different linguistic choices depending on an outlet's institutional position with direct consequences for how political actors, victims and acts of violence are perceived. Different institutional positions produce different incentives for the choice of lexicon, nomination and predication strategies and intensification and mitigation devices, shaping how the legitimacy, morality and consequences of military action in Gaza are represented to audiences (Baker et al., 2013).

A substantial body of research already addresses the war on Gaza (see 2.8), some studies compare the representation of the humanitarian crisis in CNN and Al Jazeera English; others examine news values in BBC and Al Jazeera's coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict following 7 October 2023; and further work addresses the online reporting of the conflict during the 2023 escalation. However, this literature is predominantly quantitative relies on content analysis rather than sustained discourse analysis, treats textual and visual modalities separately rather than synthesising them, and does not systematically compare the verbal strategies used by CNN across the same period of conflict. In particular, little attention has been paid to the specific discursive strategies, nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation through which these two outlets construct competing narratives of the Gaza war.

Without close discourse-analytic attention to these strategies, the linguistic mechanisms through which CNN constructs competing political narratives of the same conflict, and thereby shape public understanding of its legitimacy and consequences remain unexamined. Existing studies can describe that the two outlets report the war differently, but they cannot explain how specific linguistic choices construct those differences, nor why each outlet's discourse takes the ideological shape that it does.

To address this gap, the present study adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). DHA is particularly suited to this problem because it situates discursive strategies within their historical, social and political context rather than treating them in isolation. Given that the divergent representations of the war on Gaza in CNN stem from different institutional and geopolitical positions.

2. An overview of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis (henceforth DA) examines the language in use. It is the examination of the meanings of language utilised in certain settings, the examination of language beyond the phrase level, concentrating on how sentences interconnect to create meaning, coherence, and achieve aims. Nonetheless, a solitary sentence or utterance can be analysed as a form of “communication” or “action,” rather than only as a syntactic structure whose “literal meaning” derives from grammatical conventions. Linguists differentiate between two sorts of meaning, a distinction pertinent to DA. They differentiate between utterance-type meaning and utterance-token meaning (Levinson, 2000). Every word, phrase, or structure possesses a general spectrum of potential meanings, referred to as its “meaning range.” This indicates its utterance-type significance. Nevertheless, words and phrases acquire far more precise meanings within their actual settings of usage. These are utterance-token meanings, also referred to as “situated meanings” (Handford & Gee, 2012).

DA could perform one or both of two functions (see figure 1): one pertaining to broad meaning of utterance types and the other concerning contextual meaning. One task is referred to as the utterance-type meaning task. This task entails examining the relationships between form and function in language at the level of utterance-type meanings (generic meanings). “Form” refers to elements like as morphemes, words, phrases, or other syntactic structures (e.g., the subject position inside a sentence). “Function” refers to the significance or communication intent that a form conveys. The additional task pertains to what can be referred to as the utterance-token meaning or situated meaning task, it examines the relationships between form and function in language at the level of utterance-token meanings by identifying the context-specific meanings of forms utilised in particular situations. DA is a subdivision of linguistics and a contribution to the social sciences. Due to its importance in various social and cultural contexts. The basic significance of DA is in its capacity to render the world intelligible across particular modes of speaking and writing, while excluding others (Handford & Gee, 2012).

2.1

Media

Discourse

O'Keeffe (2006) admits that media discourse encompasses the entirety of how reality is portrayed in both broadcast and print media, ranging from television to newspapers. Media interactions are fundamentally discussions perceived by others, and the concept of engaging in an overheard conversation is not a novel event in a descriptive context. During a television or radio interaction between a presenter and an interviewee or guest, both parties are aware that their conversation is being broadcast to an audience. Consequently, they engage in a distinct form of dialogue compared to two individuals conversing on a train amidst others who cannot evade overhearing their exchange. The former necessitates audience inclusion and engagement, while the latter frequently entails exclusion (e.g., through guarded or coded references) and detachment (e.g., absence of eye contact and lack of inclusive references). Discourse can be either written or oral. Media discourse encompasses both textual content, such as news articles, and the methodologies involved in its creation and production. Fairclough (2001,p.40) characterises media discourse as a "one-sided" phenomenon with a distinct separation between producers and interpreters. A significant role of media discourse is to facilitate communication between two domains: the public and the private, regarding the temporal context of media properties. Furthermore, Bell (1995) indicates that communicative event involves different actors, including reporters and editors, who deliver messages to the audience, which serves as the recipients, and notably, third parties representing diverse segments and influences within the public sphere. Producers of media discourse create their envisioned audiences for optimal subjects. They depict the war and justify their participation in it. Events are reported and understood by various individuals, including reporters, editors, and institutions. The interpretation of news consists of the opinions, reasoning, and aspirations of the individuals who report and disseminate it.

2.2

Features

of

Media

Language

A prominent linguistic feature in media is the employment of catchphrases and attention-grabbing headlines. Media outlets frequently use succinct, controversial, emotionally charged language to engage the audience and stimulate interest. These headlines act as an entry point to the material provided, influencing the readers' initial view and contextualisation of the topic. The language of media is frequently defined by its tone and slant. Journalists and writers choose precise words, adverbs, and adjectives to create a tone that corresponds with their intended message or impact. The choice of positive or negative language could affect readers' perceptions of events, personalities, and concepts, thereby influencing the public opinion (Maqsdud, 2024). Moreover, media organisations may possess intrinsic biases affected by the political affiliations, ownership structures, and audience. This bias may be evident in the choice of sources, the framing of narratives, and the employment of charged language. Sensationalism and emotive appeals are often employed in the discourse of in media to receive intense responses from the audience. This is evident in news coverage, when emotive language, striking images, and personal narratives are employed to enhance emotional connection. Media outlets could evoke emotions to generate a sense of urgency or significance about a particular subject, hence sustaining audience engagement (Maqsdud, 2024).

2.3 CNN: Overview and Organization

CNN news channel was established in 1980 by media tycoon Ted Turner. Time Warner subsequently acquired Turner Broadcasting System, which was also settled by Ted Turner. Turner recognised a chance to launch a 24-hour cable news channel through a period when cable television was rising and quickly the technology grown. Since that time, it has evolved into one of the most common cable networks in the America . The network attempts to deliver comprehensive representation of news and thorough analysis of critical issues and events. CNN has spreaded and highly skilled cadre of journalists, anchors, and reporters stationed in bureaus globally(Musonera, 2025)

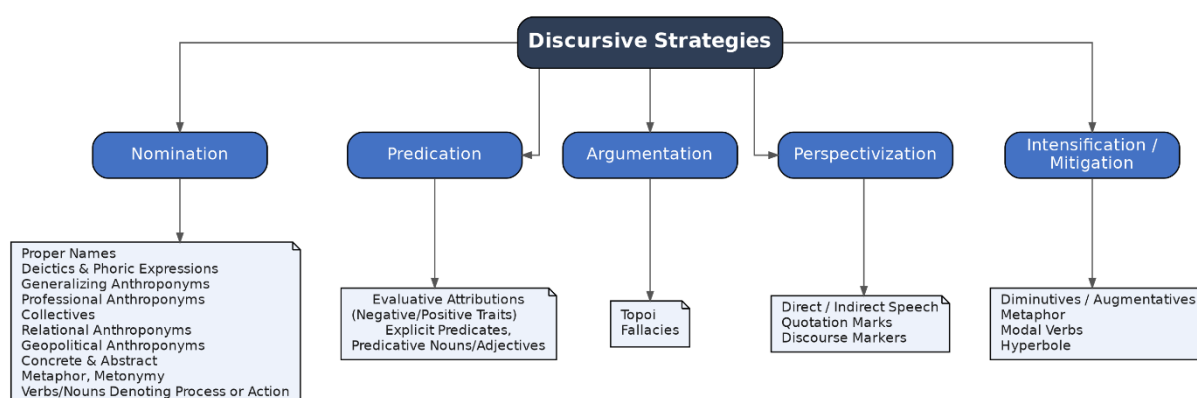
CNN is identified for its extensive coverage of many issues, encompassing politics, foreign relations, commerce, and technology. CNN network has a complete online presence, comprising a website and mobile applications. The network's internet platform supplies real-time news updates, along with on-demand access to past programming and new data. In recent years, CNN has challenged heightened rivalry from Fox News, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, and the BBC. CNN has remained a strong market position owing to its esteemed reputation for high-quality journalism and comprehensive coverage of break news (Musonera, 2025).

CNN aims to convey trustworthy news coverage to audience, as well as it seeks to disseminate news and information via various platforms and methods. CNN aims to enhance its audience reach and engagement in order to broaden its audience and maintain current viewers by providing superior news coverage, inventive programming, and captivating interactive elements. The limitations of CNN encompass regulatory restrictions, financial restraints, and the necessity to uphold editorial independence and fairness. CNN network produces revenue from advertising and cable subscription fees. The management

philosophy of CNN concentrating on delivering reliable, precise information and news coverage when maintaining the utmost standards of journalistic integrity and objectivity. The President of CNN Worldwide, responsible for overseeing the entire firm and establishing its strategic direction, occupies the highest position in the organisational hierarchy (Musonera, 2025).

3. THE MODEL OF ANALYSIS

An Adapted Model of Reisigl and Wodak



4. CORPUS DESCRIPTION

The corpus consists of 14 news reports. It is divided as 14 news reports from CNN .They are news reports only written in English language retrieved from official media website of CNN. The selected reports cover the period from (7 October 2023 to May 2024) which marked the beginning of the war until the assault on Rafah and khan Younis, so the total period is(222) days .

5.DATA ANALYSIS

CNN uses proper names by naming a specific person (Benjamin Netanyahu) to tie actions and statements directly to an identifiable agent, making them personally , not just institutionally or nationally responsible. This is often used to personalize conflict: framing a war as driven by one leader's decisions rather than a whole nation's. Proper names are used because war and politics relying on identifiable figures to rally emotion around , audiences respond more strongly to a named villain (Hamas) or named hero (Benjamin Netanyahu) than an abstract collective (e. g., the militants or government). Proper names give speeches a face for target praise or hostility . The use of proper noun of the IDF spokesperson "Daniel Haggard" in representing how Israeli troops and tanks raid Gaza's Al-Shifa Hospital : However, IDF spokesperson Daniel Haggard said later, in his daily briefing Wednesday, that the military operation at the hospital was "still underway and Will take time."

"It's a complicated area, which still has many people. We need to conduct (it) in the right pace," he said. By naming the IDF spokesperson by his institutional role is to tie Haggard's utterance directly to a specific organizational authority (the Israeli defense ministry), marking his speech as an official, institutional voice, not a private opinion. The addition of the proper name here is to give that institutional voice a human face and individual accountability, naming him individuates the source, which in journalistic convention typically signals credibility, transparency, and traceability of the quote. The utilization of proper name 'Atef Al-Kahlout' in reporting how Israeli strikes targeting Hamas commanders and the militant group's infrastructure in the densely populated Jabalya refugee camp in northern Gaza :

CNN coverage refers to individual leaders using the same singular third-person pronoun structure ("he") for both Netanyahu and Abu Obieda , without varying tone, distance or formality between them, this shows the deictic system treating both leaders as equally distanced third parties , i.e., neither is drawn closer to the reporting "center" (implied "we") nor pushed further away than the other. The Israeli leader and Hamas leader position each leader identically, then referred to anaphorically with "he." CNN employs the pronoun 'they' as in "Hamas's militant wing, Al- Qassam Brigades, said in a statement Monday that they

were fighting in the western Khan Younis area, killing a number of Israeli soldiers with anti-personnel missiles, 'they' is inherently a distancing device, "they" pushes referents outside speech event, into the position of object of discussion rather than interlocutor. This is the basic grammatical mechanism of distance.

Generalizing anthroponyms are utilized in the coverage of CNN, terms like soldiers, civilians, responders, , leaders, commanders, attackers, terrorists, rescuers, they identify people by collective social role and function rather than by their individual name, placing each actor within a category rather than as a distinct person. Anthroponyms like 'soldiers, forces, commanders' to frame the social actors as agents of a legitimate state, referring to Israeli forces or soldiers , naturalizes the military action as institutional and rule-governed, while generalizing anthroponyms like 'civilians, responders, rescuers, staff' constructing a sympathetic collective, by focusing on service rather than combatant status in the sense that their use humanizes suffering in general terms while still withholding individual identity — audiences feel empathy toward a category not a named person. While the adversarial term 'terrorists', in which they are the most evaluatively loaded, they carry delegitimation and moral evaluation, by framing the social actors as inherently illegitimate.

The professional anthroponyms like chief, president are used to emphasize the political authority , to make the statements more official and legitimate and to show that the social actors are presented not only as individuals but they are representative of institutions, governments and organizations. For instance, "UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's." the title in this statement links individual to the United Nations, his statement gains international and diplomatic authority and formality. Thus, the professional anthroponyms increase formality, to be more factual, objective and effective.

By dehumanizing Hamas through collectives by using extreme form of out-group, by describing them like slaves, fighters, criminals, and terrorists, replacing complex collective identities with reductive moral-legal categories. These collective anthroponyms perform a crucial discursive operation, they pre-judge through naming, by categorizing (Hamas fighters) as "war criminals" before any tribunal has ruled, the political speech acts as a form of anticipatory juridical discourse , constructing the legal identity of the out-group in advance of formal legal proceedings.

Relational anthroponyms are employed to help the speakers to construct collective identities such as “us” versus “them.” They categorize individuals into groups and strengthen social belonging, solidarity, or exclusion. The social actors use relational anthroponyms to present groups positively or negatively. For example, referring to Hamas as fighters or terrorists reflects ideological positioning and influences audience perception. They are used to justify political actions or condemn opponents. By identifying people through relationships or roles to legitimize authority, policies and military actions (of Israeli army) while delegitimizing others ' Hamas's armed wing, Al-Qassam brigades'.

Geopolitical anthroponyms are used by referring to people through geographical, national, and state related names, for example : Qatar, Gaza, Israel, etc., they are used to present countries as one voice, representing actors rather than physical locations only like Washington, UN, the Arab World.

The geopolitical anthroponym ' Israel' stands for government, the internal political differences are hidden, the state appears unified and authoritative. The White House represents unified American government or USA administration. The ' Arab world' is used as geopolitical anthroponymy to construct solidarity and reinforce political identities and to emphasize the national identity. Geopolitical anthroponyms are used to help speakers unify audiences around shared political or cultural belonging .By emphasizing national or geopolitical belonging, speakers strengthen solidarity ,fear or resistance among audiences. The geopolitical anthroponyms function to reveal how political discourse constructs national identities, power relations, and ideological divisions through nomination strategies embedded in historical and social contexts.

In war discourse, speakers strategically choose concrete lexical items to portray their own side positively while representing the opposite side negatively, for example in description of Hamas as terrorists, aggressors, they wanted to depict them to out - group as they are dangerous, violent, or illegitimate while the Israeli militants are referring to them as soldiers for defending them. As a result, concrete nominations help speakers to legitimize their own actions, justify military responses and gain public support.

Abstract nomination employs to show how actors, actions and events get labeled through general, institutional, vague, or impersonal terms like "the deal," "the agreement ,"safety ," operation," security", "brutality" "freedom ." Because these expressions don't name who is actually carrying out an action, accountability becomes blurred, and the event is made to sound technical or procedural rather than the result of a deliberate choice by identifiable person.

CNN news, the social actors and groups perceived positive and negative qualities and evaluation through adjectives, and evaluative expressions to legitimise and delegitimise the social actors. The negative adjective is used, for example in 'terrorist' to exclude the social actors from the moral considerations (to delegitimise, and criminalise Hamas fighters linking them to violence, illegitimacy and illegality) and emotionally influence the audience. But attributing the positive predication to Israeli soldiers and militants as they are legitimate

The CNN report in reporting the event of 7 October the participants express the claim of sudden attack from the Israeli point of view and describing Hamas attack as brutal, and attributing 'Hamas fighter' as terrorists they kill and murder people, shoot victims, firing machine guns, and describing the location of the attack as a site of the massacre. In CNN news, the attack on Jabalia refugee camp is being described as :

"Israeli strikes targeting Hamas commanders and the militant group's infrastructure in the densely populated Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza have left catastrophic damage and killed a large number of people, according to eyewitnesses and medics in the enclave.

In this statement, argumentation is constructed through the topoi of consequences by linking Israeli strikes with catastrophic humanitarian outcomes. The reference to a densely populated refugee camp strengthens the topoi of danger, while eyewitnesses and medics function as legitimizing sources through the topoi of authority. Together, these argumentative strategies guide readers toward a critical evaluation of the military action. The arguments are rational because the social actors in the reports of the two channels are describing the attack of Jabalia refugee camp as unfairly attack by providing evidences and arguments but aims justify means, there is no threatening for disagreement. There is criticism and justification with evidence to the events. The social actors are allowed to question and criticize the arguments, the claims are questionable and ask for clarification.

In the selected data of CNN, perspectivization is also realized through using various linguistic devices like metaphor, for example:

"Add burden on the troops... "

The perspectivization is realized through the way the situation is viewed from the perspective of the military rather than from other affected groups. The expression "burden" frames the situation as a difficulty or pressure experienced by the troops. This lexical choice positions the audience to interpret the event through a military-centered perspective. Instead of focusing on civilians, destruction or political consequences, the statement foregrounds the operational and emotional challenges faced by soldiers. Thus, the perspective constructed to gain sympathetic toward the military, it is concerned with military hardship and responsibility, and it is oriented toward institutional or strategic difficulties.

Intensification is realized linguistically by using intensifying adverbs, for example :

"Israel has been highly reluctant to allow fuel into Gaza", the adverb 'highly' functions as an intensifier, because it modifies the adjective 'reluctant' and strengthens its degree by putting emphasis on reluctance that attributed to Israel to express the seriousness and persistence of the refusal to allow fuel into Gaza. Thus, this strategy is used to strengthen the argument force.

In the discourses of CNN news reports , the speakers generally employ mitigation strategy alongside intensification to reduce, soften and weaken the force of the statements by using linguistic devices as mitigation markers like 'may, would, but, etc..'. mitigation strategy is essential in the selected data because the discourses are strategic, speakers manage responsibility and credibility by controlling how strong or direct their claims appear. The social actors uses mitigation markers to downplay certainty and reduce the emotional force and severity of the impact of their statements, for example:

" there may be as many as 100,000 displaced people in United Nations shelters. ."

The modal verb "may" mitigates the numerical claim by expressing possibility rather than certainty. Instead of presenting the figure as definite, the speaker introduces caution and uncertainty, by using "may" reduces the speaker's epistemic commitment to the exact number, mitigation is utilized to reduce the certainty and responsibility of the claim, and mitigation is a strategy that is used to maintain journalistic objectivity.

6.CONCLUSIONS

The present study concludes that:

1.The social actors in the representation of the war on CNN news reports are referred to linguistically through the linguistic devices of nomination strategies by using proper names, deictic expressions, relational anthroponyms, geopolitical anthroponyms, professional anthroponyms, collectives, abstract and concrete nouns. The proper names are used to make the speech having more profound discursive decision, by personalizing responsibility into individuals rather than distributing it across a states or people. Both Al-Jazeera and CNN consistently utilize "he" for both Netanyahu and Abu Obeida, placing both leaders at equal third-person distance from the reporting center with no side elevated or personalized over the other, balancing "he/she" for Israeli and Palestinian leaders and authorities, but occasionally changes to the collective "they" for Gazans (e.g., evacuees), a deictic selection that depersonalizes them as an undifferentiated group rather than naming them individually.

Meanwhile, generalizing anthroponyms are employed to maximize pathos by invoking the most vulnerable human categories. The social actors are referred to by using professional anthroponyms to identify people through their professions and institutional roles or social functions rather than simply by their personal names (e. g., US President Joe Biden). The collective anthroponyms are used to represent the social actors as a one single unit (e.g., Palestinians, the Israelis, the hostages, the refugees, the worshipers, etc.,). relational anthroponyms are used to show social and political connections by connecting individuals to larger groups or institutions to increase authority. Abstract and concrete nominations are used to refer to the degree of specificity used when naming the social actors, institutions, political phenomena and events.

2.The social actor in the selected data are attributed by using predication strategies as (homeless, militant, terrorists, fighters, Islamist etc,) positively and negatively. These descriptions are ideologically significant Since they shape the public perception. The predications are realised by the use of adjectives, appositions, to construct positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. By connecting the linguistic choices to historical and political contexts, for instance, in attributing Hamas as 'terrorists' for delegitimising them, whereby attributing Israeli militants 'soldiers' for legitimatise them. Consequently, such predications reflects ideology and power relations.

3.The argumentation in the twenty eight news reports under the study represent the war on Gaza reasonably because there are freedom of arguing in the sense that social actors are free to present their opinions and claims. The argumentative principle scheme which refers to the idea that a claim can only be considered properly defended when the social actor uses suitable, rational, reasonable, and logical accepted patterns of reasoning that connect an argument to a conclusion, the participants use a appropriate argumentation schemes correctly by choosing a type of reasoning that fit the issue being discussed, they use it logically in which the premises support the conclusions.

4.Perspectivization therefore reflects how discourse positions actors, events, and audiences from particular perspectives .The social actors positions their perspectives by using various linguistic devices, for instance, the use of deixis, metaphor, quotations, direct and indirect speeches. The perspectivization is achieved by guiding the audience to interpret the events from the military and victim's emotional standpoint .

5. Intensification strategy is employed in the selected data to amplify meaning, reinforce ideological positions, increase persuasive impact, heighten emotional response and strengthen evaluation. Intensification reveals how long is used to construct social realities, legitimatising actions and shape public perception of political and historical events. It is realised through the use of adjectives, adverbs, hyperbole, etc. Mitigation is employed to reduce certainty and present the events of conditional or projected rather than factual, by using modal verbs like 'may' to express possibility not certainty and open outcome. The speakers is not fully asserting truth, but only suggesting a potential scenario to avoid strong claims. It is used to reduce speaker's epistemic commitment and soften the assertiveness of the claim, thereby, by constructing the statement as tentative and non-definitive .

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