PRESUPPOSITIONS IN THE SPEECH BY THE U.S. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AT THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE 2022: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

TIỀN GIẢ ĐỊNH TRONG BÀI PHÁT BIỂU CỦA BỘ TRƯỞNG BỘ QUỐC PHÒNG MỸ TẠI ĐỐI THOẠI SHANGRI-LA NĂM 2022: PHÂN TÍCH DIỄN NGÔN PHẢN BIỆN

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzed the application of presuppositions in disclosing the information in the speech by the U.S. Secretary of Defense at the Shangri-la Dialogue 2022 through the lenses of Critical Discourse Analysis. With keen observation of the linguistic choices, the research analyzed how presuppositions contribute to revealing the hidden meaning in constructing strategic narratives. The findings revealed that presuppositions played a critical role in supporting ideological positions, positioning the U.S. and its allies as champions of stability, international law, and cooperation, while groups against them are presented in a subtle manner as being against such ideals. In this analysis, the research points out the role of presuppositions in language as a means to limit perceptions and justify policy positions in international security discourse.

Keywords: *U.S. Secretary of Defense, Shangri-la Dialogue, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, International Relations, Presupposition,*

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu này phân tích vai trò của tiền giả định trong việc hình thành diễn ngôn của Bộ trưởng Quốc phòng Hoa Kỳ tại Đối thoại Shangri-la 2022 dưới góc nhìn của Phân tích Diễn ngôn Phản biện. Thông qua việc phân tích cách sử dụng ngôn ngữ, nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng những ý nghĩa tiềm ẩn trong bài phát biểu có thể được nhận diện qua tiền giả định. Kết quả cho thấy tiền giả định đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc củng cố lập trường ý thức hệ, khẳng định vị thế của Hoa Kỳ và các đồng minh như những bên thúc đẩy ổn định, luật pháp quốc tế và hợp tác, đồng thời ngầm mô tả các đối thủ như những thách thức đối với các giá trị này. Nghiên cứu cũng làm nổi bật cách tiền giả định trong diễn ngôn có thể định hướng nhận thức và hợp thức hóa lập trường chính sách trong bối cảnh an ninh quốc tế.

Từ khóa: *Bộ trưởng Bộ Quốc phòng Mỹ, đối thoại Shangri-la, phân tích diễn ngôn phản biện, ý thức hệ, quan hệ quốc tế, tiền giả định.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary complex geopolitical environment, political discourse is regarded as a powerful tool of ideology formation, policy legitimation, and backing for power. The Asia-Pacific area, where territorial claims, military alliances, and competitive strategies are ubiquitous, remains a main platform for international competition [1]. As tensions rise, world powers, particularly the United States and China, employ discursive strategies to project power, delineate allies and enemies, and legitimize their actions [2]. But beyond outright declaration, political speeches tend to invest implicit meaning through linguistic devices like presuppositions, which frame things subtly and, in turn, influence public opinion [3].

A significant platform for such discourse is the Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual security forum where defence leaders discuss regional and global security concerns. The U.S. Secretary of Defense's speeches at this forum not only outline military strategies but also construct ideological narratives. While much attention is given to the explicit policy

messages in these speeches, the implicit assumptions, and presuppositions, embedded within them remain underexplored [3]. By revealing the hidden meanings, these presuppositions play a crucial role in shedding light on ideology and potential policy.

Keeping that in mind, this study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine presuppositions in the U.S. Secretary of Defense's address at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2022, and how language is strategically utilized to construct power relations and legitimize security positions. Theoretically, this article contributes to applied linguistics, underlying the role of presuppositions in unveiling ideology from CDA's perspective. Practically, this study is beneficial for scholars, policymakers, and analysts in gaining insights into the ideology embedded or dispersed in Defense leaders' speeches.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis: Socio-Cognitive Approach

2.1.1. Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough [4] argues that discourse, whether written or spoken, is shaped by social contexts and simultaneously shapes those contexts, reflecting and influencing social structures and practices. As language functions as a social semiotic, it is systematically impacted by societal factors, which it, in turn, influences to shape, sustain, or alter social relationships [5]. CDA, therefore, serves as an approach that investigates the intricate links between linguistic expression and social variables, specifically highlighting power dynamics within discourse. Through CDA, the underlying power relation ideologies can be identified and analyzed. Fairclough [4] considers CDA as a tool for analyzing the causal and determined nature of relationships between discursive practice and broader social and cultural structures, and how power relations are ideologically invested in discourse. Expanding on Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak, and Meyer describe CDA as analyzing how social power, dominance, and inequality are expressed and resisted in discourse [6].

From these points of view, it can be stated that *CDA is an approach to language analysis encompassing the interdependence of language, power, and ideology. With thorough description, explanation and critique, CDA aims to defamiliarize the "naturalized" language used in the discourse, then reveal the power or struggles over power as well as ideologies hidden.*

2.1.2. Van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Analysis: Socio-Cognitive Approach

According to van Dijk [6], ideologies are pivotal in shaping societies and guiding human behavior. As complex belief systems, ideologies are deeply enmeshed in discourse, realizing, being performed, internalized, and recreated through language.

In his model, van Dijk [6] suggests a scheme that reveals the traces of ideologies in discourse: the Ideological Schema, illustrating how groups cumulatively construct a self-concept through their shared experience in society.

Ideologies are evident in discourse through various types of meanings [6]. In his framework, van Dijk [6] introduces a scheme that reveals the traces of ideologies in discourse: the Ideological Schema, illustrating how groups cumulatively construct a self-concept through their shared experience in society. Within various schema categories, *Group Relations* takes a central position for most ideologies, encompassing often positive presentation of oneself and negative presentation of others in discourse. According to this category, the Ideological Square (Table 1) serves as a central tool for regulating ideological debate through differentiation between in-groups and out-groups [6]. This model employs four interrelated meta-strategies: *highlighting positive aspects of our group, emphasizing negative aspects of their group, downplaying negative aspects of our group*, and *downplaying positive aspects of their group*.

Table 1. The Ideological Square [6]

Emphasize *Our* good things	Emphasize *Their* bad things
De-emphasize *Our* bad things	De-emphasize *Their* good things

These meta-strategies can be employed at various levels of discourse, including sound and visual structures, syntax, lexicon, semantics, pragmatics, rhetoric, and organizational structures [6].

2.2. An Overview of Presuppositions

2.2.1. The Notion of Presupposition

Presupposition has been explored from multiple angles, each contributing to a richer understanding of how presuppositions operate in language.

Yule [7] and Levinson [8] emphasize shared knowledge between speaker and listener as central to presupposition. Yule [7] defines it as an assumption based on the speaker's intention, dependent on mutual understanding in order to maintain discourse coherence.

Levinson [8] adds that presuppositions manage the flow of information within discourse, further emphasizing their fluidity. Besides, Van Dijk [9] presents presuppositions in a socio-cognitive model, where they are closely connected with the knowledge structures of a discourse. In his framework, presuppositions reflect shared ideologies and knowledge, which speakers use strategically to invoke ideas that the audience is expected to know or accept.

For the purposes of this article, the working definition of presupposition will be defined as *implicit assumptions made by the speaker regarding shared knowledge or common ground with the audience, essential for guiding discourse and shaping communicative interaction.*

2.2.2. Identification of Presupposition

This section aims to thoroughly explore the identification of presuppositions by employing established theoretical frameworks, specifically Levinson's presupposition triggers.

According to Levinson [8], linguistic expressions and constructions carrying presuppositions are called *presupposition triggers*. These triggers are tied to specific linguistic structures and can be found across various levels of language, like grammar or surface structure [3, 7, 8].

The subsequent list presents an overview of the diverse types of presupposition triggers as identified by Levinson, elucidating the mechanisms through which these linguistic elements operate within discourse.

(1) DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS encompass proper names, possessives, *"this"*- and *"that"*-clauses, *wh-phrases*, and quantificational noun phrases that provide detailed referential descriptions, often presupposing not only the existence but potentially also the uniqueness of the referent. To illustrate, the *sentence "The treaty is essential for maintaining regional stability"* presupposes that a *specific treaty* exists.

(2) FACTIVE VERBS are verbs that inherently presuppose the truth of their propositional complements. Verbs such as *"know", "realize", "regret",* and *"discover"* all imply that the statement within their complement is a factual one. Thus, when one states, *"The president knows that the economy is slowing down"*, it is presupposed that the economy is, indeed, experiencing a downturn.

(3) IMPLICATIVE VERBS are used to presume that something has occurred, such as a particular action or event. An example would be, *"The senator was able to pass the bill after weeks of negotiation",* which presupposes the senator tried and managed to pass the bill with a presumed effort and success.

(4) CHANGE OF STATE VERBS indicates a shift from one state to another, thereby presupposing that a prior, different state existed. As an example, *"The country has stopped importing crude oil"* implies that the country previously engaged in importing crude oil.

(5) ITERATIVES presuppose that an action or event has occurred previously. Thus, in *"The prime minister visited the border region again"*, it is implied that the prime minister had visited the border region on at least one previous occasion.

(6) VERBS OF JUDGING presuppose a certain judgment or evaluation regarding a particular situation. Consider *"The opposition blamed the government for the economic crisis"*, which implies that an economic crisis exists and that it is viewed as a governmental failure.

(7) TEMPORAL CLAUSES are used to presuppose the timing of events, which shows that some events have taken place. For instance, *"After the bill was passed, protests broke out throughout the city"* implies that the passing of the bill occurred prior to the subsequent protests.

(8) CLEFT SENTENCES are used to highlight certain parts within a sentence, while at the same time presupposing some background context. A good example is, *"It was the foreign minister who negotiated the peace deal"*, which presupposes that it was actually someone who negotiated the peace deal, highlighting the foreign minister's involvement.

(9) IMPLICIT CLEFTS with Stressed Constituents also involve some contextual presupposition, often in order to highlight contrasting factors. So *"THE prime minister made the announcement, not the defence minister"* presupposes that there had been an announcement, with stress on the identity of the announcer.

(10) COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS serve to indicate that more than one entity is being compared, with the implication that these entities existed previously. For example, *"This year's election turnout was higher than in previous years"* implies that there have been elections with varying rates of turnout in previous years.

(11) NON-RESTRICTIVE RELATIVE CLAUSES add information, provided that the described entity exists. To provide an example, *"The senator, who has held office for ten years, announced his retirement"* implies that the senator has held office for a decade.

(12) COUNTERFACTUAL CONDITIONALS presuppose that the described never took place. For instance, *"If the government had acted in time, the crisis could have been avoided" with* the assumption that the government failed to act in time and the crisis occurred.

(13) QUESTIONS have a tendency to assume the truth of some background facts and present them as commonly accepted or presumed. In *"Has the new policy been implemented?",* it is assumed that there is, in fact, a new policy at issue.

2.2.3. Presupposition Under the Light of Critical Discourse Analysis

Presuppositions are crucial in CDA as they introduce ideological meaning into discourse, build public perception, and maintain overt argumentation to a bare minimum. Thoyyibah [10] defines that presuppositions are unstated propositions assumed as true by the audience, thereby effective in building understanding. Fairclough [11] indicates how presuppositions underpin and normalize power relations through the introduction of dominant ideologies as unchallenged truths, thereby limiting other possibilities. Similarly, Fairclough and Fairclough [12] emphasize that presuppositions in political and policy discourse reinforce hierarchical structures, making them appear natural and unquestionable, which further complicates critical engagement and reproduces social inequalities. van Dijk [9] expands on this by illustrating how presuppositions reinforce ideologies through implicit assumptions that shape public perceptions [17]. Particularly in political speeches, presuppositions function by assuming shared knowledge between speaker and audience, presenting ideological viewpoints as established facts that require no justification. Central to van Dijk's Particularly in political speeches, presuppositions function by assuming shared knowledge between speaker and audience, projecting ideological positions as fact that do not require evidence. Central to van Dijk's [13] framework is the K-device, which outlines how speakers creatively deploy audience knowledge to trigger presuppositions, hence ideologically reinforcing messages in an insidious way. Presuppositions are thus a powerful discursive tool in political discourse, allowing hegemonic groups to frame narratives while seemingly being neutral.

2.3. Overview of Related Studies

Previous studies have confirmed the significance of presuppositions in shaping discourse, yet there are gaps in their ideological impacts, particularly in defense and political contexts. Ijabah and Argina [14] highlight presuppositions' influence on consumer behavior in advertising but do not extend their analysis to broader ideological implications. Meanwhile, Phạm Hiển and Vũ Xuân Trường's [15] study on ideological differences between Chinese and U.S. media provides a foundation for examining discourse in international relations, particularly through van Dijk's ideological square. While their research identifies ideological positions in media, it does not examine presuppositions as a main mechanism in framing such biases. Similarly, Guswita and Widodo [16] quantify presuppositions in US news but fail to report on their ideological functions. Polyzou [17] offers a critical discourse approach, but without empirical use, a potential area of research employing her model to empirical political speeches. Tu [18] and Lathar et al. [19] examine presuppositions in political rhetoric, but their focus on individual actors, such as Pompeo and Biden, limits the external validity of their findings. This article fills these gaps by investigating presuppositions in a range of speeches made by U.S. Secretaries of Defense systematically and how they underpin geopolitics ideologies and sustain power dynamics within defence discourse.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1. Materials

3.1.1. Data Sources

The main data for the study consists of both the video recording and the official transcript of the U.S. Secretary of Defense's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2022. To keep these materials credible, they were obtained directly from authenticated and reliable sources, such as official government publications and quality news agencies. This method ensures that the data objectively represents the speech content and supports the purposes of the study.

For purposes of maintaining authenticity and enabling in-depth linguistic and discourse analysis, only the official speech read by the U.S. Secretary of Defense at the 2022 Dialogue is presented here. A full and accurate transcript is required to enable in-depth analysis for this research.

3.1.2. Data Background

a) Political Speeches

Political discourse presents an advanced method of analyzing speeches as basic instruments of political communication. Scholars contend that speeches, especially those delivered by leaders, play vital roles in

persuasion, argumentation, and demonstration of power. Fairclough and Fairclough [12] are of the opinion that practical argumentation is central to political discourse. In speeches, leaders not only advise specific courses of action but also authorize these actions, in keeping with Aristotle's understanding of deliberation, whereby leaders frame public decision-making through guided argument [12]. This is especially evident in national security debates, where leaders try to shape audience beliefs by presenting forceful arguments for or against specific policies. Van Dijk [20] also discusses the contextual nature of political speeches, highlighting how speeches reflect the immediate socio-political reality in which they are delivered. Horbenko [21] also highlights the persuasive nature of political discourse, illustrating how speeches appeal to audiences' values in an effort to construct consensus, rallying support through linguistic acrobatics.

b) Background to the Shangri-la Dialogue 2022

The Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual summit hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore, is a significant platform for addressing security issues in the Asia-Pacific. Since 2002, the dialogue has covered topics essential to regional stability, such as peace, dispute resolution, and cooperative international efforts [22].

The speech delivered by the U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2022 was situated within a period of considerable transformation in global security and defence frameworks. Since 2021, international relations among countries experienced significant transformation, characterized by notable geopolitical and military developments [23, 24]. This shift not only prompted concerns regarding regional stability but also necessitated coordinated efforts by neighboring countries and the international community to stabilize Afghanistan and mitigate the threat of transnational terrorism.

Meanwhile, in Europe, tensions heightened due to Russia's increased military operations in Ukraine, to which NATO responded with strategic deployments. Subsequently, Russia proposed an eight-point draft treaty, aimed ostensibly at easing these tensions; however, relations between Russia and Western Europe remain strained, invoking a renewed sense of Cold War-era caution. Simultaneously, the Indo-Pacific region witnessed a major strategic realignment through the establishment of AUKUS, a defense alliance between the U.S., U.K., and Australia, aimed at counterbalancing

China's influence in the area. This alliance, however, exacerbated tensions between the U.S. and China and also led to diplomatic friction with France, as Western nations recalibrated defense strategies in response to China's expanding geopolitical presence [24].

Moreover, U.S.-China relations intensified under President Biden's administration, marked by heightened rivalry over Taiwan, the South China Sea, and issues surrounding democracy and human rights. Despite occasional diplomatic overtures, this strategic competition persists, with the U.S. fortifying alliances while China remains assertive [23, 24].

3.1.3. Data Collection

The data collection process employs a systematic approach to uphold the integrity of the transcript. First, the video and transcript of the speech were accessed from dependable sources, such as the U.S. Department of Defense website, IISS publications, and reputable news outlets. Subsequently, the transcript's accuracy was verified by cross-referencing with multiple sources to ensure consistency and textual precision. To further validate the transcript's accuracy, an intensive reading was conducted, while the video served as an additional tool to confirm alignment with the original spoken delivery. This meticulous process establishes a reliable foundation for analysis, ensuring that the data used in this study is both authentic and dependable.

3.2. Methods

3.2.1. Analytical Framework

This study employed a two-layered analytical model to examine presuppositions and their ideological implications in discourse.

To begin with, Levinson's [8] theory was used to identify and categorize presuppositions in the text. The theory provided a systematic approach to identifying different kinds of presuppositions.

Second, van Dijk's [6] Socio-Cognitive Approach to CDA was employed to unravel the ideological dimensions of such presuppositions. The approach examined how language reflected and replicated inherent power relations, social beliefs, and institutional ideologies. Merging both models, the study unveiled implicit meaning and ideological position in the discourse analyzed.

3.2.2. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was carried out with the following steps:

Table 2. Distribution of presuppositions

Nation as Actor		Emphasize our good things	Emphasize their bad things	De-emphasize our bad things	De-emphasize their good things
Total		252	28	0	0
U.S.		124			
Indo-Pacific countries		30			
U.S.'s allies, partners and friends		36			
U.S. and others countries	U.S. and ASEAN	4			
	U.S. and Europe	1			
	U.S. and India	1			
	U.S. and NATO	1			
	U.S. and QUAD	1			
	U.S., Australia and Japan	2			
	U.S., Japan and the Republic of Korea	3			
	Indo-Pacific countries and U.S.	1			
	U.S. and audiences	9			
	U.S. and UK	1			
Groups of countries	Australia, Canada, Japan and Singapore	1			
	ASEAN and Pacific Islands	1			
	Australia, France, India and Japan	1			
	Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea	1			
	Indo-pacific and Southeast Asia	1			
	Japan, Republic of Korea	1			
	Singapore, Thailand, India, and Vietnam	1			
Taiwan		8			
India		6			
QUAD		7			
People's Republic of China		2	14		
Russia			8		
Myanmar			2		
North Korea			4		
Europe		4			
Singapore		2			
UK		3			
UN		2			

(1) The speech was broken down into individual sentences to facilitate detailed analysis.

(2) Each sentence was coded for presupposition based on a given theoretical framework, and the results were put into a negation test for doublechecking.

(3) The data was then categorized into different categories under van Dijk's ideological square.

(4) The findings were discussed.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Research Findings

With the consideration that this study is based on van Dijk's ideological schema and, more precisely, his group-relation categories, the analysis categorizes presuppositions according to the nations or groups of nations featured and the manner in which they are represented within the ideological square. By going down this path, the findings are capable of revealing how single countries or alliances are ideologically positioned in the speech.

Table 2 displays the presuppositions in the U.S. Secretary of Defense's speech during the Shangri-La Dialogue 2022, divided into particular countries and regions in an orderly manner. The categorization is for the purpose of unveiling the implied meanings of the

discourse, particularly on geopolitical matters and national representations. Curiously, the findings refer to a stark in-group/out-group dichotomy, with the United States, its allies, and Indo-Pacific nations being depicted as the known in-group, and Russia, North Korea, Myanmar, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) being characterized as a disruptive out-group. Interestingly, the data reveal no assumptions that downplay the in-group's negatives or understate the out-group's positives. This absence suggests a deliberate rhetorical strategy that validates a binary representation, always depicting the U.S. and its allies in positive terms and adversarial states only in negative terms.

4.1.1. Discursive representation of the in-groups in the speech

The United States

The speech delivered by the U.S. Secretary of Defense strategically employs presuppositions to uphold the ideological position of the United States as a dominant and benevolent player in global security, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

One dominant theme that may be discerned by such presuppositions is the confirmation of American leadership in articulating global and regional security, confirmed by presuppositions for strategy. A key instance is declaring that *"American statecraft is rooted in this reality"*, presupposing that the United States has a long-established and rightful place in global affairs. The DEFINITE NOUN phrase American statecraft supports this impression even further, which portrays U.S. leadership as natural and necessary. Additionally, this notion of strategic dominance is supported when the Secretary states, *"And so the Indo-Pacific is our centre of strategic gravity"*. The phrase our centre of strategic gravity presumes not just the significance of the region but also its inherent connection to U.S. interests. These choices of words quietly reinforce the sense that American action in the Indo-Pacific is warranted, inescapable, and unchallenged.

Further establishing the United States as a global leader, the presuppositions define most significant policy frameworks that guide its actions. The existence of *"this is central to the Biden administration's forthcoming National Security Strategy and to my department's National Defense Strategy"* is supported by DEFINITE NOUN frameworks such as National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, presupposing that these policies already exist as authoritative and pivotal to global stability. By framing

these tactics as a component of Indo-Pacific security, the speech legitimates the U.S. presence in the region as a structured, responsible, and stabilizing one. The image of U.S. alliances as ever-expanding even stronger supports the leadership narrative. The statement, *"our unparalleled network of alliances and partnerships has only grown stronger since the last time that I was in Singapore"*, uses the change-of-state verb grew stronger to take not only prior existence but also a progressive intensification of alliances. This formation places the United States as a secure and committed global leader whose influence persists rather than withdrawals.

Equally prominent is the stress laid on American leadership in defense and technological collaboration. The claim that *"we are working with our friends to link our defense industrial bases, to integrate our supply chains and even co-produce some key technologies"* is based on DEFINITE NOUN structures like our friends, our defense industrial bases, and our supply chains. These lexical choices presuppose that the United States is at the heart of global defense innovation and economic integration. By framing these as cooperative efforts, the speech covertly reinforces the presupposition that U.S. leadership is not only desirable but indispensable for progress. Furthermore, applying van Dijk's ideological square illustrates how the discourse strategically brings into focus the resilience and expansion of U.S. alliances and pushes other perspectives towards the periphery. The DEFINITE NOUN phrase *"our vision for a positive future for the region with our friends and partners"* not only presumes the presence of a U.S.-led strategic vision but also the presence of allied nations actively supporting it. Likewise, the trigger *"how our partnerships have grown even stronger"* indicates that U.S. alliances are not only long-standing but are also constantly evolving and strengthening. With these language choices, the address spins a strong narrative of leadership for America, painting the nation as an agent of stability that reunites allies with a shared purpose to secure regional and international security.

Another central rhetorical strategy in the speech is the strong emphasis on the enduring strength of U.S. alliances, highlighting its unwavering commitment to collective security. This approach aligns with Chan's [26] concept of re-categorization, which frames the United States as part of a broader, peace-focused in-group. Notably, the speech contains 22 presuppositions referring to allies, friends, and partners, constructing a cohesive narrative of

interconnected and mutually supportive relationships across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The repeated use of phrases such as *"our allies", "our friends",* and *"our partners"* reinforces the idea that the U.S. is not only deeply engaged in regional stability but also serves as a trusted and indispensable leader within this strategic network.

For instance, the claim that *"we will continue to do our part to strengthen security in the Indo-Pacific"* presupposes that the U.S. has already played a vital role in ensuring stability and that this commitment remains ongoing. The CHANGE-OF-STATE VERB *continue* and the DEFINITE NOUN phrase *our part* reinforce the idea of long-term engagement, portraying U.S. actions as both necessary and beneficial to the region. Moreover, the assertion that *"no region will do more to set the trajectory of the twenty-first century than this one"* highlights the Indo-Pacific's strategic significance. The phrase *the trajectory* presupposes a predetermined course for global developments, positioning the region as central to shaping the future. Consequently, this framing legitimizes U.S. strategic engagement by presenting it as an essential and inevitable priority.

Moreover, the strategic use of various DEFINITE NOUN phrases further strengthens the perception of U.S. commitment to its allies. Expressions like *"the journey that we have made together"* evoke a shared historical trajectory, reinforcing the notion of long-standing alliances built on mutual trust and cooperation. Likewise, references to *"our ASEAN partners"* and *"our enduring commitment"* normalize U.S. participation in multilateral initiatives, portraying its involvement as both natural and essential. Additionally, triggers such as *"our trilateral defense cooperation with Australia and Japan"* and *"our annual Balikatan exercise"* present these alliances as institutionalized and deeply embedded in regional security frameworks. By framing these relationships as established and enduring, the speech positions the United States as a key coordinating power, actively shaping regional defense strategies.

Beyond diplomatic engagement, the speech further underscores U.S. commitment through its extensive military collaborations. Mentions of joint exercises such as *"our Keen Sword exercises with Japan"* and *"our Talisman Sabre exercise with Australia"* presuppose a consistent and ongoing U.S. military presence in the region. By listing these long-standing operations alongside newer initiatives, the speech not only highlights the depth of existing alliances but also legitimizes the expansion of U.S. strategic influence.

4.1.2. Discursive representation of the out-groups in the speech

People's Republic of China

Through the strategic use of presuppositions, a critical depiction of the PRC is constructed. By embedding these presuppositions within DEFINITE NOUN phrases and FACTIVE VERBS, the speech presents the PRC's actions as established facts, shaping a negative narrative that portrays China as a coercive and destabilizing force in the Indo-Pacific.

A dominant theme in the data is the portrayal of PRC as a coercive actor whose territorial claims are both aggressive and expansionist. This is evident in the assertion, *"We will also stand by our friends as they uphold their rights, and that is especially important as the People's Republic of China (PRC) adopts a more coercive and aggressive approach to its territorial claims"*. The TEMPORAL CLAUSE *"as the PRC adopts a more coercive and aggressive approach"* presupposes that China is already engaging in such behavior, positioning its actions as an ongoing threat. This linguistic framing delegitimizes China's territorial claims while reinforcing the necessity of U.S. support for its allies. By presenting China's approach as inherently aggressive, the speech not only highlights the PRC's negative actions but also justifies U.S. involvement in maintaining regional stability.

The coercive characterization of China is further intensified through depictions of its actions as exploitative and unlawful. The statement, *"We are seeing PRC vessels plunder the region's provisions, operating illegally within the territorial waters of other Indo-Pacific countries"*, strategically employs the FACTIVE VERB *"seeing"*, which presupposes that these events have already occurred. This linguistic choice removes any ambiguity, presenting China's actions as indisputable facts rather than claims open to interpretation. Moreover, the phrase *"plunder the region's provisions"* casts China as a predatory force, suggesting not only aggression but also economic exploitation. Similarly, *"operating illegally"* frames these activities as clear violations of international law, reinforcing a narrative of China as a state that disregards legal norms and regional sovereignty. Through this portrayal, the speech strengthens the argument that U.S. intervention is not only warranted but necessary to counter China's coercive tactics and uphold regional security.

Beyond territorial disputes, the speech further highlights China's role as a destabilizing force by emphasizing its maritime activities and their impact on regional security. The

assertion, *"In the East China Sea, the PRC's expanding fishing fleet is sparking tensions with its neighbors",* strategically employs DEFINITE NOUN phrases that presuppose both the expansion of China's fishing fleet and the resultant tensions. By omitting any discussion of possible justifications or mitigating factors, the statement frames China's actions as the direct catalyst for instability. A similar pattern is evident in the South China Sea, where the speech claims, *"The PRC is using outposts on man-made islands bristling with advanced weaponry to advance its illegal maritime claims".* The trigger *"outposts on man-made islands bristling with advanced weaponry"* presupposes the existence of militarized installations, while the descriptor *"illegal maritime claims"* reinforces the idea that China's territorial assertions lack legitimacy. Through the deliberate use of DEFINITE NOUN phrases, the speech removes any ambiguity, cementing the image of China as a military aggressor actively contributing to regional instability.

Furthermore, the depiction of China as a growing security threat is further reinforced through references to military confrontations. The statement, *"Now, we have seen an alarming increase in a number of unsafe aerial intercepts and confrontations at sea by People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft and vessels",* employs the factive verb *"see"*, presupposing that these incidents have already occurred. Additionally, the phrase *"alarming increase"* injects a sense of urgency, suggesting not only that China's military activities are persistent but that they are rapidly escalating. This rhetorical framing presents China's actions as an emerging crisis, reinforcing the necessity of a sustained U.S. military presence in the region. By characterizing these confrontations as part of a broader pattern rather than isolated incidents, the speech legitimizes continued U.S. engagement, portraying it as essential to countering China's destabilizing influence and maintaining regional security.

While there are occasional mentions of *"open lines of communication with China's defense leaders"* and *"important conversations"* aimed at diplomatic engagement, these instances are minimal and largely overshadowed by the focus on China's confrontational actions. This limited emphasis on dialogue, therefore, reinforces the narrative that the PRC is primarily a disruptive force, with cautious engagement being the only recommended approach.

Russia

Despite its few instances in the data, Russia appears as an aggressor and unlawful actor.

First, the speech strategically constructs a highly negative discursive representation of Russia by embedding presuppositions within DEFINITE NOUN PHRASES, reinforcing its image as an aggressor that directly threatens international stability. Through carefully chosen linguistic structures, the speech asserts Russia's culpability while eliminating any space for alternative interpretations, such as self-defense or provocation. By consistently framing Russia as the primary source of instability, the speech legitimizes strong opposition and collective international action.

One of the most explicit examples of this framing appears in the statement: *"Russia's invasion of Ukraine is what happens when oppressors trample the rules that protect us all".* The DEFINITE NOUN PHRASE *"Russia's invasion of Ukraine"* serves as a presupposition trigger, assuming that the invasion has already occurred and presenting it as an unquestionable fact. This linguistic choice effectively silences any competing narratives, such as claims of provocation or defensive action. A similar strategy is evident in the statement: *"the historic crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine".* The triggers *"the historic crisis"* and *"the Russian invasion of Ukraine"* presuppose both the existence of the invasion and its direct consequences. By referring to the crisis as *"historic"*, the speech amplifies the severity of Russia's actions, positioning them as unprecedented and exceptionally destructive. This choice of wording further reinforces Russia's responsibility for the situation, leaving no room for alternative explanations or mitigating factors. The direct causal link between Russia's invasion and the resulting crisis strengthens the narrative of Russia as the primary source of instability, legitimizing international condemnation and intervention.

Besides, Russia's negative portrayal is reinforced by framing its military actions as both unlawful and reckless, emphasizing its disregard for international norms. The phrase *"Russia's indefensible assault on a peaceful neighbor"* contains the DEFINITE NOUN phrases *"Russia's indefensible assault"* and *"a peaceful neighbor"*, which presuppose not only the occurrence of an unprovoked attack but also Ukraine's innocence. The use of the adjective *"indefensible"* eliminates any possibility of justification, positioning Russia's actions as wholly unjust and illegitimate under international law. Similarly, the phrase *"Putin's reckless war of choice"* includes the DEFINITE NOUN phrase *"Putin's reckless war of choice"*, which presupposes that the war was deliberately

initiated by Putin. The adjectives *"reckless"* and *"of choice"* further suggest that the invasion was unnecessary, avoidable, and driven by personal or political motives rather than legitimate security concerns. Moreover, the reference to *"the dangers of undercutting an international order rooted in rules and respect"* contains an existential presupposition that a rules-based global order exists, while also implying that Russia's actions undermine it.

North Korea

Through the findings, North Korea is portrayed as both a hostile and provocative actor, reinforcing its exclusion from the international community and justifying defensive measures against it.

North Korea is framed as a hostile force through language that highlights its ongoing and existential threat to global security. The phrase *"we all face a persistent threat from North Korea"* contains the DEFINITE NOUN phrase *"a persistent threat from North Korea"*, which presupposes not only the existence of this threat but also its continuous and unchanging nature. The adjective *"persistent"* reinforces the idea that North Korea's actions are relentless and unceasing, creating the impression that it remains a long-term adversary. Furthermore, the use of the inclusive pronoun *"we"* establishes a collective identity that explicitly excludes North Korea, positioning it as an external force that endangers the broader international community.

The speech further isolates North Korea by grouping it with other significant threats to regional and global stability. In the statement *"we all know the challenges that this region faces: the pandemic, climate change, nuclear threats from North Korea, coercion by larger states against their smaller neighbors, and cruelty and violence from the regime in Myanmar"*, the FACTIVE VERB *"know"* presupposes that these issues are undeniable realities, framing them as widely accepted threats. By listing *"nuclear threats from North Korea"* alongside global crises such as climate change and the pandemic, the speech equates North Korea with large-scale, existential dangers. Additionally, its mention alongside *"coercion by larger states"* and *"cruelty and violence from the regime in Myanmar"* further strengthens its negative portrayal as an oppressive and aggressive state that disregards international norms.

Beyond depicting North Korea as hostile, the speech also frames it as a deliberate and destabilizing provocateur, portraying its actions as calculated attempts to challenge international security. A clear example of this framing appears in the phrase *"North Korea's habitual provocations and missile tests"*, which contains the DEFINITE NOUN phrases *"North Korea's habitual provocations"* and *"missile tests"*. These phrases presuppose that North Korea's actions are not isolated incidents but rather recurring and intentional patterns of behavior. The adjective *"habitual"* reinforces this idea, suggesting that these provocations are not defensive responses but rather a deliberate strategy.

Myanmar

Although Myanmar is referenced only twice in the data, both instances emphasize the triggers *"cruelty and violence from the regime"*, creating a clear depiction of Myanmar as a source of oppression and instability. These presuppositions, though limited in frequency, reinforce a view of Myanmar as a severe out-group actor marked by human rights abuses. Such descriptions position the Myanmar regime in direct opposition to the values of peace and stability upheld by the U.S. and its allies, underscoring Myanmar's role as a destabilizing force within the region.

4.2. Discussion

The discursive representations of in-groups and out-groups in the U.S. Secretary of Defense's speech reflect broader socio-political dynamics in the Indo-Pacific and global security landscape. By analyzing the ideological positioning of the United States and its allies as stabilizing forces and adversaries like China and Russia as threats, this speech strategically constructs a narrative that reinforces U.S. leadership, legitimizes its military presence, and frames security challenges in a way that aligns with U.S. geopolitical interests.

The Socio-Political Context and the In-Group Representation

The speech's portrayal of the United States as a leader and supporter in the Indo-Pacific aligns with longstanding U.S. strategic priorities in the region. Since the end of World War II, the U.S. has maintained a strong military and economic presence in the Asia-Pacific, solidifying alliances and fostering partnerships as part of its broader containment strategy during the Cold War and beyond [1]. The emphasis on phrases such as *"our allies"*, *"our friends"*, *and "our partners"* serves a dual function: first, it reinforces the United States' identity as a benevolent and stabilizing force; second, it constructs an inclusive group that shares values, security concerns, and strategic goals.

This framing is particularly significant in light of contemporary geopolitical tensions. The Biden

administration's National Security Strategy [27] explicitly identifies the Indo-Pacific as the "*center of strategic gravity*", reinforcing U.S. commitments to security cooperation with regional allies. The discursive strategy in the speech reflects this broader policy orientation by presupposing the legitimacy and necessity of U.S. leadership in shaping regional security dynamics. The repeated use of presuppositions normalizes and naturalizes the presence of U.S. military forces, making it appear as a given rather than a contested issue.

Moreover, this rhetorical strategy aligns with Chan's [26] concept of *re-categorization*, in which political discourse constructs the United States and its allies as an in-group bound by shared commitments to peace, stability, and prosperity. The speech's focus on joint military exercises (*Balikatan*, *Keen Sword*, *Talisman Sabre*) strengthens this representation by presenting security cooperation as an institutionalized and cooperative effort. In this way, U.S. involvement is framed as a necessary and beneficial force rather than an imposition, reinforcing its leadership role through a discourse of partnership.

The Socio-Political Context and the Out-Group Representation

The depiction of the PRC as a coercive and destabilizing actor reflects the broader geopolitical competition between the U.S. and China, particularly in the context of the Indo-Pacific. China's rapid military modernization, increasing assertiveness in territorial disputes, and expansion of its influence in the South China Sea have heightened tensions with neighbouring countries and the U.S. [24, 28]. The speech's use of presuppositions constructs these actions as uncontested facts, reinforcing the perception of China as a revisionist power challenging the established order.

The assertion that China is *adopting a more coercive and unlawful approach to its territorial claims* presupposes that China is already acting in this manner, delegitimizing any] alternative interpretations of its policies. This aligns with van Dijk's [6] ideological square, which highlights how political discourse amplifies the negative attributes of adversaries while downplaying their justifications or perspectives. By focusing on China's "*plundering of resources*, *illegal maritime claims*", and "*militarized outposts*", the speech presents China as a violator of international norms and a direct threat to regional stability.

A key reason for this discursive construction lies in the United States' effort to strengthen regional alliances against Chinese expansionism. The Indo-Pacific Strategy [28] the need to counterbalance China's growing influence through multilateral partnerships, aligning with the speech's rhetoric that underscores "*our vision for a positive future* and *our partnerships growing stronger*". By framing China as an out-group, the speech reinforces solidarity among allies while justifying continued U.S. military engagement in the region.

The representation of Russia in the speech follows a similar pattern, although with less emphasis than China. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is framed as a direct attack on the international order, with the phrase "*Russia's invasion of Ukraine*" presupposing Russia's aggression as an undeniable fact. The speech does not provide space for alternative interpretations, such as Russia's justifications based on security concerns or NATO expansion. This linguistic strategy mirrors U.S. foreign policy discourse that seeks to delegitimize Russian actions while reinforcing the in-group unity of Western allies.

Discussion in Reference to Related Studies

The findings of this study align with broader research on political discourse, particularly regarding the strategic construction of in-groups and out-groups. van Dijk [29] highlights how ideological discourse relies on implicit meanings, such as presuppositions, to shape perceptions and influence audiences without direct argumentation. This study confirms that the speech embeds ideological assumptions within seemingly neutral statements, reinforcing U.S. strategic narratives while limiting alternative viewpoints. Similarly, research on security discourse [30] illustrates how nations present their alliances as morally justified while framing adversaries as threats. The speech under analysis follows this pattern, portraying the U.S. and its allies as proactive and cooperative while depicting China and Russia as destabilizing forces. This rhetorical strategy not only strengthens in-group cohesion and legitimizes military strategies but also establishes a moral hierarchy in which U.S. leadership is positioned as essential for global stability.

Furthermore, this study resonates with the work of Phạm Hiển and Vũ Xuân Trường [15], who apply van Dijk's [6] Ideological Square to examine how ideological biases shape geopolitical discourse. Both studies reveal a similar pattern in which the U.S. constructs China as the out-group, emphasizing coercion and militarization, while presenting itself and its allies as defenders of peace and stability. Conversely, Chinese media mirrors this framing, portraying the U.S. as the aggressor and China as a

defender of sovereignty. This reciprocal discursive construction supports van Dijk's [29] argument that ideological discourse selectively highlights in-group virtues while amplifying out-group flaws.

Additionally, this study reflects Wodak's [31] concept of strategic essentialism, where political actors simplify complex geopolitical issues into a binary opposition between "us" and "them". This simplification serves a strategic function, reinforcing public support for military engagement and alliance-building while justifying long-term commitments in the Indo-Pacific. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how political discourse strategically reinforces ideological positions through selective framing and presuppositions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the hidden ideologies embedded within presuppositions in the U.S. Secretary of Defense's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2022 through the lens of van Dijk's CDA. By analyzing presuppositions in van Dijk's ideological square, this study uncovers the implicit messages within the speech, revealing that it is not merely a diplomatic address but a discourse embedded with strategic meanings. The findings demonstrate how the U.S. and its allies are consistently framed as a cohesive in-group, united by shared values of security, international law, and cooperation, reinforcing the U.S. as a morally justified leading and supportive force. Conversely, an adversarial out-group, including China, Russia, North Korea, and Myanmar, is positioned as opposing these values, reinforcing a clear ideological divide. Through this analysis, CDA functions as a critical tool for exposing the underlying power structures and ideological positioning within political discourse, shedding light on how language is strategically used to shape international narratives and legitimize geopolitical agendas.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis relies exclusively on presuppositions, which may not capture the full spectrum of ideological framing. Other linguistic elements, such as metaphor, modality, and evaluative language, could offer further insight into how ideologies are communicated in diplomatic discourse. Additionally, the study examines a relatively small corpus, focusing on a speech from a single event. This narrow scope may limit the generalizability of findings to broader U.S. diplomatic and defence discourse. Future research could benefit from a larger, more diverse corpus, encompassing speeches across different geopolitical contexts to capture a broader range of ideological strategies. These recommendations can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of presupposition and other discursive strategies in shaping international narratives.

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