



Discourse Analysis of Ayatollah Khamenei's Letter to American University Students: Applying Paul Gee's Theoretical Framework

Masoumeh Mehrabi^{*1}  and Abdolmajid Seifi²

1. Department of linguistics, Ayatollah Boroujerdi University, Boroujerd, Iran

2. Department of Political Sciences, Ayatollah Boroujerdi University, Boroujerd, Iran

* Corresponding author: m.mehrabi@abru.ac.ir

 <https://doi.org/10.22081/ttais.2025.72089.1060>

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 8 June 2024

Revised: 11 July 2024

Accepted: 28 July 2024

Keywords:

Discourse Analysis,

Intertextuality,

Paul Gee's Discourse Analysis

Approach, Political Discourse.

ABSTRACT

This study examines a recent letter by Ayatollah Khamenei addressed to university students in the United States who are actively participating in protests against U.S. foreign policy and its support for the Zionist regime. The central research objective is to analyze the discourse structures within the letter to determine how they function in advancing specific messages within a defined ideological framework. Additionally, the study explores how the letter constructs notions of power and identity, and how these constructions may influence public perception. Employing James Paul Gee's discourse analysis methodology (2014, 2018), the study investigates both the textual and ideological dimensions of the letter. The findings highlight several key themes: the dichotomy between political entities (e.g., the Zionist regime versus Palestine), the praise of American students for supporting the people of Gaza, and the advocacy for Palestinian human rights in the pursuit of peace and independence. These themes are embedded within the broader context of global political conflict. The analysis also identifies multiple identity constructs, including the U.S. government and its political allies, American youth and student activists, Muslims, the Axis of Resistance, and the oppressed, particularly women and children, in occupied Palestine. Through this discourse, the letter seeks to persuade, commend, and galvanize American students, urging them to remain on what is portrayed as "the right side of history".

How to cite this article: Mehrabi, M. and Seifi, A. (2024). Discourse Analysis of Ayatollah Khamenei's Letter to American University Students: Applying Paul Gee's Theoretical Framework. *International Journal of Textual and Translation Analysis in Islamic Studies*, 2(4), 347-362. doi: 10.22081/ttais.2025.72089.1060

© 2024 The Authors. Published by Ākhünd-e Khorāsāni Center for Graduate Studies affiliated with Baqir al-Olum University of Qom.

This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



1. Introduction

Letters authored by heads of state and political leaders hold significant importance due to their international media influence and communicative potential. These letters serve as official articulations of a nation's policies and positions, functioning as platforms through which leaders can express national viewpoints and strategic stances. As such, they represent a powerful and effective tool for advancing political objectives and conducting public diplomacy on the global stage.

A review of the existing literature reveals that the analysis of political letters tends to focus on one or more of the following dimensions:

1. **Rhetorical Aspects:** Scholars have examined the use of rhetorical devices such as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* to understand how persuasion is constructed in political communication.
2. **Framing and Narrative Construction:** Discourse analysis has been employed to investigate how political figures frame issues and build narratives within their letters.
3. **Language and Power Dynamics:** Research has explored how language reflects and reinforces power structures and social hierarchies.
4. **Comparative Studies:** Comparative analyses have highlighted differences in rhetorical style, cultural values, and the role of political letters across various political and cultural contexts.

On May 25, 2024, Ayatollah Khamenei issued a letter addressed to the youth and university students of the United States. In this letter, he criticized the U.S. government's political stance in support of the Zionist regime and called on American youth to intensify their opposition to these policies. The rationale for selecting this particular letter as the subject of analysis lies in its historical and political relevance, as well as its embedded Islamic ideological content, which warrants closer examination. The central research problem of this article concerns the discourse structures employed in the letter and their effectiveness in conveying specific messages within a defined ideological context. Furthermore, the study explores how the notions of power and identity are constructed in the letter and how these constructions might influence public opinion. In the evolving landscape of political communication, gaining insight into the discourse strategies utilized in such letters is vital for understanding their broader impact on political awareness and civic engagement.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

- What key topics and concepts are emphasized in the letter, and what is their significance?
- To which fundamental ideological frameworks within the Islamic world do these emphasized themes correspond?

To address these questions, the study adopts James Paul Gee's discourse analysis framework (2014, 2018). This approach is particularly suited for answering the following sub-questions:

- What topics are foregrounded in the text, and why are they emphasized in the leader's discourse?
- What identities are constructed and highlighted in the letter, and for what purpose?
- What kinds of relationships and distributions of social goods are established through the letter's discourse?
- What is the semiotic system or format used in the letter, and what is its significance?

Gee's analytical and theoretical framework is therefore introduced and justified at the outset of the study as the primary tool for analysis.

1.1. *Why writing a letter?*

According to Swanson and Nimmo (2014), political communication encompasses a variety of forms, including letters, which serve to establish a connection between leaders and the public. Political letters—ranging from formal addresses to personal correspondence—have historically functioned as crucial tools for leaders to communicate with their audiences. These letters are recognized as important historical documents that reflect the values, ideologies, and priorities of political figures. Morris (2017) emphasizes that letters often convey policies and national narratives during pivotal moments, thereby shaping public sentiment and engagement. The role of political letters becomes especially significant in times of crisis. Benoit (1995) outlines how leaders use letters to address crises, provide reassurance, and outline responses aimed at maintaining public trust. This perspective is echoed by Coombs (2007), who argues that effective crisis communication can reduce damage to public perception and foster a sense of unity.

An *open letter* is a type of letter intended for a wide audience, often written to a specific individual but disseminated publicly through newspapers, websites, or other media. Open letters usually take the form of correspondence addressed to a particular person but are meant for public consumption. Critical open letters addressed to political leaders are especially common. Two of the most prominent and influential examples include *J'accuse...!* by Émile Zola, addressed to the President of France and accusing the government of wrongfully prosecuting Alfred Dreyfus for alleged espionage; and Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, which includes the famous line: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere".

In past centuries, letter writing was a significant form of communication, typically reserved for private exchanges between the sender and the recipient. Consequently, an *open letter*, usually published in a newspaper or magazine, offered a rare glimpse into a public figure's message directed at another prominent individual. Open letters began to appear more frequently in newspapers during the late 19th century. By the 21st century, the concept of the open letter has evolved significantly, often resembling a press release. Today, large volumes of open letters are distributed automatically to numerous newspapers and media outlets. In many cases, blog posts or social media posts are also considered open letters.

A notable contemporary trend is the increasing prevalence of open letters with multiple signatories, resembling online petitions. In academic settings, scientists who publish open letters about scientific matters may adopt conventions typical of scholarly communication—such as seeking informal peer review prior to publication or viewing the act of public

engagement itself as a valuable academic contribution. The practice of political leaders authoring open letters, established as a norm since World War I, remains highly relevant today. While many open letters are politically motivated, they are by no means exclusive to political actors. Once their function and influence in public discourse became apparent, open letters gained traction among a broad range of social groups. Today, thousands of open letters are issued for cultural, social, and civic purposes, often as appeals to change societal conditions or to challenge official decisions.

In the contemporary era, leaders of various government bodies and departments continue to regard the letter as a highly effective medium of communication. Despite the proliferation of digital and media platforms, the written letter retains a unique authority and permanence that cannot be easily replicated by a contentious public statement or even an article published in one of the world's most renowned newspapers. A letter is often considered "hard evidence", a concrete and traceable record that directly reflects the voice and intent of the individual or institution behind it.

At the same time, some scholars and commentators evaluate the significance of correspondence from a historical perspective. They argue that, just as historians have reconstructed past events by interpreting inscriptions and analyzing letters written by previous generations, the letters composed today will hold substantial historical value in the future. While the rise of technology has introduced alternative means of documentation, such as video and photography, letters remain invaluable for their narrative quality and depth. For future historians, today's correspondence may serve as a credible source of insight into the social, cultural, and political landscape of the early 21st century. It is not difficult to imagine that simple letters written in our time could help future generations understand the complexities of contemporary life, or that novelists and filmmakers might draw upon these documents to recreate a vivid portrait of this period.

There are several motivations for choosing the format of an open letter. An individual might write one to publicly criticize a person or policy, to express a personal opinion in a direct and visible manner, or to initiate, or attempt to conclude, a broader public dialogue on a contentious issue. Open letters may also be intended to draw focused public attention to a particular recipient, thereby prompting action or response. In other cases, they function as tools in public relations crises or reputation management efforts. Finally, some communications are composed as open letters out of necessity or formality, especially when the subject matter requires the structure or decorum of traditional letter-writing, but with a desire for public exposure.

The importance of political letters can be understood across several key dimensions. First, they hold considerable historical significance, often serving as enduring records of a leader's thoughts, policies, and interactions with their constituents. For instance, the letters of U.S. presidents during pivotal periods—such as Abraham Lincoln's correspondence during the Civil War—offer valuable insight into the political and social climate of their times. Second, political letters function as a means of communicating policies and values. Leaders frequently use this medium to articulate national narratives and ideological positions, aiming to persuade or mobilize the public. Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats," though delivered via radio, can be interpreted as a modern evolution of the political letter, intended to inform and reassure the American public during the Great Depression.

Additionally, political letters often aim to establish an emotional connection with their audience. By employing rhetorical strategies rooted in ethos, pathos, and logos, leaders

attempt to evoke solidarity, foster national identity, and inspire civic engagement. Scholars have noted the effectiveness of these strategies in building trust and resonance with the public. Finally, in moments of crisis, letters serve as essential communication tools. Whether addressing national emergencies, political upheaval, or social unrest, such correspondence is used to reassure citizens, clarify government actions, and maintain public confidence. Research underscores that the tone, framing, and content of these messages can significantly influence how the public perceives and responds to a crisis.

2. Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes existing research on the role of political letters, the discourse strategies employed by political leaders, and their impact on public perception. The background investigation of the topic is organized into the following sections:

2.1. Discourse Strategies in Political Letters:

Discourse analysis has emerged as a vital methodology for examining rhetorical strategies in political letters. Fairclough (1995) provides a framework for analyzing language within its social context, enabling researchers to uncover how leaders construct meaning through discourse. Wodak and Meyer (2001) emphasize the role of rhetorical devices, such as ethos, pathos, and logos, in shaping public perception, highlighting how leaders often leverage emotional appeals to mobilize support. In analyzing U.S. presidential letters, Baker (2019) identifies strategies such as inclusive language and narrative framing, which foster rapport with audiences. Similarly, Harris (2021) explores how political leaders frame issues in letters, demonstrating how strategic language choices shape public discourse. Several studies have employed discourse analysis, including Gee's framework, to examine political texts, both written and oral, as outlined below:

Ghasemi (2015) explores how discourse analysis, specifically Gee's framework, can enhance understanding of identity construction in international relations texts, proposing Gee's method as a coherent and precise approach for analyzing identities within such texts. Pahlavannezhad and Estahbanati (2008) analyzed the 2006 United Nations General Assembly speeches of the presidents of Iran and the United States, applying speech act theory to identify key rhetorical strategies. Noori (2012) and Keyvani (2012) examined Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's speeches at the UN General Assembly, highlighting the core diplomatic messages conveyed. Salimi and Zargarbashi (2013) analyzed speeches by four Iranian presidents at the UN General Assembly, focusing on their discourse strategies. Moosavi and Nayeri (2014) applied Austin's speech act theory to compare the speeches of the presidents of Iran and the United States, identifying performative elements in their rhetoric. Mazidi, Soltanifar, and Soroushpour (2015) used discourse analysis to compare the UN General Assembly speeches of Ahmadinejad and Khatami, aiming to clarify Iran's foreign policy under different administrations. Mojtahedzadeh and Mojtahedzadeh (2016) analyzed Hassan Rouhani's first UN General Assembly speech using a discourse analysis approach. Ansarian, Davari Ardakani, and Bamshadi (2019) applied Gee's discourse analysis framework to examine President Rouhani's 2017 UN General Assembly speech, focusing on identity and rhetorical strategies.

2.2. Iran's Supreme Leader's Letters Using Discourse Analysis

This section investigates significant letters, particularly those authored by Iran's supreme leaders, through a discourse analysis approach. Key studies include:

Bashir and Aghayan Chavoshi (2019) conducted a discourse analysis of all the letters sent by Imam Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei to the Hajj Congress. They identified the central themes of Imam Khomeini's discourse diplomacy as monotheism, the inseparability of religion and politics, Muslim unity, opposition to Western arrogance, support for the oppressed, and the revolution. In contrast, Ayatollah Khamenei's discourse diplomacy emphasizes support for Palestine, Islamic awakening, resistance to cultural invasion, and steadfastness. Arab Yusufabadi, Seifi Qara Yataq, and Arab Yusufabadi (2015) analyzed the letter addressed by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution to the youth of Europe and America. This letter invites youth to engage in informed research about Islam and the life of the Prophet. According to the authors, among various speech acts employed, the representative speech act is the most prevalent, used to explain and clarify Islamic principles and offer an accurate portrayal of Islam to the younger generation.

Rahdar (2022) argues that the discourse analysis of the Supreme Leader's letter to Western youth enhances the potential influence and effectiveness of its message. Sadeghi, Mirzaei, and Tateian (2020) conducted a study focusing on keywords associated with anti-arrogance discourse—such as “arrogance” and “anti-arrogance”—in the speeches of the Supreme Leader. Their findings suggest that identifying these discursive elements reflects the Leader's realistic perspective and situational awareness, which in turn promotes informed and active resistance against perceived enemies.

2.3. Impact on Public Perception

The impact of discourse strategies in political letters on public perception has been widely studied. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) demonstrate how framing effects can significantly shape public opinion, indicating that the way issues are presented in political letters influences citizens' attitudes and beliefs. Similarly, Goffman (1974) emphasizes that the presentation of self in political letters contributes to shaping the leader's public persona, thereby affecting how audiences perceive their authority and credibility.

More recent research has examined the effects of digital communication on political letters. Boulianne (2015) highlights how social media transforms traditional communication by enabling leaders to interact with the public more directly and informally. This transformation prompts critical questions about the continued effectiveness of traditional discourse strategies in the digital era and their influence on public perception.

Overall, the literature underscores the importance of political letters as a communicative medium that reflects historical contexts, articulates policies, and shapes public opinion. The discourse strategies used in these letters play a vital role in determining how messages are received and interpreted. As political communication evolves, further research is necessary to understand the changing dynamics of political letters within digital communication frameworks and their implications for public engagement and perception.

3. Theoretical Framework

As Brown and Yule (1983) explain, discourse is a system that guides how we use and understand language in real-world contexts and specific situations. Discourse analysis, therefore, is the study of language use in these real-life settings. This type of investigation holds that language is not only a tool for expressing ideas but also a means of performing actions and effecting change in the world. The logic behind the “weak” version of discourse analysis is that the world exists objectively and independently; however, our access to it is

mediated through language, which is primarily an interpretive and narrative process. According to this view, nothing comes into existence without being expressed either orally or in writing. Thus, ontology is narratively oriented—things only exist as they are formed through language. In contrast, proponents of the “strong” version of discourse analysis argue that language is everything. They claim that language creates reality, and there is no reality outside of language that can exist or be understood independently. Some approaches to discourse analysis focus closely on purely linguistic factors, such as the syntactic structure of sentences, to uncover hidden meanings within the text. This represents a purely linguistic approach, based on the premise that certain issues are rooted primarily in language itself. Other approaches extend beyond language to examine the relationship between texts and broader institutions of knowledge, such as social sciences, philosophy, or psychology. The theoretical framework adopted in this study aligns with the former approach to discourse analysis, which emphasizes the interpretive and narrative role of language in accessing reality.

James Paul Gee’s framework for discourse analysis is a well-known approach that highlights the connection between language, social practices, and identity. According to Gee (2014, 2018), humans perform certain actions through language that bring things into existence, create, or even destroy. Gee’s methodology for discourse analysis, which is employed in the present study, includes several theoretical tools. These tools consist of seven types of acts that language can perform and six guiding questions whose answers help reveal the function of a given text. Thus, discourse analysis involves examining the interplay between these acts and questions. In Gee’s view, language is used to perform one or more of the following acts:

1. *Attaching significance*: use of language to give meaning and value to entities. Foregrounding is one way of attributing value to things and using highly frequent linguistic items is one way of foregrounding. Marginalizing them equates to degradation. What discourse analysis tries to do is to clarify what is that a text tries to attach significance to?

2. *Doing actions*: Language is used to say things and to do things too. This does not contain only physical actions, but informing for instance is another way of doing things. Here, what discourse analyst is doing is to answer this question: What the text is doing?

3. *Assuming and adopting identities to entities*: Language is used to create new identities. Identity can refer to the writer/ speaker’s social group or institutions. Means of creating new identities can be spotted by questions like: What identity the writer/ speaker is trying to show others? What identity the writer/ speaker is trying to attribute and create for others? What linguistic tools/ mechanisms are used for the assumption of new identities?

4. *Forming, building, and developing relations/ relationships*: Language is used to form relations, to develop them, or to continue them. Relations between human beings and between human beings and objects or even between objects are built by the language. The question which a discourse analyst may ask to recognize relations is that how linguistic mechanisms (lexical or syntactic) are used to maintain and continue relations between identities created?

5. *Adopting and specifying policies*: Policy does not refer to the nations’ behaviors, but it refers to the distinction which a text is trying to make between fair and unfair, good and evil. Here, the analyst will ask: What are the social goods and how are they distributed? “The

social goods”, here means either public values like freedom, respect, equality or values specified to a certain group or community like the right to carry gun in the United States.

6. *Making connections*: The connections and relations between things in the world will be manifested in language, too. The analyst will ask: How can linguistic means be used to create or lose connections?

7. *Inserting sign system and knowledge systems*: Sign systems like linguistic systems such as languages, language varieties or non-linguistic systems like maps, graphs can signify meaning. These sign systems reflect belief and knowledge systems. So the analyst will ask: How linguistic items are used to create or introduce a sign or knowledge system?

Then Gee comes up with this new idea that the analyst can take advantage of some theoretical means too:

1. *situated meaning*: a word or sentence meaning in context which can be different from their meaning in isolation or in a dictionary or their current and common use

2. *social languages*: Different styles or varieties of a language related to certain and specified social identities like literary, political, or even forensic language.

3. *intertextuality*: a quotation from another related text or a reference to it

4. *figured world*: the cognitive systems rooted in being a participant or member of a certain culture or community. In every world and realm there can be found certain actions, agents, and values.

5. *Discourse*: discursal beliefs, values, and insights

6. *Controversies*: current disputes and topics surrounding us which are publically common to wide population of people and mass media.

The main aspects of this theory are as follow:

1. Discourses: Gee distinguishes between “discourse” (with a lowercase ‘d’), which refers to language use in context, and “Discourses” (with an uppercase ‘D’), which encompass broader social practices, identities, and power relations associated with language use. Discourses involve ways of being, acting, and valuing in society.

2. Social Language: He emphasizes that language is not just a tool for communication but a means of enacting social identities and relationships. Different contexts and social settings shape how language is used, and these usages can reinforce or challenge power structures.

3. Four Perspectives: Gee suggests analyzing discourse from four perspectives:

- The Interactional: How individuals interact through language.
- The Contextual: The social and cultural contexts influencing language use.
- The Institutional: The role of institutions in shaping discourse.

- The Ideological: How language reflects and perpetuates ideologies.

4. Building Tasks: He also discusses “building tasks”, which are the ways in which individuals use language to construct their identities and relationships in discourse. This involves examining how language choices can create different meanings and relationships among speakers and listeners.

5. Power and Identity: Gee’s framework highlights the interplay between language, identity, and power. It examines how language can be a site of struggle for power and how individuals negotiate their identities through discourse.

Gee’s approach is often used in various fields, including linguistics, education, and sociology, to analyze how language functions in social contexts and how it shapes our understanding of identity and power dynamics.

4. Textual analysis

The following is Ayatollah Khamenei’s letter addressed to American university students following their courageous defense of the Palestinian people:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

I am writing this letter to the young people whose awakened conscience has moved them to defend the oppressed women and children of Gaza.

Dear university students in the United States of America, this message is an expression of our empathy and solidarity with you. As the page of history is turning, you are standing on the right side of it.

You have now formed a branch of the Resistance Front and have begun an honorable struggle in the face of your government's ruthless pressure—a government which openly supports the brutal Zionist regime.

The greater Resistance Front which shares the same understandings and feelings that you have today, has been engaged in the same struggle for many years in a place far from you. The goal of this struggle is to put an end to the blatant oppression that the brutal Zionist terrorist network has inflicted on the Palestinian nation for many years. After seizing their country, the Zionist regime has subjected them to the harshest of pressures and tortures.

The apartheid Zionist regime's genocide today is the continuation of extreme oppressive behavior which has been going on for decades. Palestine is an independent land with a long history. It is a nation comprised of Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

After the World War, the capitalist Zionist network gradually imported several thousand terrorists into this land with the help of the British government. These terrorists attacked cities and villages, murdered tens of thousands of people and pushed out multitudes into neighboring countries. They seized their homes, businesses and farmlands, formed a government in the usurped land of Palestine and called it Israel.

After England's initial help, the United States became the greatest supporter of this usurper regime, ceaselessly providing it with political, economic and military support. In an act of

unforgivable recklessness, the United States even opened the way and provided assistance for the regime's production of nuclear weapons.

The Zionist regime used an iron-fist policy against the defenseless people of Palestine from the very beginning and has, day by day, intensified its brutality, terror and repression in complete disregard of all moral, human and religious values.

The United States government and its allies refused to even frown upon this state terrorism and ongoing oppression. And today, some remarks by the US government regarding the horrific crimes taking place in Gaza are more hypocritical than real.

The Resistance Front emerged from this dark environment of despair, and the establishment of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran expanded and fortified it.

The global Zionist elite – who owns most US and European media corporations or influences them through funding and bribery – has labeled this courageous, humane resistance movement as "terrorism".

Can one call a people a terrorist nation for defending themselves on their own land against the crimes of the occupying Zionists? And is helping such a nation and strengthening it, an act of terrorism?

The oppressive leaders of global hegemony mercilessly distort even the most basic human concepts. They portray the ruthless, terrorist Israeli regime as acting in self-defense – yet they portray the Palestinian Resistance which defends its freedom, security and the right to self-determination, as terrorists!

I would like to assure you that today the circumstances are changing. A different fate awaits the important region of West Asia. The people's conscience has awakened on a global scale, and the truth is coming to light.

Moreover, the Resistance Front has grown in strength and will become even stronger.

And history is turning a page.

Besides you students from dozens of American universities, there have also been uprisings in other countries among academics and the general public.

The support and solidarity of your professors is a significant and consequential development. This can offer some measure of comfort in the face of your government's police brutality and the pressures it is exerting on you. I too am among those who empathize with you young people, and value your perseverance.

The Qur'ān's lesson for us **Muslims** and all of humanity, is to stand up for that which is right: "So be steadfast as you have been commanded" (11:112).

The Qur'ān's lesson for human relations is: "Do not oppress and do not be oppressed" (2:279).

The Resistance Front advances by a comprehensive understanding and the practice of these and hundreds of other such commands – and will attain victory with the permission of God.

My advice to you is to become familiar with the Qur'ān.

Sayyid Ali Khamenei

May 25, 2024

5. Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the letter text, guided by the selected theoretical framework.

1. Discourses vs. Discourses:

○ Lowercase “d” discourse: Analyze the language and rhetorical strategies used in the letter (e.g., persuasive techniques, emotional appeals) depicted by the phrases like *Dear university students in the United States of America, you are standing on the right side of it.*

Uppercase “D” Discourses: Identify the broader social practices and identities that Khamenei is invoking, such as Islamic solidarity, anti-imperialism, and youth empowerment. depicted by the phrases like *brutal Zionist regime, this message is an expression of our empathy and solidarity with you.*

2. Building Tasks:

○ Examine how Khamenei constructs identities for both himself and the recipients (American university students). Here some identities are created and built:

- *oppressed women and children of Gaza*
- *university students in the United States of America/ you*
- *Zionist regime*
- *England/ British government*
- *Resistance Front*
- *Palestine/ Palestinians*
- *Islamic Republic of Iran*

3. Four Perspectives:

○ Interactional: Assess how Khamenei addresses the students and engages with them through the letter. by the phrases like *Dear university students in the United States of America, you are standing on the right side of it.*

○ Contextual: Situate the letter within the contemporary political climate regarding Palestine and U.S.-Iran relations.

○ Institutional: Discuss the implications of the letter for Iranian authority and its position in global politics.

○ Ideological: Analyze the ideological underpinnings of the letter, including themes of resistance, justice, and anti-Western sentiment.

1. Attaching significance:

In this letter, language is used for the purpose of defending the oppressed and the innocent and fighting against the wrong policies of the oppressors.

2. Doing actions:

In this letter, US students and young people are encouraged to defend and support the goals of the Palestinian resistance front, and their empathetic actions in the nationwide protests are praised. Also, the changing situation of the West Asian region is emphasized, and American youth and students are encouraged to support the always weak side of the Palestinian resistance.

3. Assuming and adopting identities to entities:

In this letter, two opposite identities are placed in front of each other. The first identity is related to the Muslims and the Palestine Axis of Resistance, which has been reduced to titles such as we are Muslims, the great Axis of Resistance, Oppressed children and women, residents of the independent land, the usurped land of Palestine, defenseless people of Palestine has been addressed. The other identity that is opposed to the first identity is the American government, the partners of the American government, the United States government, the British government, the Zionist leaders. In the meantime, American students are mentioned as a strong independent wise identity, and the letter tries to praise their support for the Palestinians and encourage them to show more empathy towards the Palestinians. This identity is therefore admired by the writer of the letter, who aims to violate and suppress the policies of the American government that support the Zionist regime.

Table 1. The main identities in the text of the letter

Identities	Frequencies	Reference
oppressed women and children of Gaza	1	Palestinian women and children
university students in the United States of America/ you	17	Young American students
Zionist regime	1	Israel Government
I	1	Ayatollah Khamenei
We/ our/ us	3	Muslims especially Iranian Muslims
England/ British government	2	English government
Resistance Front	5	The Axis of Resistance
Terrorists	3	Zionist regime
Palestine	3	Palestine
Islamic Republic of Iran	1	Islamic Republic of Iran

4. Forming, building, and developing relations/ relationships:

This letter tries to create a conflicting relationship between the identities that include the Palestinian state and the United States government, in the meantime, American students and young people who are inclined towards the Palestinian state are encouraged.

5. Adopting and specifying policies:

In this letter, the foreign policies of the United States and England and the diplomacy of Zionist leaders are considered as evil.

6. *Making connections:*

One of the goals of writing this letter is to establish a connection between the youth, American students, and the oppressed people of Palestine, as well as the ideals of the resistance front. By writing this letter, reconciliation is established between these two groups of people which seems to be separate and apparently strangers.

7. *Inserting sign system and knowledge systems:*

The semiotic system used in the text of this letter is the natural Persian language and the English language, the purpose of the Persian language is to communicate with the Persian-speaking audience inside Iran, and the purpose of the English language is to communicate with American students. There is also another purpose for the use of English in the text of the letter, which is that since English is universally considered an international language, in this way the letter can appeal to non-American audiences of other countries.

Then Gee comes up with this new idea that the analyst can take advantage of some theoretical means too:

1. *situated meaning:*

Words like *Zionist* and *Axis of Resistance*, which can be used in the political context of the Palestinian land, are meaningful words that have a situational meaning, as well as words like *Leaders* and *partners* possess contextual meaning conveying power and Complicity in conspiracy respectively.

2. *social languages:* political, or even forensic language and terminology has been used here. The formal standard English language as the native tongue of the American students has been used here.

3. *intertextuality:* Since two verses of the Holy Qur'an are mentioned in the thesis, it is possible to find connections between the teachings and moral principles of the Holy Qur'an and the text of the letter as depicted in "So be steadfast as you have been commanded" and "Do not oppress and do not be oppressed".

4. *figured world:* Because in the text of the letter, concepts and social goods that have positive values, such as justice, peace, tranquility and defense of the concept of justice, are proposed and the world is in opposition to each other, a world in which everything is in its proper place and in which justice, peace, tranquility and justice prevail and the world which is idealistically described. This ideal world is in contrast with the real world in which the Palestinian society lives in war, does not enjoy peace, and there is no justice and fairness for it.

5. *Discourse:* In the text of this letter, values such as creative conscience, peace, justice, tranquility and defending the rights of the oppressed are praised

6. *Controversies:* The text of this article considers the war crisis in Palestine and instability in the Middle East region as well as the oppression of Palestinians as conflicts of a global format.

6. Concluding Remarks

Political letters are significant artifacts of leadership communication, offering insights into historical contexts, emotional appeals, and policy narratives. Through discourse analysis, we can uncover the rhetorical strategies, power dynamics, and cultural frameworks embedded within these texts. Such analysis deepens our understanding of political communication and its broader societal impact. The letter under discussion advocates for the rights of the Palestinian nation, aiming to inspire American students and promote a global sense of justice. It employs language that constructs a binary between the oppressed and the oppressor. Positive lexical choices are used to portray the Palestinian people and their struggle, including phrases such as “the awakened conscience,” “children and oppressed women,” “the honorable struggle,” “the great axis of resistance,” “the independent land with a long history,” “the usurped land of Palestine,” “defenseless people,” “continuous oppression,” and “humane and brave resistance”. Conversely, the letter uses strongly negative language to describe the Zionist regime, reinforcing its role as the oppressor. Terms include: “the ruthless flow of the usurping,” “ruthless regime,” “terrorist and ruthless network,” “occupation,” “pressure,” “torture,” “genocide,” “oppressive behavior,” “ruthlessness,” “Zionist occupiers,” “terror,” and “suppression”. This strategic use of emotionally charged vocabulary serves to frame the conflict in stark moral terms, shaping readers' perceptions and mobilizing political sentiment.

Figure 1. below illustrates the foregrounded topics, constructed identities, and dominant conversations within the letter text:

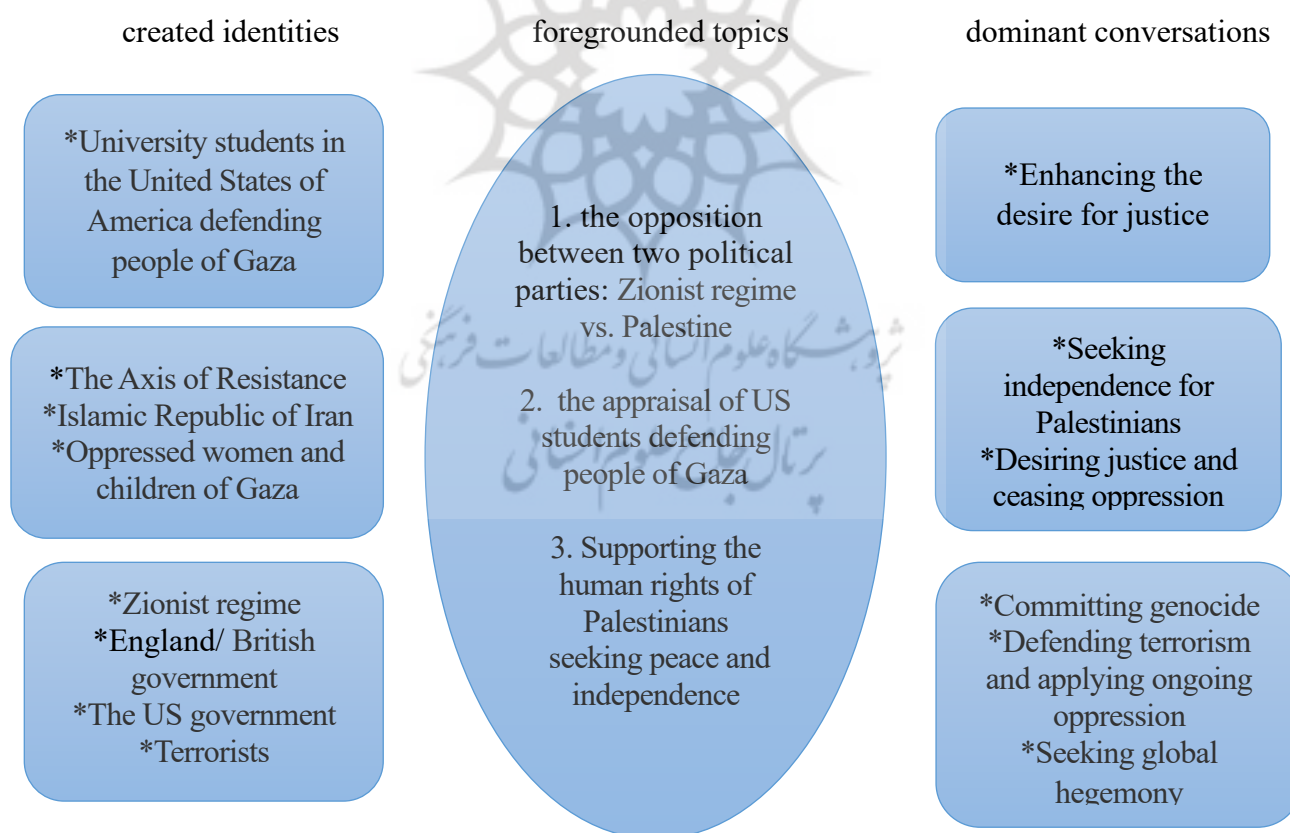


Figure 1. The illustration of foregrounded topics, created identities, and dominant conversations in the letter text

The letter presents several key themes that reflect its broader political and rhetorical aims. Foremost is solidarity with the Palestinian cause, as the text underscores the importance of standing with the Palestinian people and highlights the moral and political dimensions of this support. It also includes a pointed critique of Western policies, particularly targeting the United States for its role in Middle Eastern affairs and its support of Israel. Another central theme is the empowerment of youth, with a clear call to action directed at young people—especially students—encouraging them to engage in social justice movements and resist oppression. The letter's impact on public opinion is particularly notable in two areas: it seeks to influence the perceptions of American university students, challenging their views on U.S. foreign policy and the Palestinian struggle, while also aiming to resonate with a broader international audience, potentially contributing to global discourse surrounding justice, resistance, and the future of Palestine.

References

- Ansarian, S., Davari Ardakani, N., & Bamshadi, P. (2019). Analysis of President Rouhani's speech at the UN General Assembly in 2017: Paul Gee's discourse analysis approach. *Iranian Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 6(1), 1–20.
- Arab Yusufabadi, F., Seifi Qara Yataq, D., & Arab Yusufabadi, A. (2015). The study of the speech acts of the Supreme Leader's letter to the youth of Europe and the United States. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 67, 1–20.
- Baker, J. (2019). Rhetoric and political communication: Analyzing presidential letters. *Political Communication Studies*, 12(3), 215–232.
- Bashir, H., & Aghayan Chavoshi, M. (2019). The discourse of diplomacy of Imam Khamenei and Supreme Leader to the Hajj Congress and its effects. *Journal of Islamic Revolution*, 29, 1–20.
- Benoit, W. L. (1995). *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*. State University of New York Press.
- Boulianne, S. (2015). Social media use and participation: A meta-analysis of current research. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 2533–2552.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Coombs, W. T. (2007). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding*. Sage Publications.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. Edward Arnold.
- Gee, J. P. (2014). *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2018). *Introducing discourse analysis: From grammar to society*. Routledge.
- Ghasemi, F. (2015). Discourse analysis method and the question of self and other. *Political International Research*, 7(24), 185–212.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harper & Row.

- Harris, R. (2021). Framing political issues: A discourse analysis of political letters in contemporary politics. *Journal of Political Discourse*, 8(1), 45–60.
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1987). *News that matters: Television and American opinion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Keyvani, K. (2012). *A discourse analysis on Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's 2008–2010 speeches in UN General Assembly: A public diplomacy approach* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Iran Broadcasting University.
- Mazidi, A. M., Soltanifar, M., & Soroushpour, M. (2015). A discourse analysis of Iran presidential speeches (Khatami and Ahmadinejad) at the UN. In *The 1st International Conference & Second National Conference on Modern Research in the Humanities* (pp. 1–10). Civilica. https://www.civilica.com/Paper-MRHCONF02-MRHCONF02_266.html
- Mojtahedzadeh, F., & Mojtahedzadeh, N. (2016). A discourse analysis of President Rouhani's first speech at the UN. In *Proceedings of the 1st National Conference on Islamic Sciences, Law and Management* (pp. 1–10). Qom, Iran.
- Moosavi, L., & Nayeri, H. (2014). An analysis of Rouhani and Obama's speeches at the UN. *Political Quarterly*, 1(4), 39–48.
- Morris, J. (2017). Letters as historical documents: A study of political communication. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 30(2), 123–140.
- Noori, V. (2012). Status-seeking and Iranian foreign policy: The speeches of the president at the United Nations. *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, 3(1), 127–152.
- Pahlavannezhad, M., & Estahbanati, L. (2008). Speech acts analysis on discourse of presidents of Iran and USA: Shahrivar 1385 in UN. *Foreign Language Research*, 51(208), 1–22.
- Rahdarm, A. (2022). An analysis of the Supreme Leader's letter to the youth of Europe and the United States. *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Studies of Islamic Revolution Civilization*, 2, 1–20.
- Sadeghi, S., Mirzaei, P., & Tateian, S. (2020). Analyzing the anti-arrogance discourse in the sayings of the Leader. *Journal of Contemporary Research and Islamic Revolution*, 2, 1–20.
- Salimi, H., & Zargarbashi, R. (2013). Speech pattern of Iranian presidents at the UN General Assembly. *World Politics*, 2(4), 35–67.
- Swanson, D. L., & Nimmo, D. (2014). *Political communication in America*. Pearson.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2001). *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Sage Publications.