

# **Donald Trump's grammar: How to trivialize facts on coronavirus**

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*Manuscript received December 19, 2021, revised February 2, 2022, first published May 1, 2022, and available online May 7, 2022. DOI: 10.22373/ej.v9i2.11742*

## **Recommended APA Citation**

Fanani, A. (2022). Donald Trump's grammar: How to trivialize facts on coronavirus. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 9(2), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v9i2.11742>

## **ABSTRACT**

This current research reveals how President Trump grammatically constructed his clauses to trivialize the coronavirus (COVID-19). This research uses a discourse analysis approach with a qualitative design. The research data are President Trump's trivializing clauses (192 main clauses) taken from his speeches, press interviews, remarks, and tweets from January 2020 to June 2020. Hallidayan SFL and Straker's technique of trivialization are used as the basis of analysis. The result shows that most of the trivializing clauses are declarative while the others are interrogative and imperative. It is also identified that the declarative mood (statements of opinion and fact) reflects the techniques of sneaking through, trivializing the target, and discounting the target. The interrogative mood (rhetorical questions) demonstrates the technique of discounting the target. In addition, the imperative mood (directives) reflects the technique of sneaking through. Finally, the result also shows that oversimplification, severity decrease, and exaggeration characterize President Trump's trivializing clauses.

**Keywords:** Donald Trump; Trivialization; Clauses; Coronavirus; Mood analysis.

## **1. Introduction**

President Trump's statements are always worth analyzing, including those dealing with Coronavirus issues. Several studies (e.g., Fanani, Setiawan, Purwati, & Maisarah, 2020; Ross & Caldwell, 2020; Tauberg, 2018; Tchaparian, 2017; Mohammadi & Javadi, 2017) have shown that President Trump tends to use controversial statements containing negative rhetorical devices in his speeches, remarks, and tweets. A study by Fanani, Setiawan, Purwati, Maisarah, and Qoyyimah (2019), for example, revealed that the President used many negative rhetorical devices (e.g., blaming previous US

presidents) in his speech that potentially ignited controversy, especially among those on the opposite side.

Regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19), President Trump had repeatedly been giving statements downplaying or trivializing the virus's threat. Since the virus outbreak in the US, President Trump had downplayed the virus's severe and damaging impact for more than 60 times (Blake & Rieger, 2020). He always convinced his people that the pandemic was not as serious as what the health officials were worried about (Kolata, Rabin, & Bosman, 2020). He always gave optimistic, yet trivializing, statements, stating that the US would prevail and soon defeat this virus. He also repeatedly noted that the virus would quickly disappear by itself. It is certainly different from what health experts had advised that people should be seriously prepared rather than underestimate the threat.

As a US leader, his statements tend to be referenced by his people – especially those coming from the Republican side – in dealing with the coronavirus issue. Pew Research Center poll reported that the Republican side (54%) believed that Trump and the White House get the facts right at least most of the time (Perano, 2020). A study by Ho (2020) showed that most Americans did not take the virus seriously. Other studies showed that Americans who rely on White House guidelines regarding the pandemic tend to underestimate this virus (Mitchell, Jurkowitz, Oliphant, & Shearer, 2020).

Several studies have analyzed some of the world's leaders who underestimate the coronavirus (e.g., Heng, 2020; Oxford Analytica (OA), 2020; Rivers & Gallon, 2020). Their viewpoints of analysis are generally related to politics. For example, OA (2020) analyzes the political impact of the president downplay of the virus by Nicaragua's president and found that (1) Opposition parties are starting to form alliances with the hope of benefiting from people's frustration with the government, (2) Trade and investment into Nicaragua will remain minimal as a result of concerns about the spread of COVID-19 in the country.

This current study analyzes the same topic but with a different point of view, namely the linguistic analysis of President Trump's statements that trivialize the coronavirus. The study results are expected to complement the results of the previous studies above related to the language patterns used by President Trump in dealing with coronavirus.

Linguistically speaking, how did the President deliver his statements that tend to underestimate the problem? It is essential to reveal because his trivializing statements, on one side, were positively responded to and followed by US people. In contrast, they were negatively responded to by the other US people. This current study revealed how President Trump patterned his trivializing clauses and how the clauses reflect trivialization techniques of persuasion. By understanding the patterns of trivialization techniques, we can see President Trump's actual attitude towards the handling of coronavirus. In addition, we can see how rulers with great power use language to handle complex and challenging issues.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Hallidayan interpersonal meaning

In Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), meta-function or meaning is one of the prominent discussions. There are three meta-functions: textual, interpersonal, and ideational. This current research is concerned with the interpersonal meaning, which reveals that language is a means of social interaction. The chief interpersonal function represents language uses to articulate social and personal relationships.

Language is utilized by the speaker to exchange information or services or create and sustain social relationships. The language interpersonal function signifies that the speaker/writer has potential meaning in the communication as a participant. The speaker/writer is utilizing the semantic factor to communicate his opinion or evaluation and influence the views and actions of the audience readers. According to Thompson (2008), the interaction will affect one's attitude and views and disclose the speaker's attitudes in a definite occasion or purpose of particular action.

In the interpersonal meaning, the mood system is one of the central discussions. The mood system comprises two basic terms, namely indicative mood and imperative mood (Halliday, 2014; Eggins, 2004). The indicative mood deals with negotiating a proposition or the exchange of information. There are two basic terms in the indicative mood: declarative and interrogative. Typically, the declaratives function as a statement (i.e. facts, opinion, etc.) whose main aim is to provide information. On the other hand, the interrogatives typically function as a question whose main function is to request information (Halliday, 2014; Eggins, 2004). The imperative mood is concerned with negotiating a proposal to provide services or exchange goods. The imperatives typically function as instructions, appeals, and commands (Eggins, 2004; Fanani et al., 2020).

In the communication process, the types of mood are utilized to carry out the speech functions. The association between Subject and Finite is a signal of the interaction in the discourse making the message as a statement, an inquiry, a proposition, and a command. Once a speaker or writer gives information to the audience/readers, they make a statement. In terms of providing information, the Subject is put before the Finite, and this structure of the mood system is called Declarative Mood (Eggins, 2004).

Clauses are utilized to evaluate how the language is employed to associate with others, negotiate relationships, and to communicate opinions and attitudes. Halliday (2014) explains that the relationship between speakers occurs each time the language is used to associate with others. Halliday further explains that there are two basic types of speech roles: giving and demanding.

Thus, a declarative is characterized by a Subject that precedes the Finite, which generally realizes to a statement (giving information). While speakers/writers needing information, they typically ask questions (demanding information). Occasionally they

inquire in polar interrogatives which anticipate a yes/no request. In a polar interrogative question, the Finite comes before the Subject. This order is the signal of the Interrogative Mood serving as a frequent realization of a question (Eggins, 2004). Interrogative is indicated by the reversal position of Subject and Finite in the clauses where Finite is put before the Subject.

In exchanging goods and services, speakers needing goods or services typically give orders or commands. In this type of exchange, there is no clear Subject or Finite, but speakers/writers can make their demands more forceful by adding a Subject or a Finite. These formations of the Mood system are recognized as the Imperative Mood, which usually realizes a command (Eggins, 2004). Speakers/writers who give goods and services commonly propose something. The utterance is usually expressed in modulated interrogatives (Eggins, 2004).

Many researchers had applied SFL from different dimensions and perspectives. Kamalu and Tamunobelema (2013) used SFL to analyze religious identities and ideologies construed in a literary text. They found out that SFL Mood analysis was useful for understanding the participants' structural-based interpersonal relationships in the literary text. Ayoola (2013) analyzed some political adverts of two parties in Nigeria concerning the interpersonal metafunction (mood system). One of his highlighted findings is that the interpersonal meaning does not always correspond with its lexicogrammar analysis. The writers used different mood types to interact, negotiate, and establish their relationship with the readers. The mood system was also applied to change the readers' behavior. Ayoola concluded that contextual factors (e.g., the need to reflect the country's economic and socio-political context/situation) profoundly influenced the mood types used in the adverts and their interpersonal meanings.

## *2.2. Trivialization*

According to Straker (2002), when someone does not get what he hopes for, he will feel very disappointed. His hopes and predictions seem ruined. He would even feel more embarrassed when he had told other people beforehand about his hopes and predictions. In response, he might make the situation lighter by telling himself (and others) that it is not as important as he thought before. In other words, he underestimates or trivializes what he previously thought was important. The aim of trivialization is not to lessen the degree of inconsistency but to reduce the significance of the inconsistency by decreasing the importance of one or more of the discordant elements (Simon, Greenberg, & Brehm, 1995).

Trivializing reframes what is said as being not crucial by implicitly deciding for the choice concerning what is significant and what isn't. What is frequently not referenced are the standards by which significance is judged. Trivializing can likewise be applied to the individual, inferring that they are not significant, not master enough, or not senior enough to be heard.

Trivialization is closely related to the strategy of disavowal, which is frequently misjudged as a resistance component (Simon, 2009). When someone utilizes the strategy, he is persuading other people that something bad is not generally as awful as or as destructive as what other people think. He may concede that it is, in some part, not the most important one. In other words, by utilizing the strategy, he attempts to control others into believing that something is not such an awful or dangerous one.

According to Simon (2009), trivializing makes something that is big or important small and insignificant, allowing someone to ignore it. Trivializing may also be used as an attack, making small something that others find meaningful. This is often used when someone is facing a situation that makes him feel uncomfortable in some way, and thinks that he is unable to cope with it just now.

Concerning diseases, some studies propose three possible elements of disease trivialization. They are oversimplified, decreased severity, and comedic representations (Pavelko & Myrick, 2015). Developments in healthcare may cause the oversimplification of some diseases. Perceptions that the situation is not serious could lead to trivialization by undermining efforts to describe the realities of OCD, the importance of treatment, and the need for additional research. Ford and Ferguson (2004) explain comedy or mockery as a form of “disparagement humor” that “belittles or maligns an individual or social group” (p. 79). Honored people or groups are inclined to using mockery when conversing with less honored people or groups. People may utilize mockery to strengthen their supremacy over the people in a lower position (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006).

According to Straker (2002), trivialization linguistically can be constructed through three following ways:

(1) **Trivializing targets** (time, people ideas, money, etc.). In this case one often directly trivializes people or things. For example, one may trivialize time (e.g., it won't take you very long), or people (e.g., you are not that clever), or ideas (e.g., There are better ways of doing things), or money (e.g., It's not very expensive for what you are getting.)

(2) **Discounting others.** Trivialization is also done to people or something to discount or reduce them in status by comparing them with people, things, or other ways. If one reduces the status of the other person or things, then anything he say or do will be like the following:

That was an easy challenge. Can you give me a more difficult one?

She is hardly among the best ones in this class.

Is this all you can do?

(3) **Sneaking through.** Someone sometimes trivializes something indirectly. The trivialization can only be seen from the implications of the sentences he uses. The listener can usually conclude that someone is looking down on something or not.

For example:

Everyone knows we are the best team in this country (implies that 'The other team is not a serious threat')

Everything will be okay (implies that 'The problem is not serious')

Trivialization can be constructed with complete sentences and phrases. However, many key words are commonly used:

- *Just*: I just want one minute.
- *Only*: He is only a little child.
- *Simply*: Just simply do like this.
- *Hardly*: I hardly think it is important.
- *Quite*: It is quite easy.

### 3. Method

This current study was a discourse analysis that was aimed at finding out the linguistic patterns of President Trump's trivializing statements. The statements were taken from his speeches, remarks, press interviews, and tweets from January 2020 to June 2020, a period that marks the beginning of the virus outbreak and the peak of the outbreak in the US. There were eight speeches and remarks (taken from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>) and 12 tweets (taken from @realDonaldTrump) used as the data source. The data were in the form of clauses indicating trivialization of someone, something, and others' conduct or behavior regarding coronavirus issues.

The trivializing statements/sentences were then broken down into clauses. A simple sentence, as well as a complex one, was counted as one clause. A compound sentence was counted as two or more, dependent on the number of clauses constructing the sentence.

In this current study, in total there were 186 sentences which were then broken down into 192 clauses analyzed. After the clauses were collected, they were classified based on their types of mood and speech function realizations. The results were then analyzed by using Straker's trivialization techniques to understand how the statements were linguistically structured to convince the US people that coronavirus was not a big problem.

To ensure the validity of the data, a peer debriefing technique was applied by working together with several colleagues who hold impartial views of the study (Barber & Walczak, 2009). Two raters (Misnadin, Ph.D. from Universitas Trunojoyo and Prof. Slamet Setiawan from Universitas Negeri Surabaya) were asked to check the validity the data. They were given a checklist about the relevance between the author's classification and the theory used. The reliability of the data was carried out using the

inter-rater reliability technique, where the results of the two raters were correlated to see the agreement between the two raters.

#### 4. Findings

Table 1 below summarizes the findings of this current research: the mood types, speech function realizations, techniques of trivialization of the clauses used by President Trump to trivialize the coronavirus.

**Table 1**

Mood type, speech function realization, and technique of trivialization employed in President Trumps trivialization clauses.

Mood type	Speech Function Realization	Techniques of Trivialization	Examples in the Data
<b>Declarative</b>	Statement of opinion	• Sneaking through	(1) We have the best experts anywhere in the world, and they are on top of it 24/7! (2) It will all work out well.
		• Trivializing the target	(3) The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA
		• Discounting the target	(4) When you look at the kind of numbers that you're seeing coming out of other countries, it's pretty amazing when you think of it
	Statement of fact	• Discounting the target	(5) On average, you lose from 26,000-70,000 or so and even some cases more from the flu. ... So far, we have six [coronavirus deaths] here
		• Sneaking through	(6) When you have 15 people, and the 15 within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero." (Feb 26)
<b>Interrogatives</b>	Rhetorical question	Discounting the target	(7) Many call it a flu, <i>what difference?</i>
<b>Imperative</b>	Directive	Sneaking through	(8) Stay calm

##### 4.1. The declarative mood

President Trump, on many occasions used declarative mood in his trivializing clauses. This mood was used to exchange commodities (information) with the audience. In this context, they were used to make statements with two different speech functions: opinion and fact statements.

##### 1) Statement of opinion

In composing the statements of opinion, President Trump applied three techniques of trivialization:

(1) Sneaking through

(2) Trivializing the target

### (3) Discounting the target

The first technique, the sneaking through, was dominantly used by President Trump to trivialize the coronavirus facts. This technique indirectly trivialized the target (i.e., the coronavirus) by providing some evaluations. In general, he evaluated two things: (1) what he and his government had done, and (2) the coronavirus itself. For example, in his remarks on March 7 with president Bolsorano of Brazil, he said “*We’re doing very well, and we’ve done a fantastic job*” (Blake & Rieger, 2020). In this instance, he gave a positive evaluation of his administration’s efforts in handling the prevalence of the virus. The adjunctive element ‘very well’ and the complement ‘a fantastic job’ contain a high assessment of something. Similarly, in a remark during a press conference before a trip to India on February 25, the President said, “*We have very few people with it,*” (Peters, 2020). His clause certainly downplayed the danger of the virus, as represented by the complement of the clause ‘very few people with it’.

In this trivialization technique, the pattern he commonly used was ‘exaggeration to trivialize another thing.’ Many of the exaggerations were about the efforts he had made and the resources he possessed for handling the coronavirus. In his opinion, he had done the right and exceptional decision in managing the proliferation of the virus, as in his statement at a meeting with Prime Minister Varadkar of Ireland on March 12, “*The United States, because of what I did and what the administration did with China, we have 32 deaths at this point*” (Peters, 2020). Besides, he had tremendous resources to manage the situation, as in his tweet on January 30, “*We have the best experts anywhere in the world, and they are on top of it 24/7!*” (Blake & Rieger, 2020). Besides, he also exaggerated the number of people who had been recovered from the virus. He exaggerated that the number was tremendously up, as in his statement in a press conference on February 25, “*They’re all getting better*” (Blake & Rieger, 2020). All of these exaggerating statements lead to an inference that this kind of virus was very much under control and would not pose any problem to US people.

There were three patterns President Trump commonly employed in his exaggeration clauses:

(a) *Because of what I did, the 'X' is very much under control.* In the first pattern, the clause-like adjunct 'Because of what I did' is the most important element in the exaggeration. It oriented the audience to the determinant factor for the positive result gained. So, when President Trump said before a meeting with Prime Minister Varadkar of Ireland on March 12, “*The United States, because of what I did and what the administration did with China, we have 32 deaths at this point*” (Blake & Rieger, 2020), it means that he emphasized the factor (because of what I did) that led to the positive result (only 32 deaths) while simultaneously trivialized the threat of the virus. The clause construction would easily make the audience conclude that the President had already handled the virus.



Another application of this pattern was in his statement at the briefing room podium on February 26, "*Because of all we've done, the risk to the American people remains very low*". Here, he boasted his success in handling this kind of virus. As a result, the virus could be well managed, and the risk was very low.

(b) *I have the best stuff to control 'X.'* In this pattern, the complement of the clause 'the best stuff' becomes the key element in exaggeration. When someone said, "*I have great preparation for the test,*" it implies that the test would not be problematic for him at all because he had all the required preparation. The same thing occurred when President Trump said in his tweet on January 29, "*We have the best experts anywhere in the world*" (Peters, 2020). The complement 'the best experts' clearly indicates an exaggeration which, at the same time, belittles the danger of the virus. In other words, he would like to say to the audience that with the best experts on hand, the virus would generate no problem for US people. Another example of the application of this pattern was when President Trump said on March 6, "*Anybody that wants a test can get a test.*" (Blake & Rieger, 2020). Here, he boasted the number of tests he could provide for the American people. This clause certainly implied that the virus's spread would soon be under control with the abundant supply of test kits.

(c) *The result (of my effort) is exceptional.* In the third pattern, the complement of the clause 'exceptional' contains an exaggeration. For example, when the President said in a remark on February 26, "*They're all getting better*" (Blake & Rieger, 2020), he wanted to say that his efforts had worked effectively, and the virus had been well managed. Similarly, in his remark on February 28, "*We're getting some very good results*" (Blake & Rieger, 2020), the President boasted that his endeavor to cure the COVID-19 sufferers had already worked very well and generated very satisfying results. Again, this clause implied that the virus was not dangerous, and most of the victims could be well recovered.

The second technique of trivialization was trivializing the target. By this technique, President Trump directly minimized the threat of the virus. For example, in his remark on March 4, "*It is very mild*" (Peters, 2020), President Trump directly minimizes the danger by saying that the virus was very mild. The complement of the clause (very mild) indicates a trivialization that it was not dangerous at all. Another example is in a tweet on February 24, "*The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA.*" (Blake & Rieger, 2020). In this instance, he assured the audience that he had already been able to handle the virus well, which was in contrast with the fact that the virus was spreading rapidly at that time. The complement of the clause 'very much under control' would easily imply that something had already been well managed and would not result in something terrible.

The third technique in building a statement of opinion was discounting the target. President Trump used this technique on some occasions. In this technique, he compared something with another thing. For example, in a speech on March 12, *“When you look at the kind of numbers that you’re seeing coming out of other countries, it’s pretty amazing when you think of it”* (Peters, 2020), President Trump compared the number of death of coronavirus in the US with that in other countries. In his opinion, the number was very small and should not be worried about. He also used this pattern to compare the number of possible coronavirus victims and those of economic recession and depression as in a speech on March 24, *“But you’re going to lose more people by putting a country into a massive recession or depression”* (Peters, 2020). Here, he trivialized the number of death of coronavirus by comparing it with the possible number of victims due to economic recession and depression.

## 2) Statement of fact

In structuring his statements of fact, President Trump used the following technique of trivialization:

(1) Discounting the target

(2) Sneaking through

The technique used by President Trump was discounting the target. By this technique, he compared some facts that implied a trivialization of the coronavirus. For example, in his statement at a news conference on March 2, *“On average, you lose from 26,000-70,000 or so and even some cases more from the flu. ... So far, we have six [coronavirus deaths] here”* (Peters, 2020), President Trump compared the number of death caused by the common flu with that caused by coronavirus at that time. The comparison led to a belief that this kind of virus was not dangerous at all and that it would not cause fatal death among the victims. Similarly, in his statement at a news conference on March 2, *“We’re talking about a much smaller range of deaths than from the flu”* (Peters, 2020), President Trump, again, presented a fact of the lower case of death caused by coronavirus compared to that of the flu.

Another technique he used was sneaking through. In this case, he was predicting what would happen shortly through the presentation of ‘data.’ In his remark during a Coronavirus Task Force briefing on February 26, *“When you have 15 people, and the 15 within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero”* (Peters, 2020), he presented the number 15 as those who were infected by a coronavirus. In this instance, he predicted that the very small number shortly would become 0. This clause implies that the virus was very mild and would not spread in the US.

## 4.2. The interrogative mood

Two other types of moods used by President Trump were interrogative and imperative. However, they were rarely used. The interrogative mood was typically a rhetorical one, which means that the questions did not need any answers. The questions

were utilized to trivialize the virus as well as its impact. For example, his interrogative clause at a rally on June 27, “*Many call it a flu, what difference?*” (Peters, 2020) skeptically sounds to trivialize the danger of the virus. In this instance, he compared the virus with the common flu, which indicates the use of discounting the target. His other questions, in an interview with ABC News on May 5, “*Will some people be affected? Yes. Will some people be affected badly? Yes. But we have to get our country open*” (Peters, 2020) sound to trivialize the impact of the virus, which implies the application of the technique of discounting the target. He knew very well about the answer, and he realized the implications. However, he belittled it by comparing the disease impact with the cost of closing the country, which he thought was more critical than the virus impact. The trivialization in these two questions can also be seen from the use of the word ‘some’ instead of ‘many’ in them. The word ‘some’ means ‘not many,’ hence trivializing coronavirus victims.

#### 4.3. *The imperative mood*

President Trump's most infrequently used type of mood was the imperative mood. Only a small number of clauses were delivered in this type of mood, commonly applied to give an order to do something. For example, his statement, in a trip to Capitol Hill for talks on emergency economic bailout on March 30, “*Stay calm*” (Peters, 2020), asked the people not to worry about the virus (sneaking through). The complement of the clause ‘calm’ bears the meaning of ‘relaxed’ and ‘at ease.’ When someone says ‘Stay calm’ to us, we usually would think that the speaker knows the situation very well, assuring that the problem would end and anything would be fine. In this example, he wanted to say that he had a firm conviction that the virus would disappear soon, as indicated by the next clauses accompanying it (“*it will go away. You know it is going away*”).

## 5. Discussion

This study highlights three aspects of SFL in the speech that are interesting to discuss: (1) the high use of declarative moods, (2) the clauses that function as statements of opinion, and (3) the patterns of the trivializing statements. Firstly, President Trump dominantly used declarative moods to deliver his trivializing statements. According to Eggins (2004), the high use of declarative mood indicates that a speaker prefers to tell something rather than ask for information. In this context, by telling them some negative facts related to the virus, President Trump tried to convince his audience that COVID-19 was not a serious problem.

The utilization of declarative mood helps him convey his message straightforwardly without separating him from the audience (Halliday, 2014). The declarative mood helps the audience receive the message directly without requiring additional thought and time. The President might want to affirm that “It is the fact” or “it is true,” which gave the audience no opportunity to challenge the information. This

kind of function cannot be obtained by using imperative or interrogative moods. It is because the moods cause a separation between the speaker and the audience since they require the audience's reactions to see whether the information is delivered successfully or not (Ayoola, 2013).

Secondly, the trivializing declarative mood functioned mainly as a statement of opinion for evaluating something. In this case, President Trump often used two kinds of evaluation: positive and negative evaluations. *First*, he positively evaluated any efforts his administration had made to manage the coronavirus problem, which was a part of his sneaking-through technique of trivialization. In Martin & White's appraisal (2005) this is called positive judgment, giving a positive evaluation of one's behavior. In many of his statements, he judged positively what he and his administration had done in many of his statements. In his opinion, everything was already on the right track and would be able to defeat the virus soon. In short, he ensured his people that he had done it rightly. In Plutchik's wheel of emotion (1997), President Trump's positive evaluations were to arouse the US people's trust in him and his administration. The main point was that the virus would not be a serious problem for the American people with all of his efforts.

*Second*, President Trump provided negative evaluations of the coronavirus itself. Mostly, they were utilized in the clauses that indicate the technique of trivializing the target. On many occasions, he used words or phrases that contained negative judgment on the coronavirus, which were commonly put in the complement of the clauses as well as in the predicator. A negative evaluation was one of the common features found in President Trump's statements. He usually evaluated his 'enemies' negatively (Tauberg, 2018). The same thing occurred in his trivializing statements on coronavirus. In this context, he treated the virus as his enemies, and, as what he did to his other 'enemies,' he said negatively on it. Many of the negative words or phrases that he utilized contained trivialization such as 'very mild,' 'going to go,' 'going to leave,' 'going to be gone,' 'going to be eradicated,' or 'disappear soon.'

In general, the trivializing words or phrases refer to an oversimplification and decreased severity of the problem, which were two common techniques in disease-related trivialization (Pavelko & Myrick, 2015). He oversimplified and reduced the severity of the virus by decisively evaluating that it was mild, not dangerous, and it would disappear soon. For example, in "It's very mild" (Peters, 2020), the phrase 'very mild' indicates that the President decreased the level of threat of the virus, which is, in fact, very dangerous.

Thirdly, another exciting thing to discuss is the clauses that indicate the sneaking-through technique of trivialization. In this technique, the President exaggerated something to trivialize another thing, either in his statements of fact or opinion. The exaggeration often indicates what Aristotle (Fanani et al., 2019) said as the ethos of persuasion, enhancing his credibility. For example, the clause "*We have the best experts*" in "*We have the best experts anywhere in the world, and they are on top of it 24/7!*" (Peters, 2020), enhances the credibility of US health forces in managing the

virus. Similarly, in “*We’re using the full power of the federal government to defeat the virus, ...*” (Peters, 2020), the presentation of his credibility can be seen from the clause “*We’re using the full power of the federal government*”. In this instance, he would like to show that his government had done its best (as indicated by the phrase ‘full power’), and therefore, the American people should remain calm and believe that the virus would soon be under control in the US.

In the technique of sneaking through, exaggeration is central. Exaggerating is one of the common patterns found in President Trump’s statement, as revealed by Tauberg (2018) in his research. He found that President Trump often boasted something with the expectation of positive results. Mohammadi and Javadi (2017) also revealed that positive statements (positivity) were one of the characteristics often found in President Trump’s statements. This kind of statement was commonly self-promotional, exaggerating his government’s effort in handling the problem of coronavirus. By utilizing the clauses of facts and opinions, the President tried to raise his image before the American people. The message he would like to convey through the trivializing clauses was that the problem had been well handled with the resources the US government had. The virus, which became a severe problem in other countries worldwide, was a trivial problem in the US, which should not be worried about.

Besides referring to sneaking through, many of the clauses revealed the technique of discounting the target, either in his statements of fact or statements of opinion. Psychologically, he had got a problem with this. Naturally, a person facing a complex situation and has got difficulty handling and overcoming it is minimizing or downplaying the problem (Hoyk & Hersey, 2010). The same thing happened to President Trump. He sought justification for the difficult situation he was facing. To do this, he made comparisons. For example, when President Trump was faced with the fact that the number of death due to coronavirus continuously rose in the US, he tended to deny it by minimizing the number, saying that it was still far smaller than that caused by flu (Peters, 2020).

## **6. Conclusion**

In making trivializing statements, President Trump used clauses that trivialize the virus directly and indirectly. The trivializing clauses indicate an oversimplification and a severity decrease in the clauses that directly downplay the virus. Certain trivializing words or phrases (e.g., very mild) play an important role in this case. They are directly used to downplay the virus' level of threat. Meanwhile, in the trivializing clauses that indirectly downplay the virus, the clauses contain a lot of positivity which aims more at boasting the success of his efforts in managing the virus. In this case, exaggeration plays a major role.

The result concludes that through his trivializing clauses, President Trump was trying to position himself as the person who had succeeded in overcoming the coronavirus problem in the US. By constantly proclaiming his success in overcoming

this disease, he hoped that his self-image would also rise, which would be very useful for facing the upcoming presidential election.

For further studies, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between President Trump's trivializing clauses and his failure in the US Presidential election. It is possible because his trivializing the viruses could be one of the US People's considerations in choosing a presidential candidate.

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