



A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AHMAD AL-SHARA'S SPEECH IN BUILDING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST-CONFLICT SYRIA

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Abstract

This study analyzes how Ahmad al-Shara's political speeches construct a new national identity in Syria in the post-conflict context and the transition of power following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which encompasses three analytical dimensions: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. The research data consists of three official speeches by Ahmad al-Shara delivered during the early period of the transitional leadership and obtained from Arabic media broadcasts. They are then transcribed, translated, and analyzed based on lexical choices, rhetorical strategies, discourse production-consumption processes, and the underlying socio-political context. The results indicate that these speeches reproduce Syrian national identity through a combination of discourses of religiosity, nationalism, and narratives of collective suffering. Linguistic strategies such as the use of emotive diction, the metaphor of the "nation's wound," and the parallel use of masculine and feminine forms serve to construct a message of inclusivity, social reconciliation, and the legitimacy of moral leadership. These findings suggest that Ahmad al-Shara's political speeches not only function as a political communication tool but also as a discursive practice to reframe Syrian national identity amidst the post-conflict recovery process.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis; political speech; Ahmad al-Shara; national identity*

INTRODUCTION

Political speeches constitute a discursive practice that plays a strategic role in shaping public opinion, constructing political legitimacy, and managing collective emotions within society. In modern politics, speeches function not only as a means of communicating policies but also as ideological instruments rhetorically designed to influence audiences' perceptions, attitudes, and emotions (Abdul-Raof, 2006). Fairclough (1992) argues that politicians deliberately construct their language to appear persuasive, natural, and convincing, thereby enabling their political agendas to be accepted as legitimate and taken for granted within the social sphere. Consequently, language cannot be regarded as a neutral means of communication; rather, it serves as a primary instrument of power and social transformation (Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022).

Over the past decade, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been widely employed in the study of political speeches because this approach conceptualizes language as a social practice closely linked to the contexts of its production and reception.

Sharififar & Rahimi (2015) defines discourse as a broad concept that integrates multiple layers of meaning and implies that discourse analysis goes beyond linguistic structures to include social, cultural, and ideological dimensions. Several CDA frameworks have been developed, the discourse-historical approach Wodak, (2014) and Fairclough's (1992) dialectical-relational approach. Among these models, Fairclough's framework is particularly relevant to the analysis of political speeches because it provides a holistic connection between textual features, discursive practices, and broader sociocultural practices.

A central issue in the study of political speeches lies not only in identifying explicitly articulated ideologies but also in understanding how language operates subtly to shape emotions, affiliations, and public acceptance. Al-Hamad (2011) emphasizes that political discourse analysis should pay close attention to semantic aspects such as emotions, figurative meanings, and lexical choices, as these elements play a crucial role in establishing psychological resonance between speakers and audiences. Emotions in political speeches may be understood as representations of speakers' attitudes and psychological states manifested through particular linguistic choices (AbuMwis, 2021). Expressions of suffering, hope, fear, solidarity, and sacrifice, therefore, do not merely convey feelings but also guide collective responses to specific political circumstances. This issue becomes increasingly significant in the context of post-conflict Syria. The conflict that erupted in 2011 devastated the country's social, political, and economic structures (Badawi, 2023). After years of reliance on repression, state violence, and military support from Russia and Iran, Bashar al-Assad's regime collapsed in late 2024. The conflict claimed hundreds of thousands of civilian lives, displaced millions of people, and left deep fragmentation among ethnic, religious, and political groups (Pinfold, 2025). In such a transitional context, political solutions require not only institutional restructuring but also the construction of discourses capable of rebuilding trust, solidarity, and national identity.

Ahmad al-Shara emerged as a central figure in this transitional phase. Formerly known as the leader of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an armed opposition group rooted in the jihadi-Salafi movement, al-Shara later positioned himself as Syria's transitional president following the collapse of the former regime. This shift necessitated a significant discursive transformation from the leader of an armed movement to a national political figure seeking acceptance from both domestic audiences and the international community. Al-Sabbagh (2026) demonstrates that al-Shara's early speeches systematically attempted to distance himself from his previous jihadist image and cultivate a new identity as a pragmatic, collectivist leader committed to public service. In this context, political speeches function as instruments for constructing legitimacy, mitigating public distrust, and formulating a post-conflict Syrian narrative. Previous studies have shown that emotions constitute a significant strategy in Middle Eastern political speeches. AbuMwis (2020) discovered that pathos was pivotal in Hasan Nasrallah's speeches for galvanizing political resistance. Similarly, Al-Suod (2017) examined how emotional content in the speeches of King Abdullah II was translated into English, particularly in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace discourse. These findings suggest that emotional expressions serve both ideological and persuasive functions within political discourse. However, most existing studies have focused on external conflicts, resistance rhetoric, or issues of translation, leaving insufficient attention to how emotions are strategically employed during domestic political transitions following the collapse of authoritarian regimes.

Studies on Middle Eastern political figures, including Hasan Nasrallah and King Abdullah II, have demonstrated the close relationship between emotions, collective identity, and political legitimacy (Kareem, 2024). However, Ahmad al-Shara's speeches have received limited attention from a linguistic perspective, particularly concerning the ideological constructions that intertwine religiosity, nationalism, and leadership legitimacy. This gap is significant because the post-conflict Syrian context presents discursive demands that differ substantially from those associated with wartime rhetoric or regional diplomacy. In a transitional setting, a leader's language functions not only to justify political authority but also to articulate a traumatic past, envision a shared future, and construct a national identity capable of embracing fragmented social groups.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to analyze the emotional dimensions of Ahmad al-Shara's political speeches through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The novelty of this research lies in its examination of emotions as a discursive strategy for constructing national identity and leadership legitimacy during Syria's political transition following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime. By linking textual features, discursive practices, and sociocultural contexts, this study argues that emotions are not merely psychological expressions but ideological mechanisms through which solidarity is fostered, collective memory is organized, and the political imagination of post-conflict societies is shaped. The scope of this study is limited to Ahmad al-Shara's speeches as Syria's transitional president, with particular attention given to linguistic choices that represent suffering, hope, unity, and political legitimacy. Furthermore, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how representations of social actors, power relations, and lexical choices operate collectively in shaping public acceptance of the new leadership, while considering the historical conditions underlying Syria's social fragmentation, the need for national reconciliation during the transitional period, and the urgent demands for political stability among civilians

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to language analysis that views discourse as a non-neutral social practice inherently connected to power relations, ideology, and the social contexts in which discourse is produced and consumed. Unlike traditional linguistic approaches that primarily focus on the internal structure of language, CDA conceptualizes language as a means of constructing, reproducing, and transforming social reality (Darma, 2014). Within this framework, language not only reflects the social world but also actively shapes how individuals and groups understand and interpret it. Fairclough (1995) argues that CDA seeks to uncover the relationship between language and social structures. Discourse is regarded as a site where ideology operates subtly through lexical choices, grammatical structures, and rhetorical strategies that often appear natural and unquestioned to speakers and audiences. Consequently, CDA is particularly relevant for the analysis of political texts, as political discourse is inherently embedded with interests, legitimacy claims, and attempts to influence audiences (Setiaji et al., 2022). Norman Fairclough developed one of the most influential CDA models. In *Discourse and Social Change*, Fairclough (1992) proposes a three-dimensional conception of discourse, encompassing text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. These interconnected dimensions provide an analytical framework that enables researchers to understand language not merely as a linguistic structure but also as part of broader social processes.

The first dimension is text analysis, which focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary choices, sentence structures, metaphors, and stylistic devices. This level of analysis seeks to identify the linguistic construction of meaning and the manifestation of speakers' ideologies and attitudes within the text (Fairclough, 1992). In the context of political speeches, text analysis enables researchers to uncover the rhetorical strategies employed to frame social reality, construct self-representation, and shape audience emotions.

The second dimension is discursive practice, which encompasses the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. At this level, discourse is understood as the product of particular institutional practices and is directed toward specific audiences. Fairclough (1992) emphasizes that the ways in which texts are produced and consumed significantly influence their meanings and social effects. In political speeches, discursive practice relates to the identity of the speaker, the intended audience, and the communicative objectives pursued through the speech. The third dimension is sociocultural practice, which situates discourse within broader social, political, and historical contexts. At this level, analysis seeks to reveal how power structures, dominant ideologies, and social dynamics influence both the production and the content of discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Accordingly, discourse is not viewed as an isolated text but rather as a response to specific social conditions and, simultaneously, as a means of facilitating social change.

Fairclough's CDA Framework

Within Fairclough's framework, language in political discourse functions not merely as a medium for conveying information but also as a means of constructing ideology and managing collective emotions. Fairclough (1992) argues that ideology operates through language in ways that often remain unnoticed by audiences, particularly when linguistic expressions are presented in emotional and persuasive forms. Consequently, the emotional dimension constitutes an essential component of political discourse analysis. Emotions in language can be understood as representations of speakers' attitudes and subjective positions toward the social realities under discussion (AbuMwis, 2021). In political speeches, emotions are frequently mobilized through the use of metaphors, personifications, and similes, as well as religious and cultural expressions that resonate with the collective experiences of audiences. Such strategies enable political leaders to establish psychological proximity with listeners while simultaneously reinforcing the ideological legitimacy they seek to promote. By employing Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model, this study conceptualizes emotional dimensions not as supplementary elements but as integral components of political discursive practice. The analysis of text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice provides a comprehensive understanding of how emotions function as rhetorical resources in political speeches, particularly within contexts of political transition and social transformation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on uncovering meanings, linguistic strategies, and the social functions of language within political contexts, particularly in interpreting how emotions are mobilized through political speeches. This method is appropriate because the data

analyzed are non-numerical, consisting of speech texts that contain lexical choices, figurative expressions, and discursive constructions representing the speaker's ideological and emotional positions (Nuryadin & Nur, 2021).

The research data consist of three official speeches delivered by Syria's transitional president, Ahmad al-Shara, during significant moments in the initial phase of Syria's transitional government in 2025. The first speech was a victory address delivered on January 29, 2025, and obtained from the Al Hadath (الحدث) YouTube channel. The second was a national address directed to the Syrian people on January 30, 2025, obtained from the Syasyah Al Arabiyah channel. The third speech was delivered on March 29, 2025, during the announcement of the formation of a new government and was obtained from the Al Jazeera Arabic channel. These speeches were selected because they represent crucial moments in Syria's political transition and demonstrate prominent rhetorical strategies employed to establish the legitimacy of the new political authority.

The selected speeches contain salient emotive linguistic features, including religious expressions, representations of women, and figurative language such as similes, metaphors, and personifications. Religious expressions are utilized to construct the speaker's moral image and spiritual legitimacy, while representations of women emerge as part of broader socio-political constructions concerning women's roles in a post-conflict state. Figurative language, meanwhile, serves to strengthen the persuasive force of the speeches and to generate emotional resonance among audiences. These aspects were chosen because political language functions not only as a vehicle for conveying information but also as an ideological instrument for shaping public perceptions and constructing political hegemony.

Data were collected through the examination of official online sources, specifically three Arabic news media YouTube channels Al Hadath, Syasyah Al Arabiyah, and Al Jazeera Arabic which broadcast the speeches live. The audiovisual recordings were subsequently transcribed in full into written Arabic texts. Following the transcription process, the speeches were translated into Indonesian by the researcher. The translation process was conducted contextually, taking into account semantic, pragmatic, and rhetorical dimensions to preserve the ideological meanings and emotional effects embedded in the original speeches.

The researcher was guided by an analytical framework based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, encompassing text analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. This framework facilitated the identification of relationships between linguistic structures and the underlying ideological interests reflected in the speeches.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, at the level of text analysis, the researcher examined lexical choices, sentence structures, and figurative language that generated emotional effects. Second, at the level of discursive practice, the analysis focused on the processes of speech production and consumption, including the speaker's communicative intentions and the target audience addressed by the speeches. Third, at the level of sociocultural practice, the researcher related the linguistic and emotional strategies employed in the speeches to the political context of Syria following the collapse of the authoritarian regime. The researcher presents the findings informally through narrative descriptions, supported by relevant linguistic evidence and textual excerpts.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented through three stages according to Fairclough's AWK theoretical framework as follows.

Textual Analysis

Personification

Personification is a rhetorical device that attributes human characteristics to non-human entities to construct particular meanings. In political discourse, personification functions as a rhetorical strategy for fostering audience engagement while simplifying complex political realities into representations that are more accessible and emotionally resonant. In Ahmad al-Shara's speeches, Syria is consistently personified as a wounded and suffering human figure. This representation does not occur sporadically; rather, it forms a coherent and recurring pattern throughout the speeches. The following examples illustrate the use of personification across the three speeches analyzed.

Table 1
Personification

No	Arabic Text	English Translation
1	وقد تحملت سوريا خلال هذه الحقبة أوجاعا وألما	Syria has endured pain and suffering throughout this period.
2	لكنها جريحه متألمة تناديكم	Yet it (Syria) is wounded and suffering, calling upon you.
3	نهشتها الضباع و أوغلت في دماؤها	It (Syria) has been torn apart by hyenas, with its blood spilt.
4	أنقذت ولكنها مثقلة بالجراح وهي اليوم في غرفة الإنعاش	It (Syria) has been saved, yet it remains burdened with wounds and is now in intensive care.

Table 1 presents data that portrays Syria as a suffering subject. Examples (1) and (2) depict Syria as an individual enduring both physical and emotional pain over an extended period. The phrase *khilāl hādhihi al-ḥiqbah* (“throughout this period”) implicitly refers to the era of armed conflict and political crisis associated with the Syrian civil war that began in 2011. Example (3) intensifies the personification by employing a predator metaphor (al-ḍibāʿ, “hyenas”), symbolising destructive actors operating both internally and externally. The imagery of being “torn apart” and “bleeding” amplifies the perception of structural violence inflicted upon the nation while positioning Syria as a victim of injustice rather than as a perpetrator of conflict. Example (4) demonstrates a further development of the metaphor into the medical domain. Syria is portrayed as a patient who has been rescued but remains in critical condition within the *ghurfat al-in ʿāsh* (intensive care unit). This metaphor implies a post-conflict transitional phase in which the most severe dangers have been overcome, yet recovery continues to require substantial and collective intervention.

From a rhetorical perspective, this sequence of personifications serves to frame the condition of the nation as one that remains salvageable, provided that citizens actively participate in its recovery. Through this strategy, Ahmad al-Shara not only evokes empathy but also constructs moral legitimacy for his leadership by presenting himself as a figure capable of “healing” the wounds of the nation. Personification therefore functions as a persuasive device that links collective suffering in the past with hopes for future

recovery. Accordingly, personification in Ahmad al-Shara's speeches functions not merely as a rhetorical ornament but as a discursive strategy that transforms the collective experience of war into a shared moral narrative. Syria is positioned as a wounded body, while the leader emerges as a healing figure. This strategy strengthens emotional legitimacy while facilitating the transition from the former regime to a new political authority.

Simile

A simile, or '*tashbīh*' in the Arabic rhetorical tradition ('*balāghah*'), is a figurative device that compares two distinct entities through the use of explicit comparative markers such as '*ka-*' ('like/as') or '*ka'anna*' ('as if'). Pragmatically, simile functions to clarify meaning, connect abstract concepts to concrete experiences, and construct particular evaluations in the form of praise, criticism, embellishment, or emphasis (Abdul-Raof, 2006). In political discourse, similes serve not only aesthetic purposes but also ideological ones, as they enable speakers to frame social realities and position themselves within those realities. In Ahmad al-Shara's speeches, similes are employed to construct emotional relationships among the leader, the nation, and the people. Examples of simile usage are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Simile

No	Arabic Text	English Translation
1	تهيأت لي دمشق كالأم المتفانية ترمق أبنائها بعين المستغيث المعاتب	Damascus appeared to me like a devoted mother, gazing upon her children with the eyes of one who seeks help while expressing reproach.
2	أحدثكم اليوم لا كحاكم بل كخادم لوطننا الجريح	Today, I address you not as a ruler but as a servant of our wounded homeland

In example (1), the city of Damascus is compared to a devoted mother. The maternal figure carries strong cultural significance within Arab societies, where motherhood symbolizes sacrifice, unconditional affection, and moral authority. Through this simile, Damascus is portrayed not merely as the administrative center of political power but as a nurturing maternal figure that has given much and now calls upon its "children," the Syrian people, to fulfill their moral responsibilities. The phrase '*ayn al-mustaghīth al-mu'ātib*' ("the eyes of one who seeks help while expressing reproach") intensifies the emotional ambiguity between a plea for assistance and a moral reprimand, implicitly positioning the audience as active respondents rather than passive sympathizers.

Example (2) illustrates the use of the comparative marker *ka-* to construct the speaker's political identity. Ahmad al-Shara explicitly rejects the identity of a *ḥākīm* ("ruler") and replaces it with that of a *khādim* ("servant"). This simile projects an image of leadership grounded in service rather than domination. Within a post-conflict context, such a strategy is particularly significant because it reduces the symbolic distance between political elites and a population that has endured collective suffering. From a discursive perspective, the simile in example (2) also functions as a source of moral legitimacy. By presenting himself as a servant of the *waṭan jāriḥ* ("wounded homeland"), al-Shara frames his leadership as a response to national suffering rather than as an expression of political ambition. Consequently, the simile not only contributes to the construction of a favorable personal image but also reinforces a broader narrative of national recovery that requires cooperation between leaders and citizens.

Overall, the use of similes in Ahmad al-Shara's speeches serves as a rhetorical mechanism for simplifying complex political relationships into emotionally accessible forms. Through the figures of the mother and the servant, the speeches shift the discourse of power from the realm of formal authority to that of moral responsibility and collective service.

Simile serves as a discursive strategy that transforms power relations into affective relationships, making them more readily accepted by the public. The figures of the mother and the servant reposition both the nation and the leader from symbols of domination to symbols of service and moral responsibility, thereby making al-Shara's discourse more persuasive and acceptable within a post-conflict social context.

Textual Analysis: Religious Expressions

Ahmad al-Shara's speeches demonstrate a consistent and systematic use of religious expressions. This pattern is evident from the opening sections of his speeches, which invariably begin with a muqaddimah (religious preamble) characteristic of the Islamic rhetorical tradition, as illustrated in example (1). In the context of political rhetoric in the Arab world, such openings function not merely as religious formulas but also as discursive strategies that situate political discourse within a moral and spiritual framework perceived as legitimate by audiences.

Table 3
Religious Expression

No	Arabic Text	English Translation
1	بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم الحمد لله والصلاه والسلام على رسول الله وعلى اله وصحبه ومن والاه وبعد	Syria was first freed by Allah's grace and then by those who fought inside and outside the country. Praise Allah, and may peace and blessings be upon his Messenger, family, companions, and followers.
2	تحررت سوريا بفضل الله اولا ثم بفضل كل إنسان ناضل في الداخل والخارج	Syria was first freed by Allah's grace and then by those who fought inside and outside the country.
3	سائلنا الله ان يوفقنا جميع للنهوض بوطننا وتجاوز التحديات التي نواجهها	We ask Allah to grant us success in rebuilding our nation and overcoming the challenges we face.

The consistent use of a religious preamble, as illustrated in example (1), reflects not only the speaker's religious background but also serves to establish symbolic credibility before a predominantly Sunni Muslim Syrian audience. In post-conflict societies, legitimacy is determined not solely by political or military power but also by conformity to the collective moral and religious values of society. By opening with religious expressions, al-Shara places his speech within a sacred discursive space, thereby endowing the political messages that follow with greater ethical authority.

In example (2), al-Shara uses a religious causal structure with the phrase *bi fadl Allāh awwalan* (“first by the grace of Allah”) before talking about the part that people play. This structure reflects a characteristic Islamic hierarchy of causation in which human effort is recognized but ultimately subordinated to divine will. Discursively, this strategy performs a dual function. On the one hand, it prevents the perception that a specific leader or group can solely claim political victory. On the other hand, it unites diverse segments of society within a collective narrative of liberation framed as the realization of divine providence rather than merely the outcome of political struggle. Example (3) demonstrates the use of supplication as a concluding argumentative strategy. The invocation of divine assistance functions not only as an expression of personal piety but also as an affective mechanism for fostering emotional solidarity. Through the use of the inclusive pronoun “we,” al-Shara positions himself alongside the Syrian people as a collective subject equally dependent upon divine guidance and support. This linguistic choice reinforces an image of leadership that is participatory and empathetic rather than authoritarian.

From an emotional perspective, religious expressions in al-Shara’s speeches create a sense of hope and reassurance amid political uncertainty. References to God and acts of supplication serve as psychological resources for a society that has endured prolonged collective suffering as a result of conflict. Within the framework of critical discourse analysis, this practice can be interpreted as an effort to stabilize public emotions by redirecting attention from political tensions toward trust in a higher moral and spiritual order. Accordingly, religious expressions in Ahmad al-Shara’s speeches should not be understood merely as manifestations of personal faith. Rather, they function as discursive strategies that integrate religious legitimacy, national solidarity, and the management of public emotions. This practice reflects a broader model of Arab political leadership in which religious rhetoric and nationalism are intertwined to promote social cohesion during periods of political transition and crisis.

Representation of Women

Ahmad al-Shara’s political speeches cannot be discussed without considering the social conditions that Syrian women face in the aftermath of war. Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, more than 5.6 million Syrians have been displaced abroad, while millions of others have continued to live under humanitarian crisis conditions within the country (UNHCR, 2020). The war has not only devastated the country’s physical infrastructure but has also transformed family structures, social relations, and gender roles within society. In this context, Syrian women have moved beyond traditional domestic roles and become involved in various forms of social, economic, and even political engagement because of family loss, forced displacement, and the necessity of sustaining household survival (Yalim & Critelli, 2022). Ahmad al-Shara’s speeches are noteworthy because of their deliberate use of Arabic linguistic forms that explicitly affirm gender representation through the paired mention of masculine and feminine forms. This strategy is evident in constructions such as *al-sūriyyīn wa al-sūriyyāt* (“Syrian men and women”), *al-mu‘taqalīn wa al-mu‘taqalāt* (“male and female detainees”), *al-mu‘adhdhabīn wa al-mu‘adhdhabāt* (“male and female torture victims”), and *al-mafqūdīn wa al-mafqūdāt* (“missing men and women”), as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4
Representation of Women

No	Arabic Text	English Translation
1	موج كلمتي إلى كل السوريين والسوريات	I address my speech to all Syrian men and women.
2	تحررت سوريا بالشهداء والمعتقلين والمعتقلات والمعذبين والمعذبات والمفقودين والمفقودات وجميع أمهاتهم الثكالي	Syria was liberated through the sacrifices of the martyrs, male and female detainees, male and female victims of torture, missing men and women, and all their grieving mothers.

At the textual level, the repetition of masculine–feminine pairs creates a strong rhetorical rhythm and functions as a strategy of emphasis. Each category of suffering and sacrifice is mentioned twice in different gender forms, ensuring that women’s experiences are not absorbed into generic categories often associated with male experiences. As a result, women are represented not as supplementary or symbolic figures but as active participants within the narrative of national struggle. Within the context of Arab political discourse, this strategy is relatively uncommon. Traditional political speeches frequently reproduce hegemonic masculinity by positioning men as the primary actors in conflict, heroism, and sacrifice. Women, when mentioned, are often represented implicitly or symbolically, for example, as “mothers of the nation” or purely emotional figures. By clearly naming women as victims of detention, torture, and forced disappearance, al-Shara broadens the scope of female representation in political discourse.

At the level of discursive practice, the use of gender-inclusive language functions as a strategy of affiliation. Al-Shara aims to include all segments of Syrian society by openly acknowledging women's experiences within the official national narrative. Such a strategy is particularly significant in a post-conflict context, where leadership legitimacy depends not only on political authority but also on the capacity to recognize the collective trauma experienced by diverse social groups.

From an emotional perspective, the explicit reference to women, particularly through the phrase *ummihātihim al-thaklā* (“their grieving mothers”), evokes profound empathy. The maternal figure operates as a symbol of universal suffering that transcends political and ideological divisions. By positioning women at the center of collective emotional experience, the speech generates a powerful affective resonance while softening narratives of violence that have traditionally been dominated by masculine imagery. Accordingly, the representation of women in Ahmad al-Shara’s speeches reflects more than symbolic inclusivity. It constitutes a discursive strategy for constructing moral and emotional legitimacy within a society undergoing social reconstruction. Gender-inclusive language functions as a political instrument for unifying collective memories of suffering and broadening public support during a period of political transition.

Discursive Practice

At the level of discursive practice, Ahmad al-Shara’s speeches can be understood as products of a highly specific socio-political context, namely the transitional period following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in January 2025. As a political figure who did not emerge from the structures of the former state and who had previously served as a leader of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an armed opposition group, al-Shara faced

significant challenges in establishing political legitimacy. Consequently, political speeches became a primary medium through which symbolic authority could be constructed, a new leadership identity could be articulated, and Syria's future direction could be envisioned.

From the perspective of discourse production, al-Shara's speeches were carefully put together using formal, systematic, and emotionally charged rhetorical structures. The language choices show a mix of political, religious, and nationalist tones. This suggests that the speeches were not merely spontaneous expressions but strategically designed texts intended to fulfill multiple functions simultaneously: alleviating collective trauma, fostering hope, and consolidating political support. Within Fairclough's framework, this process of discourse production cannot be separated from al-Shara's position as a new political actor who must negotiate and reconstruct his public image before a society fragmented by years of conflict. A significant shift in discursive strategy emerges when comparing the political discourse of Bashar al-Assad, Syria's former president. [Gaber \(2020\)](#) argues that Assad's wartime speeches primarily focused on narratives of external threats and the legitimization of state authority through security-oriented rhetoric. In contrast, Ahmad al-Shara constructs a discourse centered on internal reconciliation and the collective suffering experienced by Syrian society.

Regarding discourse distribution, al-Shara's speeches were delivered publicly and broadcast through major Arabic-language media outlets, including Al Jazeera Arabic, Al Arabiya, and Al Hadath. Beyond their full-length broadcasts, the speeches were also redistributed in the form of short video clips across social media platforms. This pattern of distribution demonstrates the adaptation of political discourse to contemporary media logic, in which political messages are consumed not only as complete texts but also as fragmented visual content that highlights emotionally and symbolically significant segments. Consequently, al-Shara's discourse undergoes a process of recontextualization, transforming from official state speeches into media content that can be easily shared and consumed across geographical boundaries.

From the perspective of discourse consumption, the audience of Ahmad al-Shara's speeches is broad and heterogeneous. Domestically, the speeches address Syrians across different social classes, age groups, and genders. Calls for struggle, responsibility, and participation in national reconstruction indicate that audiences are positioned not as passive spectators but as active agents in the process of rebuilding the nation. The explicit inclusion of both masculine and feminine linguistic forms further suggests an effort to incorporate women as recognized members of the political community. The speeches also aim at people outside of Syria, such as Syrians living abroad, members of the Syrian diaspora, the general Arab public, and Muslims all over the world. The consistent use of religious preambles, prayers, and references to Islamic values reflects this broader orientation. Such strategies expand the reach of discourse consumption, enabling al-Shara's speeches to function not only as domestic political communication but also as symbolic messages directed toward the Arab and Muslim worlds concerning the ideological identity of Syria's transitional government. The primary objective of this discursive practice is to establish trust and legitimacy amid political uncertainty. Through narratives of collective suffering, hope, and national healing, al-Shara seeks to position himself not merely as a holder of political authority but as a moral and spiritual leader. The metaphor of Syria as a wounded body and the representation of the leader as a servant reinforce an image of leadership oriented toward care, recovery, and reconciliation rather than domination. Accordingly, the discursive practice reflected in Ahmad al-Shara's

speeches demonstrates that the production, distribution, and consumption of political discourse constitute strategic processes for constructing symbolic authority. These speeches are not simply delivered; they are carefully designed to generate public trust and affirm al-Shara's position as a transitional leader possessing both moral and political legitimacy.

Sociocultural Practice

At the level of sociocultural practice, Ahmad al-Shara's speeches should be understood as discursive responses to the socio-political conditions of post-war Syria. Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2011, Syria has experienced extensive social devastation, marked by the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the displacement of millions of people (Fleck, 2024). Political and military fragmentation involving numerous armed groups, both domestic and international, has weakened state institutions while simultaneously disrupting the social fabric of Syrian society. Within this situational context, discourse does not function as a neutral text; rather, it operates as a form of social action intended to respond to collective trauma, leadership vacuums, and crises of state legitimacy.

The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in late 2025 created a new political space that had previously been inaccessible. The weakening of the regime resulted not only from internal popular pressure but also from the decline of strategic support from external actors such as Russia and Iran. The opposition coalition led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) capitalized on this situation to assume control and establish a transitional government (Staff, 2024). Within this context, Ahmad al-Shara's speeches function as a primary medium for articulating narratives of political transition, reconciliation, and national renewal. At the situational level, therefore, these speeches can be interpreted as direct responses to the crisis and uncertainty that emerged in the aftermath of regime change. At the institutional level, the transformation of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) as a political actor is inseparable from al-Shara's discourse. Initially emerging as an armed opposition group with jihadi-Salafi ideological roots, HTS has gradually repositioned itself as a political force characterized by stronger nationalist orientations and a greater emphasis on territorial stability (Drevon & Haenni, 2025). Al-Shara's discursive strategies reflect this shift by emphasizing national unity, public service, and moral legitimacy instead of the rhetoric of global jihad. However, this repositioning does not mean that it has completely given up on its Salafi ideological roots. Instead, al-Shara's speeches reveal an ongoing negotiation between HTS's institutional religious identity and the political demands of a modern nation-state. In other words, the discourse produced is simultaneously shaped by the institution from which it originates and employed as a mechanism for redefining that institution's public image.

At the level of the social system, Ahmad al-Shara's speeches reflect an effort to respond to the transformation of a deeply polarized Syrian society. Prolonged conflict has intensified sectarian divisions and widened the social distance among Sunni, Shi'a, Christian, Kurdish, and other minority communities. Within this context, political discourse functions not only as an instrument of political communication but also as a means of reconstructing collective identity. Al-Shara's speeches seek to rebuild a Syrian national imagination by emphasizing shared suffering, religiosity as a unifying value, and hope for a common future. This strategy illustrates how discourse can be employed to reorganize social relations and foster symbolic cohesion within a fragmented society.

Public responses to al-Shara's speeches further demonstrate how discourse is consumed and interpreted within a changing social environment. Enthusiastic receptions in cities such as Damascus and Homs, as well as among Syrian diaspora communities in Germany, France, and Turkey, suggest that these speeches successfully generated collective emotions of hope and optimism (Staff, 2024). However, discourse consumption was not homogeneous. Secular groups and religious minorities tended to respond more cautiously, particularly due to concerns regarding al-Shara's ideological background and the historical trajectory of HTS. This demonstrates that political discourse always operates within a social field characterized by negotiation, resistance, and tension, rather than functioning as a purely one-directional instrument of domination. Accordingly, the sociocultural dimension of analysis demonstrates that Ahmad al-Shara's speeches constitute responses to the transformation of Syria's post-conflict social and political structures. These discourses function to redefine national identity, negotiate the institutional legitimacy of HTS, and promote social cohesion within a society that remains deeply fragmented.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Ahmad al-Shara's speeches function as strategic discursive instruments for constructing leadership legitimacy during Syria's post-authoritarian political transition. Applying Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework, the findings reveal that at the textual level, al-Shara consistently employs religious expressions, figurative language, and inclusive linguistic strategies to establish emotional proximity with audiences while projecting an image of leadership characterized by humility, service, and nationalism. At the level of discursive practice, these speeches are systematically produced and disseminated through various media channels as part of a broader effort to shape public perceptions and reinforce al-Shara's role as a unifying figure during a period of crisis. At the sociocultural level, the discourse constructed by al-Shara reflects the political transformation of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham from a jihadi-oriented armed movement into a political actor seeking broader national legitimacy. The speeches serve to address the collective trauma resulting from prolonged conflict while simultaneously reconstructing Syrian national identity through narratives of religiosity, shared suffering, and hope for the future. These findings affirm that, in post-conflict contexts, language functions not merely as a medium of political communication but also as a form of social practice capable of bridging social fragmentation and shaping new directions for national discourse. Future research is encouraged to explore gender representation in Arab political discourse in greater depth, particularly through the lens of feminist critical discourse analysis. Further studies may also investigate how transitional political speeches are received and interpreted by minority communities and Syrian diaspora populations, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between discourse, identity, and political legitimacy in post-conflict societies.

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