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## A Critical Discourse Analysis of Former Iranian President's Speeches in the Time of Covid-19: The Case of Holy Sites Lockdown

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### Abstract

This study takes a critical look at the purposive manipulation of discourse and rhetoric by the former Iranian President — Hassan Rouhani — when announcing the lockdown of holy sites during the COVID-19 crisis. A discourse analysis with a qualitative design was applied to study the political dimension of the discourse. This study is framed within the domain of systemic functional linguistics mood systems and the classical Aristotelian rhetoric trio — logos, ethos, and pathos. The results revealed that Rouhani mainly used the declarative mood in his speeches which performed three main functions: statements of opinion, statements of fact, and indirect directives. From a rhetorical perspective, Rouhani applied ethos considerably more than pathos and logos as a way to increase the credibility of his words while persuading the audience. Moreover, the researchers noticed that the former president employed multiple strategies to build pathos and ethos with the audience. These findings can suggest and encourage novel future research directions.

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, discourse analysis, Hassan Rouhani, Iran, political discourse, rhetoric, SFL

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## 1. Introduction

In December 2019, the World Health Organization reported that an unknown and novel pneumonia was detected in China. The disease, commonly known as COVID-19, soon turned into one of the worst global health crises in recent history. During the pandemic, lockdown measures were implemented across various public spaces, such as schools, universities, stadiums, transportation sites, and malls; it changed people's lives in ways unimaginable before (Bertrand et al., 2020). Consequently, businesses, including education, shifted their operations online to adapt to the new circumstances (Chau & Hieu, 2023). During serious situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, fear and uncertainty can be as dangerous as the virus itself, increasing the responsibilities of local political leaders. They use or manipulate language to communicate with people; thus, the significance of the language "as a means of communication, a means of presenting and shaping arguments ..." in critical times increases (Beard, 2000, p. 29). Therefore, it is apparent that language is not by itself a robust system; the strength is added to it by the users (e.g., politicians and debaters) of that language (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014).

Hassan Rouhani, the former Iranian President (2013–2021), was a prominent figure in making decisions regarding anti-COVID-19 measures after consulting his advisors. He had to attend regular sessions, called 'Setade Meli Moqabele Ba Corona' or The National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus (NTAC), and announce the committee's decisions to the public as the chief executive. Like other countries, his government had to take unprecedented steps to combat the pandemic. Being both a religious and political leader, the ex-president also had to announce the holy sites lockdown. This decision was met with fierce disagreements from both the religious leaders and their supporters. For instance, Ayatollah Rafati Naeeni, an important religious figure in Qom (Iran's religious capital), harangued Rouhani in a letter, saying, "After apologizing to people for what is done, you must reconsider holy sites lockdown and let people attend religious ceremonies," (Hamshahrionline, 2020 [a popular Iranian news website]).

Rouhani announced the decisions knowing that many were looking critically at every word pronounced and that he had to be careful in his choice of discursive strategies and rhetoric. With all this pressure on Rouhani's shoulders during that chaotic time, analyzing the discursive strategies and investigating how he intended to persuade the audience in his speeches is both important and necessary.

As Chilton and Schäffner (1996) stated, political discourse analysis (PDA) focuses on strategically using political concepts and keywords to achieve specific political aims. Rachman and Yunianti (2017, p. 1) add that “political strategy deals with many perspective strategies where the basic strategy is the way of the purpose invented and used to obtain the objective”. This study, therefore, takes a critical look at the discursive strategies and rhetoric used by the former Iranian president when dealing with holy sites lockdown. We aim to, as Wilson (2001, p. 410) puts it, “seek out how language choice is manipulated for specific political effect and almost all levels of linguistics are involved.” Out of the various theoretical approaches to critical discourse analysis (CDA), the authors have informed the current inquiry into systematic functional linguistics (SFL) and classic Aristotelian rhetoric to achieve the objectives of this study.

## 2. Theoretical Frameworks

### 2.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics

Introduced first by Halliday in 1985, SFL has been an essential model within applied linguistics classifications. SFL and CDA have shared strong ties throughout their development and are detected together in various articles. With extra attention to language uses and social and informative functions, researchers have frequently used SFL in the domain of CDA (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2009; Jahedi & Abdullah, 2012; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014). SFL focuses on the utilization of language by people to attain everyday communicative goals and on how this utilization of language establishes social worlds in and through language (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014). how different grammatical structures can achieve a variety of goals in different contexts of use can also be explained through the lens of SFL. Halliday (1978) classified language users' meanings into three broad categories or metafunctions — i.e., Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual.

According to Bloor and Bloor (2004), the ideational function of language helps us express, form, and comprehend our experiences and perceptions of the world through language. Halliday (1971) believes that language users represent their real-world experiences, including those of the inner world of their consciousness such as their reactions or perceptions through this function. The interpersonal function, which is expressed through modality and mood system, gives language users the privilege to take part in communication acts, participate in various

speech events, adopt different communication roles (e.g., informing & questioning), and achieve/fulfill different purposes based on the speaker's motives. The interpersonal metafunction enables users to express and comprehend emotions, different behaviors, and judgments. What is said or written is associated with the real world and other linguistic events through textual function. The textual metafunction is about the verbal world, especially the flow of information in a text, and is concerned with clauses as messages. There are associations and connections made by language between itself and the situation. The textual meaning entails how discourse is made of language. It is realized by the theme/rheme and information structure (Halliday, 1971; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004).

Halliday (1981) explains that mood is parallel to interpersonal communication, including three grammatical categories — speech function, modality, and tone. Mood can be defined as assuming and assigning communication roles to the speaker and the addressee affected by their relationship. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) state that mood “is a system of the clause, not of the verbal group or of the verb” (p. 114). In this system, a clause type can be indicative or imperative. The indicative clause which is classified into interrogative and declarative is associated with “the exchange of information (proposition negotiation), while the imperative clause relates to the performance of an action to provide services or to exchange goods (proposal negotiation)” (Fanani et al., 2020a, p. 2). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) explain that using a mood system, one can analyze a text “by showing the functional organization of its structure, and by showing what meaningful choices have been made, each one seen in the context of what might have been meant but was not” (2013, p. 24).

## 2.2. *Rhetoric*

Rhetoric is generally known for its “focus on persuasion, and implicit in any definition of rhetoric is the notion of power” (Higgins & Walker, 2012, p.197). Social power is a primary concept in rhetoric as it indicates how this power can boost shaping peoples' interests and beliefs. In this sense, many CDA scholars have been inspired by the celebrated Aristotelian Rhetoric, the earliest reliable form of analysis of persuasive discourse and arguments for analyzing rhetorical techniques used by important social actors such as politicians. In political discourse, rhetoric is used, based on the speakers' hidden intentions, to enhance the persuasive power of

the speech by appealing to logical reasoning (logos), emotions (pathos), and credibility (ethos) (McCormack, 2014). This classic trio increases the compelling power of a good persuasive speech on the addressees and aids the speaker in reaching their envisaged and expected outcome. Brief definitions of this trio are in order.

### 2.2.1. *Logos*

Holt and Macpherson (2010, p. 26) define logos in terms of “the clarity, integrity, and utility of an argument being put forward through verbal argument and reasoning.” In simple words, logos can be understood as an intentional argument used to persuade the targeted audience by employing reason or logic. In discourse, logos are formed by adopting analogies, citing famous sources (Fanani et al., 2020a), or making the benefit of argumentation, logic, warrants/justifications, strong claims, data evidence, and examples (Higgins & Walker, 2012).

### 2.2.2. *Pathos*

Pathos is related to appealing to the audience's feelings and emotions. On the importance of feelings as the basis of judgment and decision-making, Schwarz (2000) explains that the audience's cognitive processes are under the impact of moods and feelings. The speaker can arouse positive and negative emotions in the audience to achieve pathos depending on their purpose. Therefore, adopting pathos as a mode of proof, the persuader needs to consider the motives that can arouse anger, peace, irritation, and pride (Holt & Macpherson, 2010). Aristotle believed that “persuasion may come through the hearers when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgments when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile” (Aristotle as cited in McCormack, 2014, p.139).

### 2.2.3. *Ethos*

While trying to persuade someone, we can benefit from credibility to a great extent. In Aristotle's view, should the argument be offered by people of reputation, the audience is likelier to believe what they hear. Roughly speaking,

through ethos, the speaker establishes the necessary credibility and moral character for persuasion, which shows the importance of the perceived character of the speaker in discourse. Ethos can be achieved by utilizing “similitude, deference, expertise, self-criticism, and the appeal to the inclination to succeed” (Higgins & Walker, 2012, p. 197).

### **3. Previous Studies**

Political discourse has received significant attention from many scholars who have used different approaches in their studies such as CDA (Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015), CDA in combination with SFL (Kamalu & Agangan, 2011), and political linguistics (Pu, 2007). These studies can be classified based on parameters, such as the interlocutors, the context of use, the framework, and the methodology for analysis (e.g., Fairclough’s, Van Dijk’s). One strand of this research is analyzing discourses used by people in power, a topic of major interest to many researchers in the CDA and PDA fields. Many CDA studies have examined the discourse used in campaign speeches for presidential elections (Wang, 2010), inaugural speeches (Mirzaei et al., 2017), and speeches dealing with terrorism or war (De Castella et al., 2009). Some of those studies will be described here.

Wang (2010) analyzed former US President, Barack Obama’s presidential speeches mainly from a transitivity and modality point of view. He aimed to examine the political purposes beyond Obama’s speeches and understand how language serves ideology and power by using SFL as the main foundation of CDA. The author analyzed two speech samples for his paper: Obama’s victory speech and his inaugural address. After analyzing these two speech samples, Wang points out several points about Obama’s speeches. First, it was noticeable that Obama’s language was easily understandable and colloquial by using simple terms, words, and sentences in his speech. This feature can shorten the distance between the speaker and the audience. Second, based on the transitivity analysis, they realized that the President uses material processes in his speech. This is to persuade his people to trust his government by showing them what they have already accomplished and what they are planning to achieve during the four following years. By employing modal verbs, tense, and first-person pronouns, it was evident that Obama tried to lure his addressees into ready acceptance of his political speech. By using short sentences with first-person pronouns and engaging religious beliefs simultaneously, he successfully shortened the gap

between himself and his audience. These strategies have helped him persuade people he addressed to a large amount.

In a case study, Sharififar and Rahimi (2015) examined Barak Obama and Hassan Rouhani's speeches to survey 'the art of linguistic spin' in these two presidents' political speeches at the UN, based on SFL methodology. They used transitivity systems and modality as the basis of the study to manifest how they have incorporated ideology and power in their political speech. After analyzing the speech samples, these authors noticed the differences in the utilization of imperative mood in their discourses. First, just like it was pointed out in the previous study, Obama's colloquial language with its simple words and sentences caught the authors' attention. Unlike Obama, Rouhani had a formal tone and used more complex expressions. Material process, as a process of doing and happening, was evident in both presidents' discourse. This was emphasized regarding transitivity analysis. Third, these two politicians' use of modal verbs suggested their stand to achieve their goal. Their simple language was also for making their audience feel closer to the presidents. By using verbs such as 'will' and 'can,' Obama and Rouhani wanted to ensure that people will keep faith in their government in the future. The two presidents employed personal pronouns to establish intimacy and closeness with the audience.

Mirzaei et al. (2017) explored rhetorical and discursive devices in Hassan Rouhani's presidential campaign to persuade people and voters in favor of their political ideology and the moderate party. In this study, the authors focused on several dimensions or, as they put it, 'levels of language' of Rouhani's discourse. They defined levels of language as a unique selection of lexical elements, the level of sound, and special syntactic structures. The authors employed Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional analytical framework to analyze the discourse-power relationship in Rouhani's speech and the rhetorical devices' socio-cultural, religious, and political values. Results indicated that Rouhani influenced public opinion in support of his party by employing parallel lines, tripartite constructions, alliteration, and metaphor. Moreover, he took steps toward intriguing the emotions of the listeners and voters by insisting on using visual symbols and dynamic metaphors. Another evident point in Rouhani's discourse was that while blaming and criticizing his predecessor (Ahmadinejad) for the country's socio-economic and cultural situation, Rouhani used many devices and strategies to present himself as the only hope remaining that could change this

situation by portraying himself, his plans, and his ideology as being moderate and different from Ahmadinejad's fundamentalist perspectives.

In a study similar to the present one, Fanani et al. (2020a) examined the grammar of persuasion used in Donald Trump's speeches from the SFL mood analysis perspective to reveal how the former US president composed his ethos, pathos, and logos. The data were gathered from one of his speeches on Jerusalem. After conducting an in-depth qualitative discourse analysis, the authors found out that Trump's speeches highlighted three points. First, the high use of declarative moods in the former president's speeches was primarily employed to convey information directly to the hearers. To prevent any distance between the audience and the speaker, Trump avoided using imperative and interrogative statements. Ethos, pathos, and logos, as rhetorical devices, were used multiple times in his declarative statements. Second, the declarative moods used by the president at the time, instead of just carrying information, sometimes functioned as indirect directives, which is a non-typical function for this mood type. Third, after analyzing the speech samples, the researchers spotted using various negative elements mainly in the form of blaming the previous US president, Barak Obama, in speech clauses, especially in statements functioning as logos and pathos. Moreover, through the use of finite clauses, the representation of such negative statements was also detectable. Fanani et al. (2020a) suggested that "when talking about the purpose of his decision, Israel, and the Middle East, he (Trump) commonly used positive polarity; but when talking about previous US presidents, he frequently used negative polarity" (p. 6).

In yet another study Fanani et al. (2020b) examined the grammar of persuasion in an article called "The Kafir's blood is halal for you, so shed it" published by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The researchers employed a discourse analysis with a qualitative approach and Kellermann and Cole's (1994) classification of compliance-gaining strategy frameworks was employed to realize how discourse in this article was purposefully utilized to persuade the readers to grow a sense of abhorrence for Kafirs (nonbelievers in Allah). The results of this study indicated declarative mood (98%) as the absolute choice of the writers of the article, with the interrogative mood being used only once (2%). As the authors suggested, declarative mood presented writers as the carriers of information without creating a distance from the audience. These declarative statements had three main functions: statements of opinion, statements of fact, and indirect



directives. Statements of opinion were composed using two primary techniques: “(1) presenting the meaning/the characteristic of something, and (2) giving an evaluative opinion of something” (p. 3). Statements of fact were supported by one technique, ‘telling about someone saying something.’ Three strategies were employed while using declarative moods functioning as ‘indirect directive,’ viz. “(1) presenting the obligation of doing something (2) presenting the prohibition of doing something (3) giving suggestion”. Moreover, the single interrogative mood used in the text also functioned as an indirect command. Besides these grammatical persuasion techniques, the results revealed six practices of compliance-gaining strategies in the text (see Fanani et al., 2020b for a complete review). These strategies include logical empirical (quoting Muslim scholars’ statements on Allah and the prophet), appealing to authority (mentioning Allah and the Islamic prophet as powerful sources), moral appeal (referring to the Muslims’ ethical standards), assertion (directly asserting what Muslims must and must not do), and duty (referring to the obligations of Muslims).

## 4. Method

### 4.1. *Theoretical Framework*

This study is framed within the domain of Halliday’s SFL mood system and the classical Aristotelian rhetoric trio (logos, ethos, & pathos). The reason for selecting the SFL framework was that it can examine the power and ideology in the detailed analysis of each clause in the texts, in authentic contexts of language use (Martin, 2000). SFL examines the systematic patterns of choice for meaning-making. Moreover, Aristotle’s Rhetoric as “the earliest authoritative analysis of persuasive discourse and argumentative techniques” (Frost, 1994, p.86), is an excellent framework to examine a persuader’s logical, credibility-related, and emotional appeals (Higgins & Walker, 2012). Therefore, these frameworks suit the purpose of this study to analyze the purposive manipulation of discourse by Rouhani from both a meaning-wise and rhetorical perspective.

### 4.2. *Corpus Design*

For the sake of this study, a corpus of political discourse was compiled, which consists of reports of the ex-president’s speeches during NTAC meetings and

sessions, all recorded and published on the official website of Iran's President ([www.President.ir](http://www.President.ir)), from which the data was collected. We collected all the reports dating from March 21, 2020, to May 06, 2020; this is the period during which the issue of holy sites lockdown was first announced to the public until their opening later that year. This initial large corpus, which was in Persian, comprised fourteen reports, transcribed into detailed written forms without correcting or tempering, totaling 883 sentences consisting of 728 major clauses and 214 minor clauses (26500 words & 108000 characters).

Out of the initial corpus, the session reports in which the former President raises the topic of this article were identified and extracted, then translated into English. The new corpus consists of six reports, totaling 17000 words, which were translated from Persian into English by two professional English translators, then reviewed by a native speaker of English, and finally compared with the English text of the same reports existing on the English version of the original website. The samples were then analyzed based on the noted frameworks using MaxQda 2022 version software. To establish inter-rater reliability and to make sure of the accuracy of the analysis as well as reduce the subjectivity in move identification based on content or functions, the authors of this article independently analyzed the texts. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was used to calculate the interrater agreement between the two researchers in their evaluation, which turned out to be 0.8. Moreover, to ensure that the quality criteria for qualitative research are met, the researchers followed the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies as suggested by Korstjens and Moser (2018).

## 5. Results

The qualitative data analysis revealed several discursive and rhetorical strategies employed by the ex-president in his speeches on holy-sites lockdown. The results indicated that Rouhani mainly used the declarative mood in his speeches which performed three main functions: statements of opinion, statements of fact, and indirect directives. From a rhetorical perspective, Rouhani applied ethos considerably more than pathos and logos. Moreover, the researchers noticed that the former president employed multiple strategies to persuade the audience in favor of his decisions. Below a detailed analysis of these speeches in terms of rhetorical strategies is in order.

### 5.1. Ethos

Rouhani appealed to ethos to establish his credibility among the addressees (Hartelius & Browning, 2008) and, therefore, increase his words' persuasive power (Higgins & Walker, 2012). Speaker credibility together with audience values are two facets of ethical appeal. When a speaker makes an ethical appeal, they try to tap into the values or ideologies the audience finds valuable (e.g., tradition, justice, and religious or philosophical values) (Gagich & Zickel, 2018). In a similar vein, using declarative mood forms, Rouhani set out to create the ethos in speeches by exploiting multiple techniques, such as presenting an evaluative opinion, appealing to religion, and supporting his ideas by referring to the higher authority, the Ministry of Health, and NTAC.

**Table 1**  
*The Mood Type and Speech Function Realization in Ethos Clauses*

Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 1
Declarative	Indirect directive	Asserting expectation	"... but where it (the gatherings) is not obligatory (Wajib), and it's (Mustahab), people should be careful, even about the holy sites that are very sacred to us, and so they are of interest to our people, but here everyone should take medical and health advice seriously anyway."
Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 2
Declarative	Statement of opinion	Presenting an evaluative opinion	<i>In my opinion, mosques that follow protocols are of two beauties: both spiritual beauty and the beauty of order.</i>
Declarative	Statement of opinion	Presenting an evaluative opinion	<i>I'd say that in the mosques, a Mustahab act is happening and a Wajib (obligatory) act. Those who are praying in the congregation while keeping the social distance are following the obligatory act. The fact that he has come to pray in the mosque is following the recommended act.</i>

As evident from Table 1 (Excerpt 1), the concept of Wajib (a compulsory act for Muslims in the Islamic doctrine) and Mustahab (a desirable act that the Sacred

Islamic Law appreciates) has been used regarding peoples' gatherings in general in a declarative mood form. In this manner, Hassan Rouhani cleverly reminded his audience that, once gatherings are unnecessary, they are not *Wajib* and they must be avoided. He employed an indirect directive function to emphasize the necessity to follow advised health care and avoid visiting these sacred sites during the COVID-19 pandemic. He supported his request via Islamic references, thus avoiding direct imperative clauses and forming an argument using suggestions. Appealing to famous religious doctrine is regarded as one of the outstanding specifications of religious leaders' discourse (Hook, 2007) to rationalize their arguments and decisions. The ex-president engaged the audience's values by making various mentions of religious concepts to increase the trustworthiness of his discourse.

*Wajib* and *Mustahab*, as religious concepts, were also mentioned by the former president while raising the issue of the re-opening of mosques and holy sites (Table 1, Excerpt 2). Rouhani wisely made use of these concepts, starting with declarative statements that have 'I' as the subject. Trying to ask people implicitly to observe advised health protocols in holy sites, he employed a statement formed as a personal opinion rather than an imperative clause. In this way, Rouhani relied on ethos by speaking of 'spiritual beauty and the beauty of order' in attending mosques while following these protocols. By comparing the spiritual rank of 'attending holy sites' and 'following protocols', Rouhani emphasized the importance of the latter indirectly. This statement is in the form of a friendly personal opinion so that the audience would feel closer to the speaker and therefore, be persuaded more easily. Rouhani used the fact that in Islamic perspectives performing congregational prayer and attending holy sites are counted as recommended, yet not obligatory (i.e., *Mustahab*). It is, however, asserted by Rouhani that complying with health and prevention protocols is regarded as an obligatory act for Muslims (i.e., *Wajib*). So, as noted before, by appealing to religious doctrines and using Islamic terminologies, the ex-president establishes his speech's trustworthiness and credibility.

**Table 2**  
*The Mood Type and Speech Function Realization in Ethos Clauses*

Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 3
Declarative	Indirect directive	Appealing to authority and religion	<i>Unnecessary gatherings in our country, it is advised by our National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus not to have these unnecessary gatherings. Meanwhile, when there is a necessary gathering, that is a different issue.</i>
<b>Mood type</b>	<b>Speech function</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Excerpt 4</b>
Declarative	Indirect directive	Appealing to authority and religion	<i>And from a religious perspective, because that decision is approved by the Supreme National Security Council and the supreme leader has also approved it and has said that decisions must be obeyed. Therefore, everyone should observe it as a necessary and obligatory matter.</i>
<b>Mood type</b>	<b>Speech function</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Excerpt 5</b>
Declarative	Statement of fact	Appealing to authority and religion	<i>Look, we made good decisions, and to be fair, everyone did. You see, at some point, I was worried about society taking sides. There were no different sides Al-hamdulillah. There was a time when we were concerned about the polarization of religion and science. To have someone say, Sir, don't go there, stop gatherings. But someone claims that our religion recommends that we must go and gather. . Our scholars, our religious leaders, our elders, and our seminaries stepped in immediately. They didn't let this polarization happen. The polarization between religion and science, religion and expertise, between spirituality and scientific and material principles, was an awful thing to happen that al-Hamdallah did not.</i>
<b>Mood type</b>	<b>Speech function</b>	<b>Technique</b>	<b>Excerpt 6</b>
Declarative	Statement of fact	Denial/ presenting an example	<i>In our country, Al-Hamdullah, we have neither a fight between life and religion nor bread or life. None of these fights exist here. Our religion, our lives, and our bread are all important. You have seen that we had Ahya-night, we had Friday prayers in the places in the white zone, and inshallah, after the month of Ramadan, the holy places will be re-opened.</i>

Another technique through which Hassan Rouhani tried to add to the credibility of his discourse is by citing NTAC and appealing to the higher authority. In this way, Rouhani utilized an indirect directive function to persuade

people to avoid gatherings (Table 2, Excerpts 3 & 4). Furthermore, Rouhani attempted to communicate the credibility and authority of his discourse by referring to the Supreme National Security Council and Ayatollah Khamenei's approval of the NTAC decisions. Ayatollah Khamenei as the Twelver Shi'ah Marja (highest rank among Islamic leaders and scholars), the second and current supreme leader of Iran, the Commander-in-Chief, and the ultimate authority of all the Armed Forces, is known to be the prominent figure in making all the critical decisions in the country. Since the Supreme National Security Council and the supreme leader have approved their validity, Rouhani asserts that it is logical to observe their decisions, which can also be taken allegedly as building logos. To this end, the former Iranian president used a declarative mood as an indirect directive.

In Excerpt 5, Rouhani broached the subject of general doubts about the polarization of science and religion. Besides admitting his concerns about polarization which functions as a statement of fact, Rouhani guaranteed that polarization is not an issue and denied the disagreement between the religious leaders and the politicians. By 'religion vs. science', the former president indirectly targets the issue of holy sites and other religious ceremonies, which is later being apparent from his example (*To have someone say, Sir, don't go there, stop gatherings. But someone claims that our religion recommends that we must go and gather.*). Again, he tried to confute the fears of polarization by creating a sense of trust in the addressees by appealing to religion and authority. He then assured people that there are no such obstacles and disagreements in his country by using a negative declarative mood that is instantly pursued by promises of equal consideration between religion, science, and an analogy of bread, and life. This aids in developing ethos in the ex-president's discourse. Rouhani, in Excerpt 6, aimed at expanding the credibility of his words by mentioning religious examples, the Ahya-Night ceremony (an important ceremony among Muslims) and Friday prayers, that were held in the government-designated white zones, with a promise of re-opening holy sites after the month of Ramadan aiming to create emotions of anticipation and hope for the future.

## 5.2. Pathos

Pathos, as the emotional bridge between the speaker and the addressees, has been established by Rouhani by arousing both positive and negative emotions in the

audience depending on the purpose of his speeches. He adopted several discursive strategies to connect with the audience to increase the persuasive effects of his discourse by triggering the audience's feelings. These strategies included *negative other-presentation* (derogation), *positive self-presentation* (boasting), *praising*, and *presenting a suggestion/warning*.

**Table 3***The Mood Type and Speech Function Realization in Pathos Clauses*

Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 7
Declarative	Statement of opinion	Negative <i>other-presentation</i> (derogation)	<i>We're seeing now in Europe and other places that advising and at the same time employing the armed forces have a little bit of effect ... are standing next to paper towels in one of the most important European countries.</i>
Declarative	Statement of opinion	Positive <i>self-presentation</i> (boasting)	<i>So, it shows that our nation is a nation that, despite sanctions and struggling with difficulties, cares about each other ...</i>
Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 8
Declarative	Statement of fact	Negative <i>other-presentation</i> (derogation)	<i>Now you see in America what bipolar has taken place. A strange dipole between different parties and factions, and the same issues that should be re-opening, should not, sooner, later, what a tremendous bipolar did not occur.</i>
Declarative	Statement of fact	Positive <i>self-presentation</i> (boasting)/ Negative <i>other-presentation</i> (derogation)	<i>Alhamdulillah, these issues did not occur in our country, and things were done well and considered. At the same time, in some countries, this coronavirus is not the only problem of health, life, and health alone.</i>

A significant aspect of Rouhani's speech, as Van Dijk (2006) puts it, is a general strategy of positive self-presentation (boasting) and negative other-presentation (derogation), which is noticeable in several parts of Rouhani's lectures. For example, Rouhani shifted the attention to other countries by talking about the appalling situation they are dealing with (Table 3, Excerpt 7). This technique is apparent in his example of an important European country, as he puts

it, that is experiencing a crisis over ‘toilet paper.’ By derogating the Western countries and emphasizing the better conditions in Iran to overcome the crisis, despite the sanctions and other difficulties, he continually builds pathos by creating a sense of pride and comfort in his audience. Moreover, before presenting this example in a declarative mood, he builds the credibility of this comparison by stating that ‘one of his friends’ has sent a valid ‘picture’ of those incidents. Rouhani uses these declarative clauses that function as stating facts. It is worth mentioning that rarely (if at all) the former Iranian President talked about the difficulties in the country. In Excerpt 8, Rouhani, shifts the focus of his lecture to the US, depicting a picture of a country that, unlike Iran, as he puts it, is severely struggling with the polarization of the society. Considering the complicated and hostile history between the USA and Iran, these declarative forms, again, offer a positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. This can be counted as appealing to the nationalist feelings of the audience and creating a sense of the reliability of measures that the government takes.

**Table 4***The Mood Type and Speech Function Realization in Pathos Clauses*

Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 9
Imperative	Directive	Cause and effect	<i>Talk to people more honestly and more accurately, their trust will increase. The more public cooperation, all the organizations, now if we have something to argue about, if we disagree, now it's not the time to fight.</i>
Declarative	Indirect directive	Presenting suggestion/ Warning	<i>InshAllah, we will fight at the right time. Arguments do not require much expertise; we will fight in time. This is not the time for this; it's time for everyone to unite. We all need to work together, and this cooperation and coordination of organizations increase people's trust. When people notice disagreement in what they hear, they lose their trust. Of course, we need to listen to people's voices as well...</i>
Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 10
Declarative	Statement of fact	Presenting complements/Praising	<i>"We've considered different stages of social distancing, and at every stage, people have been supportive at every level..."</i>



Another technique that the former president used is calling on the authorities and advising them to be honest, and more accurate to people. He urges them to be united by employing an imperative mood. In this way, Rouhani attempts to create a sense of trust among people. After assuring people that there is no disaccord and struggle among people in power, Rouhani stated that if there is a possibility of any such issues, they must be put off for the future. As shown in Table 4 (Excerpt 9) Rouhani again emphasizes that organizations' cooperation and coordination increase people's trust. This excerpt can indicate both pathos and ethos, in the sense that the imperative moods that he practices to address the authorities build ethos to enhance the validity of his discourse as he condemns dishonesty and inaccuracy. The declarative moods that he employs to illustrate the outcomes of honesty, accuracy, and cooperation create feelings of satisfaction and agreement among the audience. Moreover, as shown in (Excerpt 10), Rouhani also uses 'We' as the subject of his declarative statements to show that what he announces is not solely his opinions, but rather studied facts. This can also explicitly stress the intimacy between the addressees and the speaker and create a feeling of engagement. The following declarative clause forms pathos by praising people's support and cooperation.

### 5.3. Logos

Concerning holy sites, logos, as the clarity and integrity of the arguments (Holt & MacPherson, 2010), was rarely used by the ex-president. Yet, Hassan Rouhani has built his persuasive discourse upon logos while directly addressing holy sites and sanctuaries' lockdown to stress logic and reason beyond the decisions made.

**Table 5**

*The Mood Type and Speech Function Realization in Logos Clauses*

Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 11
Declarative	Statement of fact	Presenting claim	a <i>"The facilities of the Ministry of Health, although al-Hamdulillah, have been good and fine, at the same time, it is limited, and this is the basis of our work in making all decisions, this is one of the basics that we consider. For now, because it is Ramadan and we promised to come to a decision, before Ramadan 15th, and conduct a new study, we got to this point in this new study..."</i>

Mood type	Speech function	Technique	Excerpt 12
Declarative	Statement of fact	Argumentation	<i>And indeed, some of the sacred holy sites, if we were dealing with only their Sahn<sup>3</sup> itself, maybe the decision would have been a little easier. But when we say this holy-sites courtyard is open, then the journey to that city begins. When we say traveling can start, then the issue of train and bus (transportation) begins. When these issues come up, the hotel and the accommodation are also important, and their presence in the market is also an issue.</i>

It can be seen in Table 5 (Excerpt 11) that Rouhani tries to use a logical argument by mentioning the limitations of the facilities of the Ministry of Health without actually derogating them. Rouhani claims that they conduct studies as valid and reliable authority that should be followed, as the proof and logic beyond his decisions. As Higgins and Walker (2012) explain, making a claim is among the persuasive techniques to build logos. In Excerpt 12, employing a declarative cause-and-effect mood system, the ex-president made an argument and attempted to persuade his audience by appealing to logic. He mentions a chain reaction where one action (opening the holy-sites courtyard) would lead to a series of problems and implicitly argues why their committee should stand against the re-opening of the holy sites.

## 6. Discussion

Knowing beforehand that they must persuade others to accept new dogmas or beliefs, people consciously may design their discourse in a way that they might reach their purposes more easily (Johnstone, 2008). This is quite detectable, especially in political discourse. Dedaić (2006) suggested that persuading people rather than giving information to them or entertaining them is mainly the critical purpose of political speeches. Through utilizing Halliday's SFL perspectives and Aristotelian rhetorical analysis, this study sought to highlight the purposive manipulation of discourse by the former Iranian President while announcing the lockdown of the holy sites in the country during the Covid-19 pandemic

Two recurrent points were brought into the spotlight after conducting an in-depth analysis of the ex-president's speeches. First, from a rhetorical perspective, Rouhani applied ethos (56%) considerably more than pathos (28%) and logos

(16%) as a way to increase the credibility of his words while persuading the addressees. He tended to build ethos by utilizing multiple techniques, such as appealing to religion and higher authority and supporting his ideas by referring to the Ministry of Health and NTAC. Mirzaei et al. (2017) study of Hassan Rouhani's inaugural speech has also confirmed his use of religious concepts to reach out to the audience and increase the credibility of his discourse. Pathos, the second most used rhetorical technique by Rouhani, was created using several ways such as positive self-presentation (boasting) and negative other-presentation (derogation). Finally, as the logical side of persuasion, logos was used four times less than the other two rhetorical techniques. The paucity of logical arguments contradicts the findings of Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2018), who indicated that employing a reasoned and civil manner in political argumentation aids politicians in persuading the public. Previous studies on the use of discursive strategies and rhetorical devices by Rouhani while giving a speech on different issues have shown that he utilizes rhetorical questions, parallel lines, visual symbols, criticism, and formal language, which were not observed in his speeches on holy sites lockdown (Mirzaei et al., 2017; Mirzaei & Safari, 2017).

Secondly, the declarative mood (96%) is shown as the absolute choice of Hassan Rouhani. In line with the claim of Halliday (2014) who asserted that the declarative mood is used to make a statement, the declarative moods in the ex-president's speeches, too, were mainly to exchange information (statement of opinions or/and of facts) with the audience. In some cases, however, they carried the critical function of indirect directives. These findings are in congruence with those of Fanani et al.'s (2020a; 2020b) studies which demonstrated that declarative moods as the primary choice in Rumiya magazine's text and Donald Trump's speeches mainly functioned as statements of opinion, statements of fact, and indirect directives. SFL explains how language structures can change based on the situational variables in different social contexts. This also confirms Ayoola's (2013) findings that suggested that typical functions of the mood may change in political discourse. As apparent in excerpt no. 9, the only time Rouhani employed an imperative mood, he addressed the country's officials rather than the people. This purposive refusal to use an imperative mood retains a friendly tone and lets people feel responsible rather than obliged to follow the advised procedures. From the instances above, it can be stated that interrogative mood had no place in Rouhani's speeches either. This is mainly because few live audiences

were present in the sessions. Furthermore, the meetings were shared via the Internet or other electronic means of communication, leaving no room for immediate responses to the interrogative clauses.

There are some limitations to note when interpreting the results of this study. First, the sessions from which we drew our samples continued to be held every week after the last session included in this study. In other words, we did not cover every NTAC session since, at some points, the mentioned holy sites were re-opened and then again locked down. This was due to the wax and wane of COVID-19 in Iran. Second, although the sessions were closely observed by two researchers, and the related parts were highlighted, there is still a slight possibility that the researchers missed some parts. Third, the sessions were in Persian, and the speeches were manually transcribed and translated into English. Even though the speeches and translations were checked and re-checked by the researchers and two professional translators, they may still be subject to errors. Further studies can focus on a comparison between the ex-president's utilized discursive and rhetorical strategies and the current Iranian presidents' discourse who attended the NTAC sessions after being selected. Furthermore, the present study encourages further subsequent research on how other political leaders dealt with announcing lockdown issues during the COVID-19 pandemic in Western countries. As mentioned earlier, this study did not cover all the NTAC sessions. Therefore, future studies examining the same issue with larger corpora would yield more sustainable results.

## **7. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study and discussion above, it can be concluded that the former president's speech on holy sites lockdown can be categorized as a persuasive discourse with the primary purpose of convincing and persuading the audience about the subject matter of the speeches. It actively demonstrates that by the arbitrary choice of a particular mood type (declarative) and employment of rhetoric, the former president aimed at persuading the people that the decisions made were appropriate and defensible. It is reasonable to argue that Rouhani willfully utilized this special discourse while announcing the lockdown to the public to avoid any objection and disagreement due to the importance of holy sites for the Iranian Islamic population.

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