

Name of the student:	Stella Avetisyan
Title of the thesis:	From Silence to Recognition: Exploring the Evolving Discourse on the Armenian Genocide by US Presidents
Reviewer:	Marcin Zubek

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The dissertation's research question is as follows: How does the discourse on the Armenian Genocide differ among Presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden, and how has President Biden's approach diverged from his predecessors? The question is somewhat relevant, as labelling the 1915 atrocities as 'genocide' constitutes a symbolic manifestation of a policy towards Armenia and whole Caucasus region. The Author indeed saw this (but also other) changes in the US Presidents' discourses on this issue, so the question is valid. To what extent the research question is relevant is however another thing – first it is descriptive. This would perhaps not be a problem if the whole research would give us an in-depth understanding of how the US Presidents' discourse on the issue looks like. Instead the Author has chosen to analyse text that have been created for a very specific commemorative event. This is very limited sample and extremely context-specific, therefore could not be representative of the whole discourse.

The literature review is also lacking in some aspects. Since the thesis is to a large extent about US foreign policy and role of the President, there is only small number of references about the role of this individual in foreign policy decision making and also the role of his speeches in other cases. There is some contextual literature review regarding US foreign policy towards Armenia, Turkey, Nagorno-Karabakh and also Armenian foreign policy. This is helpful, but not always useful for the further reading of the thesis. Lastly, sometimes we can come across statements such as: "While there have been studies on US regional foreign policy in the South Caucasus", which is then not followed by a list of references.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

Methodology used to answer the RQ is somewhat unclear. The Author claims to use discourse analysis, but does not specify which one. I assume it is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The choice of the dataset is (as mentioned above) problematic, and the Author does not say whether she is analysing the material inductively or deductively. I assume it has been inductive, in which case the analysis itself has been performed well and the table summarising the findings is very nice. Regarding the theoretical backing – it is also problematic, as there is no clear theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the thesis. The Author refers to a 'power relations/dynamics', but does not really explain it. Perhaps It could correspond somehow with the agency-structure dilemma in the IR, but this is not mentioned. I think (and maybe it should be explained by the Author during the defense), the she confuses the theory of how power is exercised through language with the power, which a country has in IR.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The research objective is reached insofar as the Author has shown how the discourse has changed. However the promise of linking this change with the US' relations with other countries (eg. Turkey, Armenia itself, broader region of South Caucasus) is not fulfilled. Nor is the promise of contributing to 'genocide studies', or at least it is not mentioned what this contribution actually is.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The language is appropriate, with some minor mistakes. What is however sometimes irritating is abundant use of adjectives (especially when describing her own work), and also repetition of certain passages.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The strong point of the thesis is the performance of the inductive analysis and identification of certain themes that indeed change, sometimes significantly. The biggest flaw is lack of a clear theoretical and conceptual framework, which would guide the analysis.

Grade (A-F):	C (Barcelona 7,1)
Date:	Signature:
04/07/2023	Marcin Zubek

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.