Thank you for submitting your manuscript "Political party differences in foreign party discourse" to Discourse Processes.  I have now received reviews of your submission from three individuals who reflect the journal's readership, and are experts with respect to the topic and methodologies employed in the manuscript.  The examination and categorization of real-world verbal protocols in efforts to identify discourse patterns are certainly relevant to the journal readership.  Indeed, each of the reviewers was very interested in the topic.  But they each expressed a variety of critical concerns for the work that ranged across multiple aspects of the project and manuscript.  The depth and number of their concerns indicates the project still needs a substantial amount of development.  Their comments along these lines leads me to decide that the paper should be rejected.  
  
As you will read, the reviewers identified important challenges to the project.  They also provided substantial suggestions and advice for the work.  I hope you take their comments and suggestions seriously and in the spirit with which they were offered.  I will outline some of the core issues here.  First, each reviewer indicated that the paper lacked focus with respect to the Introduction, the categorizations for the data, and the claims derived from the data.  For example, the Introduction seemed to discuss historical issues that were not directly relevant to the project; the methods lacked detail with respect to what the categories were meant to expose (and in some places, the descriptive nature of those categories seemed to be confabulated with claims about the cognitive processes that underlie those descriptions, without evidence to support any such claims); and the claims derived from the findings were largely presented as tentative conjectures more than conclusions  
driven directly out of the data.  Second, the reviewers were concerned that the amount of variance for which the data here accounted for might, while potentially interesting to ponder, fail to offer enough purchase on the issues in contributing to existing theories, models, and accounts.  Third, the reviewers seemed to find the project to be more of a first pass consideration of issues, rather than a fully formed research project that would contribute to the existing research base.  Finally, the classifications linked to particular political parties and perspectives struck some of the reviewers as too coarse and extreme, given the potentially more nuanced considerations that individuals might express concerning historical, political, and cultural events.  (One could imagine that in prepared speeches such extremes might be particularly enhanced, of course.)  
  
Finally, upon my own reading, I was concerned that research previously published in Discourse Processes was not cited at all in the manuscript.  Certainly work from other journals interested in discourse issues was included in the references.  But the lack of connection to research published in the journal is suggestive that this project, while interesting, might be more appropriate for a different journal, perhaps more specialized given the kinds of concerns presented.  
  
Again, the converging concerns were not limited to a particular theme or portion of the paper, but instead reached across multiple topics, sections, and issues in the project.  The reviews indicate that the manuscript represents a start for a potentially interesting set of examinations, but much more care, effort, and analysis needs to be applied before it might make a sufficient contribution to the existing literature.  
  
ACTION: I am rejecting the manuscript. The concerns raised in this review are sufficient to preclude publication in Discourse Processes.  
  
I am sorry that I am not able to provide you with more positive news with respect to your manuscript.  I encourage you to continue your investigations, and hope you will consider Discourse Processes as a potential outlet for your work in the future.  
  
Sincerely,  
  
  
David N. Rapp, PhD  
Associate Editor  
Discourse Processes  
  
  
Reviewer #1:  
In this manuscript, the authors provide a LIWC-based analysis of foreign policy decisions, using congressional and presidential speeches to examine four linguistic constructs: cognitive processing, categorical thinking, complex thinking, and psychological distancing. They tested two hypotheses: (1), that cognitive processing and psychological distancing would decrease when military action is taken, and (2) that Republicans should show less language change because they "own" foreign policy, and that Democrats should show increased change, since they are "unaccustomed to focusing on foreign policy debate" (p. 11). The researchers specifically looked at speeches on foreign relations with nine countries over a 15-year period. In total, nearly 2,000 speeches were analyzed.  
  
The first hypothesis were partly supported; for example, when military action was taken, Democrats used more cognitive processing than Republicans (p. 14). Hypothesis two was also partly supported, although there was no interaction with political party.  
  
The manuscript is clearly written, the analyses are appropriate, and the topic is one that should be of interest to the discourse community. It's clear that a great deal of effort was expended to identify, obtain, and analyze this large corpus of hearings and speeches. I do, however, have several concerns:  
  
(1) The amount of variance being accounted for seems rather small. For the four linguistic constructs, the predictors accounted for only 2 to 5% of the variance. How does this compare to similar studies? I understand that some significant effects were found, but if the explanatory power of the constructs is low, when compared to similar work, then it calls into question the relevance of these constructs for this linguistic domain.  
  
(2) To make blanket statements to the effect that "Republicans own foreign policy" and that "Democrats aren't accustomed to focusing on foreign policy" seems quite simplistic to me. There is no perfect correlation between party affiliation and foreign policy competence, and willingness to engage militarily is also not perfectly predicted by party affiliation either. The Republican party includes Libertarians who are highly isolationist, for example, and Democrats are even more diverse along a "hawk" and "dove" continuum. Instead of some binary classification, might there be some other classification technique that is more nuanced? Could the congressional "scorecards" created by organizations like the ACLU or the NRA be used here?  
  
(3) As the authors point out, "interpretation [of the language constructs] is somewhat difficult as no normed information exists" (pp. 17-18). They conclude that "further research is necessary to determine exactly what these language constructs are measuring" (p. 18). It really seems as if this issue needs to be addressed to provide a context for evaluating the current research. I would encourage the authors to view the study reported here as a first step in a more comprehensive, multiple study project that examines corpora like political blogs and news articles, as the authors themselves suggest on p. 18. Such a project would be a much more useful contribution to the field than what is on offer here.  
  
  
  
Reviewer #2:  
This article examines a large corpora collected from Congress, Foreign Affairs Committees, and Presidential Statements. The main goal of the study was to learn more about how members of Congress make foreign policy decisions. Although this research has several strengths, it also has some limitations and areas for improvement/clarification, which I detail below. At this time, I would recommend an R&R with substantial changes made to the paper.  
  
Introduction.  
The authors claim the general purpose is to learn more about the attitudes and decision making process revolving around foreign policy decisions. The introduction begins with a brief history on changes that have occurred in foreign affairs over the last century. My recommendation is that perhaps the authors may want to think about why this is important to the study. In particular, the introduction could be shortened to 2 paragraphs that showcase the major themes in this paper 1) foreign policy, 2) language use. Tell the reader right away what this paper will be about. More specifically, tell the reader that this paper will be about using language to study foreign policy.  
  
Literature Review. The authors do a good job of covering a broad range of literature. My concern is that the information covered is too broad and vague. Many studies are listed, but are never fully described. Given that this paper uses language to analyze attitudes and the decision making process of foreign policy it would be beneficial to include language examples when describing language studies. For instance, the authors mention that as causalities increased over the Iraq war the frequency of anti-war rhetoric increased. There was no example for anti-war rhetoric. I would also recommend examples in particular for some of the other LIWC studies mentioned since this paper uses a LIWC method. For example, in the Pennebaker et al. (2005) piece provide an example of the different function words used, such as first person plural (i.e., we). Make this accessible to the reader - use more examples. My final recommendation for the literature review would be to have the literature  
review reflect the hypotheses more. For example, the Hypothesis One predicts that cognitive processing and psychological distancing will decrease when military action is taken (compared to when it is not taken?- not explicitly stated). One section of the literature review should focus on language studies that particularly examine cognitive processing and psychological distancing. Currently, the literature review does not lead the reader to understand the rationale behind hypothesis one's predication. Hypothesis two predicts that people will use more categorical thinking when there is violence compared to when there is less violent actions. The authors have used the categorical equation from Pennebaker (2011) found in Table 1. I would recommend that the authors check out the new piece in PLOS one that describes the CDI in more detail. This will also be useful for reframing the literature review. Here is the link:  
[http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0115844](http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0115844" \t "_blank)  
  
Method. The number of text files to analyze is impressive. However, I am curious about the selection and description of these files. Under Presidential Statements the authors describe the final sample as 1365 speeches that pertained to no military action and 893 pertained to military action taken. It's unclear if this represents the corpora for the whole study, or the presidential corpus. A table with descriptions of the corpora would be very useful for the reader.  
  
Results & Tables. The authors have very sound and savvy statistical skills. However, I am curious about a few items that are not reported in the results. First, it would be beneficial to the reader to have a table with frequencies for word count and functions words. There is no information about the base rate of some of these linguistic markers. For example, I am curious about the base rates for cognitive processing use insight and causation words. Or when the psychological distancing formula was used it would be nice to know the base rate for I-words. Also, given that distancing is related to pronouns I was surprised to see very little in the paper about pronoun use. Second, it would be nice to have a few excerpts from the text sample to see the language being used. The reader can get a real sense of what language is being used.  
  
Discussion. The discussion is short. It needs headings. I would recommend the authors break the discussion into Hypothesis one and two. There was an attempt, but only one paragraph was provided for each Hypothesis. My recommendation is less literature review (or narrowed) in the front of the paper and more discussion later in the paper about why the results are important.  
  
Limitations & Future Direction. These two paragraphs should be collapsed into one.  
  
Conclusion. There is no conclusion. The reader needs a recap about why this study is important.  
  
Minor points.  
I would recommend not starting every sentence with the names of researchers. Instead give the reader the main idea and have the authors listed at the end in the citation.  
Use headings that describe what the paragraph or section will cover.  
Make it easy for the reader. For instance, instead of using elucidates use show.  
  
  
  
Reviewer #3:  
Summary  
Using LIWC to analyze the percentage of word categories used in congressional speeches, talk from foreign affairs committees, and presidential statements, the authors report that (1) Democrats used more words of cognitive processing than Republicans when discussing a topic that later resulted in a military action, (2) there were fewer words of psychological distancing when discussing a topic that later resulted in a military action, (3) there were fewer words of categorical thinking when discussing a topic that later resulted in a military action, and (4) Democrats used more words of complex thinking than Republicans when discussing a topic that later resulted in a military action.  
  
Review  
The topic of language differences across political parties is important and of widespread interest. The current report, however, is not convincing. The dependent measures are not coherent, and the reasoning from the DVs to the hypothesis is flawed.  
  
Regarding the DVs, in Table 1, we find four ways the data was categorized: (1) categorical thinking, which is the percentage of articles, prepositions, plus big words that are verbs, (2) complex thinking which is the percentage of exclusive words like but, conjunctions, words/sentence (which I assume is words per sentence, although it's not clarified in the paper), negations, insight words like think, and causation-inclusive words (which seems to be something related to words like with and because), (3) cognitive processing, which is the percentage of insight and causation words, and (4) psychological distancing, which is the percentage of articles, big words, I-words (presumably insight words), discrepancy words like should, and present tense verbs. It's hard to approach the categories cold and try to make sense of how these particular selections of word types - and not the many others available in LIWC - create a coherent category. I like that the authors used categories  
of word types that have already been shown to cohere in other studies, but I still think more explanation is needed about these categories. There is one paragraph of text on p. 9 describing the DVs, and it's not at all clear how the categories are mutually exclusive (and indeed Table 1 shows some components of the DVs overlapping with each other). For example, how is "abstract communication style" for psychological distancing, but "abstract discourse" for categorical thinking? How does the "organization and comprehension" of cognitive processing differ from "making distinctions" and "focus[ing] on details" of complex thinking?  
  
The reasoning is hard to follow and the conclusions go beyond the data to an unacceptable degree. For example, on p. 9 the authors reviewed earlier research showing that "Violent terrorist groups used less complex thinking and less categorical thinking than nonviolent terrorist groups." This suggested to the authors that the language preceding the taking of military action (confusingly described as "when the U.S. took military action") would result in more categorical and complex thinking among Democrats. But why, exactly? The authors' answer that "Foreign policy is typically considered a Republican owned issue" and that "Democrat's language should show an increased change as they are unaccustomed to focusing on foreign policy debate" (p. 10) isn't convincing. It could just as easily be that Democrats used more words of cognitive processing and complex thinking because they are highly accustomed to focusing on foreign policy debate; perhaps they use more of these words in  
order to convince Republicans, who used fewer words of cognitive processing and complex thinking overall (Figures 1 and 4). Being a "Republican owned issue" does not mean Democrats haven't thought about, written about, or talked about an issue. The comment in the Discussion section that "Democrats may not be as familiar with the issues involved in foreign policy" would need substantially more evidence for a scientific report. I should state here that the argument cannot be made the other way around - that the differences in the rates of word uses identified by the authors can be taken as showing that Democrats are not as familiar with foreign policy issues.  
  
Organizationally, the presentation of topics in the current manuscript seems backwards. A wide variety of related papers are reviewed before the topic is introduced. As a consequence, some information is presented that isn't relevant at all, such as factors relating to personality (p. 9). As another example, the Strict Father versus Nurturant Parent metaphors are introduced, but it's unclear how those are related to the current study. Other information that is relevant, such as the papers on words used by members of different political parties, is inadequately discussed. On p. 6, for example, 1-4% doesn't seem that high for explaining variance. If it is high, some explanation of why this can be considered noteworthy is needed. As another example, a Republican-Democrat classification study the authors mentioned was 50-88% accurate. As 50% accuracy would be chance, some further explanation is needed. On p. 8, I can see why overview of the LIWC reports on say pronouns and verb  
tense is important with respect to their contribution to the overarching categories categorical thinking, complex thinking, cognitive processing, and psychological distancing that are the center of this report, but they need to be explicitly tied into the constructs. Going further, the authors review a report on the use of first person pronouns versus third person pronouns - but how is this related to their work? First- versus third-person is not a component of the constructs of interest. While I am questioning why this paper was including in the literature review, another comment I have is that given it was included, there isn't enough information to explain the phenomenon alluded to (why are Americans using the first-person, and Spaniards the third?).  
  
There are numerous stylistic problems with the manuscript as well, such as subject-predicate agreement issues, modifiers that don't read correctly ("superpowers in developing countries"), and other errors. The writing also needs improvement for clarity. For example, the hypotheses were not laid out clearly enough on p. 10; a cursory read could lead a reader to interpret the language of interest as pre- and post-military action, as opposed to pre-action language analyzed retroactively based on whether military action was taken.