Recontextualization practices: A scale of directness

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I analyze Israel president Rivlin's 2020 speech delivered against the background of ongoing COVID-19 health threats and a severe political crisis, and its follow-ups in online news articles and in ordinary readers' comments on news sites and on Facebook. I examine the recontextualization practices used in this three-part discourse event, shedding light on their diversity and focusing on the degree of directness they manifest. Recontextualization is conceptualized as the strategic molding of situations and prior texts and their integration into another discourse through discursive practices. The analysis shows that the president recontextualizes the complex political and social crisis through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic. He frames the pandemic in terms of its morbid, mythic, and moral dimensions, as well as its influence on various aspects of civil and political disorder. This connection is drawn through the juxtaposition of propositions and the shifts between the deliberative and the epidictic keyings, alluding to Jewish tradition, prayers, and blessings. Through the use of the inclusive "we," he self-positions as a leader on a par with ordinary people, whereas through direct demands formulated in the plural without personal naming he addresses his ratified addressees, the MPs and the ministers, and thus self-positions as an authority demanding accountability from the current leadership. The news articles in leading online media are short and partial, recontextualizing the speech and the situation through their titles, the selection of the extracts they chose to present and the very few evaluations they make. They mostly take up the president's moral framing and some of his explicit demands for political accountability. The commenters mostly follow up on the moral framing and the mythic dimensions proposed by the president but offer a different perspective on these issues. They shift the responsibility for "losing the compass" from the collective "we" advocated by the president to the politicians including the president, and they ironically echo the epidictic keying in order to challenge and even ridicule it. They further add another dimension to the speech event, by framing the president's speech as politically biased. The discursive patterns used all along this thread of discourses by all its participants range in degree of directness and recontextualize the object of talk, perspectives, keying and positionings.

KEYWORDS

recontextualization, follow-ups, meta-representation, directness, keying, positioning, online journalism, readers' comments

Introduction

On 12 October 2020 Israel's parliament, the Knesset, reconvened to mark the opening of its winter session. Israel president Reuven Rivlin addressed the Plenum. He was preceded by the then Parliament's Speaker Yariv Levin, and followed by PM Benjamin Netanyahu and Opposition Chair Yair Lapid. The ceremonial opening took place against the background of ongoing COVID-19 health threats and a severe political crisis. In this paper, I analyze the discursive practices employed by Rivlin to recontextualize this complex crisis, and their follow-ups in online news articles and ordinary readers' comments on the relevant news sites and on Facebook. The paper examines the recontextualization practices used in this three-part discourse event, shedding light on their diversity and focusing on the degree of directness they manifest. It shows that the president recontextualizes the complex political and social crisis through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic, with special emphasis on its morbid, mythic and moral dimensions, as well as its influence on various aspects of the civil and political disorder. The news articles in leading online media are short and partial, and recontextualize the speech and the situation through their titles, the selection of the extracts they chose to present, and the very few evaluations they make. The commenters mostly follow up on the moral framing and the mythic dimensions proposed by the president, but offer a different perspective on these issues. The discursive patterns used all along this thread of discourses recontextualize the object of talk, the keying, the president's perspective and his self-positioning in various degrees of directness.

The paper is structured as follows: the notion of recontextualization through follow-ups is briefly sketched, with reference to varying degrees of directness in its realizations (Section Conceptual framework); the speech event is then situated within the political crisis in Israel (Section Political background); the method of data collection is presented (Section Method), and recontextualization practices are analyzed (Section The discursive practices of recontextualization), distinguishing between their realizations in the speech (Section The president's speech), the journalistic reports (Section Online news articles and the president's post on Facebook), and the commenters' responses (Section Readers' comments). The findings are discussed in Section Discussion and conclusion.

Conceptual framework

Recontextualization is conceptualized here as the strategic shaping and molding of situations and prior texts and their integration into another discourse through the use of discursive practices. It presupposes that the "situation–discourse relations is non-deterministic, but (inter)subjective and interpretative" (van Dijk, 2008, p. 119).

Recontextualizations may shape and reshape social structures, interactional and communicative situations, concepts and propositions, objects of talk, and more (Linell, 1998; Fetzer, 2004; van Dijk, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2008). For our purpose, it is important to draw a distinction between the recontextualization of situational features and the recontextualization of prior texts. Whereas the president's speech manifestly represents the former, the follow-ups represent both types: by strategically reframing the speech, they draw a different picture of the situation. Specifically, social structures, perspectives, and positionings initially construed in the speech are decontextualized and recontextualized to a certain degree in online news articles, and to a greater degree in online readers' comments in the examined journalistic venues and on Facebook.

Follow-ups are conceptualized as "communicative acts (or dialogue acts), in and through which a prior communicative act is accepted, challenged, or otherwise negotiated by ratified participants in the exchange or by third parties" (Fetzer and Weizman, 2015, p. 11). Thus, follow-ups necessarily "involve recontextualization of an object of discourse (or parts of it) from another context, stance-taking, and the negotiation of new meaning" (Linell, 1998, p. 154). They may span across long sequences within the same discourse (Bull, 2015; Gruber, 2015; Hamo, 2015), but they may also span across discourses (Cap, 2015), and, due to the technological affordances of the new media, they may involve multi-modality and become accessible to a wide range of ratified and non-ratified participants (Atifi and Marcoccia, 2015; Ensink, 2015; Fetzer, 2015; Johansson, 2015; Weizman, 2015, 2018). They may also have complex relations of connectedness with other follow-ups. For example, readers' comments which respond to an initiating column or post may at the same time initiate threads of 2nd-, 3rd-, and n-order readers' comments and trigger other readers' (non) endorsement clicks (likes and dislikes; Fetzer and Weizman, 2015; Weizman, 2018).

How explicit is the recontextualization in the follow-ups? Or, in other words, how obvious it is that the speaker collapses and reshapes situations, texts, meanings, perspectives, positionings, and more? The question is not easy to answer. As Linell (1998, p. 157) puts it,

> "There are actual ("direct") verbal quotes as well as general and rather vague influences. In no case are we faced with a true transfer of something; it is never the propagation of a fixed message across representational instances. Rather, it is a complex transformation, involving shifts of meaning, new perspectives, accentuation of some semantic aspects and the attenuation or total elimination of others."

Explicit references to context, such as "It really depends on the context" (Fetzer, 2004, p. 2) or the formulaic expression "out of context," are possibly the most explicit practices of recontextualization. Intertextual and intratextual quoting patterns, including direct and indirect speech, are also located at

the explicit end. Ironic meta-representation, or echoic mentions, are among the most implicit ones.

Within the framework of relevance theory, **Meta-representation** has been defined as "a representation of a representation: a higher order representation with a lower order representation embedded within it" (Wilson, 2012, p. 230). Lower-order representations include public representations (e.g., utterances), mental representations (e.g., thoughts), and abstract representations (e.g., sentences, propositions; Sperber, 2000; Wilson, 2012; Wilson and Sperber, 2012). In order to encompass all three types in a relevance-based theoretical framework, an analysis in terms of resemblance rather than identity between higher-order and lower-order representations has been advocated (Sperber, 2000; Wilson, 2012; Wilson and Sperber, 2012).[1] Meta-representations may be explicitly attributive, i.e., overtly marked as such, as in direct and indirect quotations, or tacitly-attributive, in which case the connection between higher-order and lower-order representation is mostly unmarked. This is the case with mentions, for example when they represent an utterance (e.g., "Shut up" is rude), or a proposition (e.g., *Roses and daisies are flowers* entails that roses are flowers; Wilson, 2012, p. 232).

Tacitly-attributive meta-representations include echoic mentions (Sperber and Wilson, 1981; Wilson and Sperber, 1992), in which an extra layer of meta-representation is added to the content, "since not only the attribution but also the speakers' attitude must be represented" (Wilson, 2012, p. 249). In this view, an essential and necessary cue (Weizman and Dascal, 1991) for the interpretation of irony is the identification of an echoic mention. The analysis suggested here maintains that echoic mentions are forms of recontextualization and that they are located at the implicit end of a scale of directness.

In between the explicit and implicit ends of the scale, a few other practices are located. These will be analyzed and discussed.

Political background

Israel president Reuven Rivlin addresses the Plenum at the opening of the 23rd Knesset [Israeli parliament] winter session, 12 October 2020. As mentioned before (Section Introduction), the president's speech takes place in times of severe crisis on several levels. Israel undergoes the second outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with nearly 2,000 deaths, and tight lockdowns are imposed, accompanied by violent public disputes. The country faces the fourth round of elections in 2 years, and there is a political deadlock over the passing of a new state budget; the then PM Benjamin Netanyahu awaits trial, nationwide demonstrations against him take place all over

the country, and the police react violently. Severe breaches of health regulations by president Rivlin and PM Netanhayu took place a few months before, when both invited their children to spend the traditional Passover Evening (*leil haseder)* with them, while family get-togethers were strictly forbidden. Under these circumstances, although the position of president in Israel is largely ceremonial (with executive power vested in the government led by the Prime Minister), his speech cannot be ceremonial only. The analysis which follows highlights the strategies used by the president in his speech to recontextualize the situation, and the ways his speech is recontextualized in online media.

Method

The discussion combines a top-down and bottom-up textual analysis. The corpus consists of (a) the president's speech, published in the parliament minutes (Divrey Haknesset; Rivlin, 2020) and posted on his official Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/ReuvenRivlin/videos/1873417062797961/), (b) news articles that report on the speech, published in five leading Hebrew-language daily newspapers, two articles for each daily, on 12–13 October 2020, starting immediately after the speech, and (c) readers' comments to the videotaped speech on the president's official Facebook and on the articles, posted on the same dates. The speech is particularly apt for analysis in view of the rich array of recontextualization practices it presents, and the negotiations of recontextualizations it initiates across media. The dailies include the online versions of the liberal, highbrow, subscription-based *Ha'aretz* (https://www/haaretz.co.il); the mainstream conservative *Ma'ariv* (https://www.maariv.co.il), the broadly centrist, *one* of the major Israel's news and general content website *Ynet* (https://www.ynet.co.il), the subscription-based Israel's leading business and financial newspaper *Globes*, and the right-leaning free daily *Israel Hayom*, at the time owned by Netanyahu's political benefactors Sheldon and Miriam Adelson. Table 1 (see next page) shows the total number of comments collected for each data set. On Facebook, Figures include only direct comments to the post which appeared on the FB page at the time the query was run, i.e., 13 October 2020.

The discourse unit of analysis is the "conversation," which is comprised of the article/post and the readers' comments that appeared for a period of two consecutive days from the time the article/post was published in each one of the media outlets selected for the corpora.

The data was collected through an automatic querying system. The database was retrieved in response to a single query that included the Hebrew words for "president" (*nasi*) and/or his name "Rivlin" (*Rivlin*), combined with the following keywords: "speech" (*neum*), "winter session" (*moshav haxoref*), and "*Knesset*" (Israel parliament). The results retrieved for the analysis contain at least one occurrence of the word

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1 A scale of resemblance between echoed sources and echoing mentions underlying the notion of meta-representation has been proposed in Weizman and Kohn (2022).

TABLE 1 Number of comments collected for each outlet.

Outlet	Number of comments
Official Facebook page of president Rivlin	277
Ha'aretz	117
Ma'ariv	151
Globes	3
Israel Hayom	60
Ynet	197
Total	**805**

combinations in the query—whether in the article/post or in the commenting sections. The content was sorted according to the categories as defined in the crawler engine: Text of post/article; link to the post/article; readers' comments (and URL link); commenter's name (when available); date and time of post/article/comment.[2]

The discursive practices of recontextualization

The president's speech

Intertwining crisis and pandemic

Considering Rivlin's speech as a realization of "subjective definitions of interactional or communicative situations" (van Dijk, 2008, p. 16), I posit that the president chooses to connect the various aspects of the crisis directly and indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus construes his own perspective on the situation. Overall, the overriding theme of the speech is the pandemic, as is made clear from the outset. Extract (1) is the opening of the speech:

(1) "The Coronavirus pandemic and its victims have led me to think about those who have lost their lives, about the invisible angel of death, which does its dreaded deeds in isolated emergency rooms, without family members being able to take their leave at the last moment, to hold hands, to stroke faces."

All along the speech topic shifts occur, but they are always connected to the Coronavirus. These movements back and forth are illustrated in (2), (3) below. In (2), the splits between the ethnic groups in Israel, which Rivlin calls "tribes," are addressed. This topic has been of great concern to the president since he was elected, as is well-demonstrated in one of his first and most noteworthy speeches, "the tribes' speech" (*neum hashvatim*),

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2 The URLs in this paper are linked to the Hebrew source texts. All URLs were last accessed on November 16, 2022, unless indicated otherwise.

delivered five years before the speech analyzed here, in which he says: "[…] Israeli society is comprised of four population sectors, or, if you will, four principal 'tribes,' essentially different from each other, and growing closer in size. Whether we like it or not, the make-up of the 'stakeholders' of Israeli society, and of the State of Israel, is changing before our eyes" (Rivlin, 2015). Following this address, a new initiative, called "Israeli hope" (*Tikva Israelit*), has been launched in order to deal with the "tribalism" in Israel,

In the current speech, the issue of tribalism, which has preoccupied Rivlin all along, is connected explicitly to the pandemic, and implicitly to the elections and the violent demonstrations:

(2) "I was moved and in wonder by the way we have stood side by side, Jews and Arabs, secular, religious and ultra-Orthodox, **joining hands to fight the virus**. [….] And yet, I am sorry to say, **as the crisis deepened, so did the disagreements and the splits** between us. I never imagined with what power this disunity would hit us. […] **Israel's tribalism is breaking out through the cracks,** and accusatory fingers are pointed from one part of society to the other, from one tribe to the other."

Acknowledging the centrality of the pandemic in this speech, I will henceforth focus on the three main themes adopted by the speaker to recontextualize the situation: the pandemic as morbid and mythic, the pandemic as a moral crisis, and the pandemic as an aspect of the social, cultural and economic crisis.

The pandemic as morbid and mythic

In his first words, the president recontextualizes the pandemic as morbid and mythic. By so doing, he embraces the epidictic dimension.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle (1954, chapter 3, 1359) distinguishes between three genres of speech—the deliberative, the forensic, and the epidictic. The *deliberative* speech urges to either do or refrain from doing some action; the *forensic* either attacks or defends somebody, and is addressed to those engaged in judging; and the *epidictic* is essentially ceremonial, displays either praise or blame, and addresses those engaged in the pleasure and beauty of the speech and its ceremonial aspects. Beauty was identified with good, and praise and blame were associated with virtues (Aristotle, 1954). This distinction, elaborated on since classical rhetoric [see discussion in Quintillian (2017, Book III, iv)] is challenged by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). In their account, the ancients' view of the epidictic focused on its virtuosity and aesthetic value and unjustly did not attribute it any rhetorical importance, whereas from their viewpoint, "the epidictic oratory has significance and importance for argumentation, because it strengthens the

disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 51).

President Rivlin's speech addresses multiple audiences, as is always the case with political speeches and, more specifically, with leader's speeches (Cap, 2015; Gruber, 2022). Considering this variation, he combines the deliberative with the epidictic, understood here in terms of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's conceptualization: the speech has an argumentative power that transcends its poetic function, but it is highly ceremonial. This is achieved through emotional allusions to traditional death rituals and prayers, particularly prominent at the opening of the speech (Extract 3):

> (3) "The Coronavirus pandemic and its victims have led me to think about those who have lost their lives, about the invisible angel of death, which does its dreaded deeds in isolated emergency rooms, without family members being able to take their leave at the last moment, to hold hands, to stroke faces. To those dear people, nearly 2,000 dead, I choose to dedicate words of prayer: **May God remember**, and **may the People of Israel remember** the souls of those Israelis who have passed away this year because of the Coronavirus. We will remember those pioneers and founders, Holocaust survivors, veteran immigrants, fighters and creators, gifted students, Jews and Arabs, men and women, young and old. They were all loved, all had names and faces. **May we be forgiven for the sin we committed through helplessness**, for not doing enough, for not being able to save them and because of which— lives were lost. **Our Father, our King**, prevent disease in Your home, and lead us to good days. **Amen, may this be His will**."

This interesting opening holds tight intertextual relations with several prayers related to death. anchored in Jewish tradition. "May God remember" (*yizkor Elohim*) is the opening of the *yizkor* prayer for the dead; "May the People of Israel remember" (*yizkor am Israel*) is a disputed version of the former, reserved for the *yizkor* prayer in national events. "May we be forgiven for the sin we committed" (*al xet shexatanu*) is a prayer said on the day of atonement (*yom kippur*), which acknowledges the sins committed by the worshiper and asks for forgiveness; "Our Father, our King" (*avinu malkenu*) is a Jewish prayer which consists of forty requests addressed at God, and "Amen, may this be His will" (*amen ken yehi ratson*) is the traditional ending of prayers, performing acceptance and agreement.

On the whole, the president's opening paragraph alludes to ominous contexts of sadness, sins and morbidity. This rather sinister framing might have some impact on the theme of moral crisis.

The pandemic and the crisis as a moral failure

We have already seen (Ex. 3) that the president weighs the virus-related helplessness in moral terms, contextualizing it as a sin requiring forgiveness by a Higher Power. He does so both explicitly ("May we be forgiven for the sin we committed [. . .]") and implicitly, through the allusion to the prayers of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. Although the sins ("the helplessness," "not doing enough," "not being able to save them") are attributed to a collective entity through the use of the first person plural, as they are in the echoed prayer where the pronoun "we" refers to the person who prays and other ordinary persons who pray with him, and although "we" includes the speaker himself, in this context it may also allude to the "powers that be," i.e., the government and the PM. As we shall see below, this meaning is captured by some of the commenters.

Later in his speech, the president elaborates more explicitly on the theme of moral principles and values. He does so by using the word "compass" (*matspen*), phonetically similar to the word "consciousness" (*matspun*), and developing the metaphor of "losing the compass" (Ex. 4) and "returning" to it (Ex. 5).

> (4) "Ladies and gentlemen, leaders of Israel, it seems that **we have lost the compass** that has been **with us** from the establishment of the state until today, **the compass of principles and fundamental values** that **we** are committed to upholding."

Here, the president explains what he means by "compass," connecting it with Israel's commitments as a nation. The personal pronoun "we" ("we have lost our compass," "with us," "we are committed") is inclusive, and most probably refers to Israeli citizens in general. This meaning is confirmed in the concluding paragraph, in which the speaker self-positions as a moral authority, possibly as a prophet who addresses his people:

> (5) **"As a people, we must return to our compass**, we must look forward and begin a process of repair—long, deep, and systematic**. As we learned in the IDF, when you get lost when navigating, you go back to the starting point."

He then proceeds to address the leaders of Israel:

> (6) "It is a process that is not limited to the state of emergency. It is a process that demands difficult decisions. **This is the time for attentive leadership, where the truth and the facts are its only guiding lights—brave, responsible, ethical, leadership which works for the benefit of all the citizens,** leadership that understands that connection and partnership between the different parts of this country are the guarantees for success in this national mission of ours today."

Unlike in Ex. (4), here the president signals his addressees indirectly ("leadership"), alludes to their accountability ("which works for the benefit of all the citizens"), and sketches in some detail what seems to him the requirements from such leadership. However, he does not address the leaders directly.

In Israel's public talk, Rivlin's speech is often referred to as "the compass speech," The analysis indicates that the president's moral talk is interlaced with shifts in the distribution of accountability for social action, as it is realized in the use of pronouns and the degrees of directness in naming his addressees. As we shall see later, the news articles and the commenters are attracted to the moral perspective. However, whereas the journalists foreground these extracts without commenting on them, the commenters challenge any hints about shared responsibility and thus recontextualize the moral accountability alluded to by the president, foregrounding the accountability of the political elite to the ordinary persons.

The pandemic as an aspect of the economic, cultural, and social crisis

As explained earlier (Section Political background), the president's speech is delivered when Israel is in a crisis in many ways. The president establishes a connection between the many problems and the pandemic in a general statement:

(7) "I have seen for myself the medical teams, the volunteers, at Magen David Adom, at the healthcare organizations, in the social initiatives, those who care for the lonely and the isolated, those who work to bring computers that are beyond the means of schoolchildren, from north to south, across the whole country […] **The people in Israel understood the enormity of the moment, did what was required of them and paid a heavy personal, economic, religious, mental, and cultural price, so that we can get through this difficult time. And yet, I am sorry to say, as the crisis deepened, so did the disagreements and the splits between us** […]."

He then proceeds to elaborate on some of the main aspects of the crisis, always connecting them explicitly to the pandemic:

(8) "The current crisis is amongst the worst we have experienced because, unlike other crises, it takes our basic freedoms from us and undermines our foundations as a Jewish and democratic state. **We understand the need to fight the disease but find it hard to accept the loss of our personal freedoms, the inconceivable harm to the freedom to worship, the freedom to gather and protest, the freedom of movement and the freedom to work**. We established a Jewish state so that we could always make our way to synagogue without fear or concern, and here we are shuttering the synagogues ourselves. We established

a democratic state so that we could always express our views, and as an opinionated and stiff-necked people, here we are limiting demonstrations and gatherings on our own volition."

Here, he speaks of the risks posed to democracy by the regulations which forbid gatherings in the public space, including prayers in synagogues, demonstrations on the streets and sharing working spaces, and thus affect human and civil rights. Through the use of the first-person plural pronoun in the context of the opposition between "we understand" and "but find it hard to accept," the president self-positions on a par with ordinary citizens who challenge the authorities. More specifically, he establishes a rather artificial link between the pandemic and the malfunctioning of the police. As part of the general disorder caused by frequent elections, a Chief of police has not been appointed by the PM for two years. The president connects it with the pandemic:

(9) "**The virus is with us to stay**, and we cannot deal with it if our hands are tied behind our backs. **For more than two years, the Israel Police has functioned without a permanent appointment of its head**. […] The police are dealing, right now as we speak, with one of the most complex challenges in its history. **Appoint** [plural] **a police commissioner now**!"

The concluding demand ("Appoint a police commissioner now!") is most probably addressed to PM Netanyahu, although the verb "appoint" (*manu*) is formulated in the plural. This is clear to those hearers who know that this appointment is within the PM's authority, that it was delayed by him, and that it has bearings on the coming elections. The unattenuated demand has an indirect illocutionary force of reprimand, which has political implications if one takes into account the political animosity between Rivlin and Netanyahu. The indirect reprimand addressed at the PM can hardly be misinterpreted although it is directly addressed at the speech's ratified addressees, i.e., the members of parliament who are present at the plenum. As will be shown later, it does not escape the attention of several journalists and commenters.

Later in the speech, the president details the results of the malfunctioning of the police: disorder, aggressive demonstrations, commotions on the streets:

(10) **"Friends, I feel the air is full of gunpowder. I feel the fury on the streets**. But it is unthinkable that **every night, demonstrators are beating demonstrators. Police are beating demonstrators. Demonstrators are throwing stones at the police**. Israel's **tribalism** is breaking out through the cracks, and accusatory fingers are pointed from one part of society to the other, one tribe to the other."

And finally, additional aspects of the crisis are addressed, including the educational, economical, occupational, medical, and social systems:

(11) "**The education system** is unable to take a clear direction on dealing with the challenge of distance learning and many schoolchildren are being left behind. **The digital gap** is widening and we are in danger of losing the next generation. Do not allow [plural] the **social welfare system** to collapse for young people at risk without a framework, for those women facing brutal violence, for the elderly and the isolated, as **poverty grows**. Look [plural] after them today! Take care [plural] of them now! Businesses are failing, unemployment is high, the deficit is growing and **the medical system** is groaning under the burden of the ill. **Pass [plural] the budget now and give** [plural] **Israel's economy the basic stability it needs!**"

Here again, as in (9) before, the president addresses his ratified addressees—members of parliament, ministers and the PM—in his demand to solve the problems and, more specifically, to pass a budget.

A bird's-eye view on the speech

These extracts illustrate the way the president recontextualizes the political instability in Israel as tightly connected with the pandemic in terms of its morbid, mythic and moral dimensions, as well as its influence on various aspects of the civil and political disorder. He does so by establishing co-textual connections between those aspects, and switching between deliberative and epidictic keyings. Through the use of the inclusive "we," he self-positions as a leader on a par with ordinary people. He further addresses his ratified addressees, the MPs and the ministers, with a list of demands, formulating them in the plural, without naming PM Netanyahu explicitly, even when specific contextual clues (Dascal and Weizman, 1987; Weizman and Dascal, 1991) suggest that he is to blame. By so doing, the president's self-position as an authority demanding accountability from the current leadership.

In the next sections, I examine the ways the president's perspective and his positioning are recontextualized in the articles and in his Facebook post, considering that they follow up on the speech and at the same time initiate readers' comments.

Online news and the president's post on Facebook

The key-word based search for relevant texts (see Section Method) yielded articles published in the news sections of the online journals under study. No op-ed was retrieved, which means that the speech did not initiate any major discussions. The news articles are short, the quoted extracts are partial and the journalists' evaluations are scarce and brief, as will be illustrated. These findings seem to indicate that the president's speech was not framed as particularly newsworthy. In the reports on the president's speech, his viewpoint is recontextualized in three ways: through the titles and sub-titles, through the selection of the quoted extracts and through the journalists' remarks.

In the titles and sub-titles, four of the five journals (*Ma'ariv*, *Globest*, *Ha'aretz*, and *Ynet*) embrace the president's moral framing, quoting his words "it seems we lost our compass." *Ha'aretz* and *Ynet* further mention his call to appoint a Chief of police and pass a budget (e.g., "Budget now, Chief of police now" (https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/B1AGas11wD). *Ma'ariv* recontextualizes the "compass statement" as a fierce criticism addressed at the PM.

(12) "The president delivered a speech in the opening of the winter session of the 23rd Knesset, in which he did not spare criticism of the PM's conduct: It seems we have lost the compass which has been with is since the establishment of the state." (https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/article-795176)

This interpretation is particularly interesting since, as we saw earlier, in this statement the president uses the first person plural and does not address anyone specifically.

Only *Israel Hayom*, a fervent supporter of PM Netanyahu, dedicates its title to PM Netanyahu's words in a speech which followed the president's, "aggression is unacceptable under any circumstances," and adds Rivlin's words on the compass in its sub-title.

In the body of the articles, all five of the articles quote, in various degrees of partiality, the speaker's words on the moral pitfalls Israel faces, and on several political issues. All of them foreground the demands to pass a budget and to appoint a Chief of police; and three of them (*Ynet*, *Ha'aretz*, and *Ma'ariv*) quote the symmetry constructed in the speech between the aggressiveness of the police and the protestors (e.g., "Policemen hit protestors, protestors throw stones on policemen," https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/article-795176). Only *YNET* quotes a few of the president's references to morbidity.

Ma'ariv's journalist pursues the recontextualization undertaken in the title with a short remark which precedes the extracts from the speech:

(13) "A fierce attack by Citizen no 1." (https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/Article-795176)

Globes, on the other hand, qualifies the winter plenum as "relatively calm," but frames the president's remarks on the budget as a political move, representing his involvement in the dispute between the PM's party, the Likud, and its partners in the

opposition (e.g., "The president touched on the political dispute between Kachol Lavan and the Likud about passing the budget," https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001345400).

On the whole, only small parts of the speech are quoted, and only two journals—*Ma'ariv* (who carries the longest quotes) and *Globes* (who quotes only a few words) recontextualize it as political, as opposed to the president's attempt to self-position a non-biased leader and moralist who speaks on behalf of the people. It is not surprising that the articles published in the news sections are more concerned with the deliberative aspects of the speech than in its epidictic components, which puts forward the morbid and the mythic aspect of the crisis. Still, it is interesting to witness the significance attached to the president's recontextualization of the crisis as a moral issue.

On the official Facebook page of president Rivlin only parts of the speech are posted. These include all the references to the compass metaphor, his direct demands from the leadership (e.g., "appoint a Chief of police," "Pass a budget now," "it's time for an attentive leadership [...]"), references to the economic, cultural and social crisis, and expressions of belief and trust in the people ("I believe in this people. I believe in our ability to win. Believe in it too"). The only references to the pandemic are "The pandemic is here to stay," and "we cannot cope with it with our hands tied behind our backs." The epidictic allusions are omitted. However, a video of the full speech is posted, and the commenters' follow-ups indicate that they do not limit themselves to the written post.

Readers' comments

The commenters mostly take up two themes of the president's speech—the moral framing and the epidictic contextualization of the pandemic—but they reshape both of them explicitly and implicitly: they shift the responsibility for "losing the compass" from the collective "we" to the politicians, including the president, and they ironically echo the epidictic keying in order to challenge and even ridicule it. Many of them further elaborate on another dimension which was partially hinted at in two news articles—the re-framing the president's speech as purely political. Two of the three central themes of the speech are of less interest to the commenters: they tend to show less interest in the pandemic as an aspect of the economic, cultural, and social crisis, and the few who do pursue this theme either challenge the president's symmetrical positioning of the police and the demonstrators (e.g., "The logical problem in your sentence is that you put the protesters and the police on the same side!!!," *Ma'ariv* 124) or challenge the president for neglecting to mention this or that aspect of life in Israel (e.g., "[...] and not a word on peace, simply embarrassing," Facebook 15).

In what follows I will discuss the three main loci of the commenters' recontextualization—the epidictic (Section Challenging the epidictic perspective), the moral (Section Challenging the accountability for the moral crisis), and the political (Section Recontextualizing the speech as purely political).

Challenging the epidictic perspective

We have seen that the president dedicates the first part of the speech to the presentation of the pandemic as morbid and mythic, both of them characteristics of the epidictic speech. In the Aristotelian perspective, unlike the deliberative speech, the epidictic raises no objection, since its interest lies in its virtuosity and dramatic value (or, in contemporary parlance, in its poetic function), rather than in its content (Aristotle, 1954). This may explain why the short news articles examined here do not refer to this keying in any way. The analysis of readers' comments, on the other hand, indicates that commenters challenge the epidictic keying. They do so directly and ironically. By so doing they recontextualize the pandemic as less mysterious and ominous.

In extract (14) below, the commenter addresses the president and criticizes what seems to him a disproportionate attitude:

(14) **"You are fanning the flames with the fuel of pathos**. The streets are not burning. Neither is the ballot box. Israeli society is built to contain itself in opposite numbers and complement each other. **The funeral ceremony is unnecessary.**" (https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/article-795307, comment 8).

He thus rejects explicitly the morbid framing as inappropriate ("You are fanning the flames with the fuel of pathos") and even mocks it through the funeral metaphor ("The funeral ceremony is unnecessary"). Indirectly alluding to the coming elections ("Neither is the ballot box"), he echoes the claim that the president is politically biased (see Section Recontextualizing the speech as purely political), i.e., that the epidictic hides deliberative argumentation.

Another criticism is addressed at the president's allusions to the Jewish tradition:

(15) "Excuse me honorable president this is the Knesset not a synagogue (*bet keneset*)." (https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/HkMhZYZvw, comment 186).

The commenter plays with the Hebrew words *Knesset* ("parliament") and *bet knesset* ("synagogue"). He thus indirectly challenges the president's reliance on religious talk, foregrounding its inappropriateness in the current political setting.

More indirect are the challenges in extracts (16), (17) below. Here, the commenters challenge the president's keying through ironic ad-hominem or ad-personam remarks. The notion of ad-hominem, literally "addressed at the man," signifies arguments regarding the personality, background or circumstances of the person who makes the argument. Ad-hominem arguments are considered fallacious to the extent that they do not contribute to the argumentation. However, some researchers consider ad hominem to be non-fallacious if they draw on facts that

undermine the speaker's reliability and authority in presenting his arguments (Amossy, 2000; Amossy and Koren, 2010). Here I distinguish between ad-personam comments, which are personal, mostly insulting (Plantin, 1996, p. 86) and do not contribute to the argumentation, and ad hominem comments, which are personal but do contribute to the argumentation. Both types challenge the addressee's ethos and are very frequent in online commenting (Weizman and Dori-Hacohen, 2017).

In (16) below, the commenter responds with both direct and ironic ad-personam challenges:

(16) "How I love you our dear President! Your lips speak emotionally and overcome the tremor. Thank you! You are a man full of compassion and human love." (https://www.facebook.com/ReuvenRivlin/videos/1873417062797961/, comment 42)

Here, the commenter explicitly presents the president's serious and dramatic keying as a sign of his weakness through an ad-personam expression of disdain ("Your lips speak emotionally and overcome the tremor"). He adds ad-hominem ironic challenges, which include an insincere declaration of love and appreciation ("How I love you our dear president, you are a man full of compassion and human love"), followed by an insincere expression of gratitude ("Thank you"). Blatant violations of the sincerity condition are used as cues for ironic performance of illocutionary acts (Haverkate, 1990; Weizman, 2008). The ironic arrows are directed at the president's emotional style, which, in the commenter's perspective, represents pretended compassion and human love.

The irony in the following is more sophisticated:

(17) "Blessed be the one who resurrects the dead (*baruch mexaye metim*], president Nobody (*nasi klumnik*)." (https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/Article-795176, comment 25)

The commenter echoically mentions the president's construction of the epidictic through allusions to Jewish prayers and blessings, and thus ironically criticizes it. Unlike the president, however, the blessing alluded to has no connection to grief and sorrow ("Blessed be the one who resurrects the dead"), as it is traditionally given to someone who re-appears after more than a year of absence. This echoic mention can be understood as mockingly addressing the president's passiveness (or absence, in terms of the echoed blessing) in his role as leader. The commenter thus contests the president's authority and non-accountability to the public. This, in addition to the blatantly insulting term of address ("president nobody"), repositions the president as having no right to speak to the people and on behalf of the people.

Even more indirect is the extract below:

(18) **"The citizens of Israel announce with astonishment, great sadness and deep sorrow, the death of democracy and the rule of law, who were kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by a criminal assassin.** The State of Israel is ruled by a bunch of wretched individuals, some of them corrupt, some of them feeble and most of them both wretched and feeble." (https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/article-795307, comment 53)

The first sentence is an echoic mention of the memorable announcement (19 below) written and read by Eitan Haber, special media adviser and speech writer of Israel Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin, immediately following Rabin's murder in November 4, 1995:

(19) "The government of Israel **announces, with astonishment, great sadness, and deep sorrow, the death of** the prime minister and defense minister, Yitzhak Rabin, who was **murdered by an assassin** tonight in Tel Aviv."

Obviously, these words, which "became lodged in the national consciousness at many of the country's key junctures" (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/16/worlds/middleeast/eita-haber-dead.html), are inherently epidictic. By echoing them in the first sentence, the commenter ironically frames the crisis Israel undergoes as reminiscent of an event that is widely considered the most tragic Israel has experienced. By further explicitating his ironic intent (Weizman, 2022) in the second sentence, he switches from the epidictic to the deliberative. The commenter echoes also the president's shifts in keying, and by so doing—ironically criticizes them.

Challenging the accountability for the moral crisis

We saw earlier that the president contextualizes the pandemic as a moral crisis. He does so, to a large extent, by elaborating on the notions of sins and forgiveness (Ex. 3) and repair (Ex. 5), as well as those related to ethics and the compass of principles and fundamental values (Ex. 4–6). The moral failures are attributed to a collective, inclusive entity referred to by "we," which seems to position the president on equal footing with ordinary people. We saw also that the moral perspective is highly accentuated in the news articles (Section Online news articles). The analysis of the comments indicates that commenters largely elaborate on the metaphor of "losing the compass," but they recontextualize it as a political failure rather than a moral one, and strategically use it to demand accountability from the president or from the political elite to the ordinary public. They do so mostly through meta-pragmatic comments that contest the president's use of the inclusive pronoun "we".[3]

This is the case, for example, in (20)–(24) below. The speakers accept the president's notion of 'losing the compass, but unanimously reject the implication that ordinary people like themselves share the blame. They thus demand accountability from the president himself (20), the political elite including

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3   This is particularly prevalent in the comments on Facebook (with 20 occurrences of the "compass" "metaphor"), and in the newspaper *Ha'aretz* (with 17 occurrences in 117 comments).

the president (21), the members of parliament (22) and Prime Minister Netanyahu (23, 24), who awaits trial for fraud and breach of trust.

The speaker in extract (20) enjoys a word-play:

(20) "No Mr. president, **we did not lose the compass, you are at a loss!** (anaxnu lo ibadnu et hamatspen, ata *ibadeta et hatsafon*]. You turned the presidency into a political branch." (https://www.facebook.com/ReuvenRivlin/videos/1873417062797961/ comment 23)

We have already seen that the president plays with the phonetic similarity between *matspen* (compass) and *matspun* (consciousness) (Ex.3). Here the commenter draw son the similarity between *matspen* (compass) and *tsafon* ("north"), in the expression *ibadeta et hatsafon*, "you are at a loss," literally "you lost the north." If interpreted as a meta-pragmatic echoic mention of the president's stylistic game, the commenter may be assigned also an ironic intention.

The other remarks on the president's political aspirations are direct:

(21) "You're confused.... **We** did not lose the compass. **You** did! And **like you, the prime minister and those around him**. It's time to give a positive example, which you have not done for almost a year [. . .]." (https://www.facebook.com/ReuvenRivlin/videos/1873417062797961/ comment 4)

(22) "Ruby darling, those who lost their compass are the 120 clowns [=MPs] who sit in the Knesset [parliament] and do nothing and nothing." (https://www.facebook.com/ReuvenRivlin/videos/1873417062797961/ comment 25)

(23) "The accused of fraud and breach of trust [= PM Netanyahu] lost his compass." (https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/B1AGas11wD, comment 174)

(24) "Rivlin, understand, Bibi has a compass that leads him to evade justice." (https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/B1AGas11wD, comment 179)

Other commenters are less specific. In (25), the speaker indirectly rejects any implications regarding shared accountability, in a comment that represents his metapragmatic awareness of the function of "we," but unlike in the previous extracts, he does not point out to the responsible:

(25) "How Rivlin loves to speak in the plural [. . .]." (https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/B1AGas11wD, comment 180)

This expressive speech act may be interpreted as an ironic criticism of what seems to the commenter to be Rivlin's satisfaction with his self-positioning as solidary with the ordinary people, if it is interpreted as an echoic mention of his thoughts and beliefs.

Recontextualizing the speech as purely political

Closely related to these accusations is the shift from the president's self-positioning as an unbiased, somewhat spiritual leader to his other-positioning by the commenters as a mere politician who promotes his political agenda. This is in line

with Dori–Hacohen and Shavit's (2013) claim that a major function of readers' comments is to reconstitute paradigmatic personifications of oppositional political agendas.

The comments which represent this perspective are clearly ad-hominem. Most of them adopt a personal, emotive self-positioning, as in (26):

(26) "**I was severely disappointed** by the president's speech. Instead of concentrating on the citizens and elected officials in the fight against the Coronavirus, **he became yet another politician.**" (https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/local/article/7541976 comment 19)

Ad hominem criticism is expected from readers of *Isreal Hayom*, a fervent supporter of PM Netanyahu, in view of the rivalry between the president and the PM. But this kind of aggressive comments is not excluded from other venues:

(27) **"The most shameful president** the country has ever had! **A political president**, a president who **hates the Prime Minister and incites against him** in a shocking way, a president who does not unify but divides and disunites!" (https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/article-795307 comment 137)

The political positioning assigned to the president is unanimously condemned as inappropriate. Only once does the commenter seem to praise the president for what she considers as political involvement:

(28) "Join one of the parties as the next prime minister. The entire people will vote for you! You are the only one who can save the country." (https://www.facebook.com/ReuvenRivlin/videos/1873417062797961/ comment 170)

Of course, it could well be the case that the commenter ironically echoes the president's presumed thoughts, in which case he is critical too. Whether ironically critical or praising, this extract joins examples (26), (27) in repositioning the president as being motivated by political interests, thus replacing the self-positioning of the president as an ideologist and moralist with his other-positioning as a biased politician.

A bird's-eye view on the comments

On the whole, the commenters seem to be attracted to the idea that the crisis and the pandemic are related to a moral failure. More specifically, they seem to take up and develop the metaphor of a compass that has been lost. However, they shift explicitly and implicitly from its rather abstract contextualization in the speech as related to sins, punishment and forgiveness and its attribution to a collective, blurred "we" which includes the president, the people and the leadership, to a specific list of wrongdoings which they explicitly assign to political leaders including the president himself. Additionally, they reject the epidictic keying, mostly through intertextual ironic echoic mentions, and they explicitly recontextualize the speech as political rather than ideological. Through these strategies, they recontextualize the object of talk, the president's perspective, the keying and his self-positioning.

Discussion

The speech event analyzed in this paper consists of three components: a speech, reports on the speech on Facebook and in online leading journals, and readers' comments on Facebook and on the news sites. I consider all the components of this recontextualization thread as subjective interpretations of social events and their textual representations. I further adopt van Dijk's understanding that "this does not mean that social and political situations and structures may not have objective dimensions (e.g., of time and space), or that they are not experienced as 'real' by social members [...], such social situations are able to influence discourse only through their (inter) subjective interpretations by participants" (van Dijk, 2008, p. 16).

This thread of texts made it possible to examine the complexities of recontextualization. First, the speech represents the recontextualization of the extra-textual, social situation, whereas the news articles and the comments recontextualize prior texts and by so doing—reframe also the situation. Second, this thread of discourses, which develops across media and genres, sets the stage for the examination of a rich array of recontextualization practices and their degree of directness.

In the speech, the tight connections established between the various aspects of the political instability and the pandemic represent the president's subjective perspective and his interpretation of the social events. He frames the pandemic in terms of its morbid, mythic and moral dimensions, as well as its influence on various aspects of the civil and political disorder. This connection is drawn through the juxtaposition of propositions and the shifts between the deliberative and the epidictic keyings, alluding to Jewish tradition, prayers, and blessings. Through the use of the inclusive "we," he self-positions as a leader on a par with ordinary people, whereas through direct demands formulated in the plural without personal naming, he addresses his ratified addressees, the MPs and the ministers, and thus self-positions as an authority demanding accountability from the current leadership.

The speech is represented only partially in the news sections of Israel leading journals.

The journalists reframe it mostly through the titles and sub-titles, through the selection of extracts reproduced in their short reports, and, to a lesser extent, through a small number of short evaluations. The picture they draw is overwhelmingly partial and belittling, possibly due to the lack of political assessments and the deletion of most parts of the speech. These findings seem to suggest that the president's speech was not framed as particularly significant or relevant within mediated public discourse and the political context. The news articles mostly take up the president's moral framing and some of his explicit demands for political accountability and taking action of repair.

The epidictic dimension is hardly taken up, and its rhetoric force is lost.

The readers' comments demonstrate a rich array of recontextualization patterns, ranging in degrees of directness.

The commenters mostly take up two themes of the president's speech—the moral framing and the epidictic contextualization of the pandemic—but most of them offer a different perspective on these issues. They do so directly and indirectly: they shift the responsibility for "losing the compass" from the collective "we" to the politicians including the president, and they ironically echo the epidictic keying in order to challenge and even ridicule it. They further add another dimension to the speech event, by framing the president's speech as politically biased. At the same time, they tend to show less interest in the framing of the pandemic as an aspect of the economic, cultural, and social crisis. The comments range from direct, *ad personam* and a*d-hominem* remarks, through meta-comments on the "compass" metaphor and the unjustified sharing of accountability through the use of "we," to the most indirect practice, the echoic mentions of propositions and of keyings.

The pragmatic analysis of recontextualization practices in this paper profited from the multi-modal and multi-participant nature of the thread of discourses that constitutes the discourse event under study. It provides further support to the understanding that participants are regularly engaged in construing their different perspectives in relations to social events and prior texts, and it sheds light on the intertwining of discursive resources used to recontextualize objects of talk, perspectives, keying, and positioning.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study involving human subjects in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent from the subjects for the publication of potentially identifiable data was not required in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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