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FULL PAPER**Stance, Legitimation, and Digital Authority on LinkedIn: A Corpus-Informed Critical Discourse Analysis of Bill Gates' Posts****Abstract**

This paper studies how Bill Gates' LinkedIn posts enact digital authority and legitimate global development intervention through stance, quantification, progress-talk, and solution-oriented agency. The corpus includes 14 fact-checked English-language LinkedIn posts published by Bill Gates between 23 September 2025 and 7 June 2026. Corpus-informed critical discourse analysis employed reproducible Python-generated token counts alongside post-level thematic and legitimation coding. The total corpus size was 1,222 words ($M = 87.3$ words/post; range = 24-199). Posts related to global health or child survival were most frequent at eight posts (57.1%). First-person singular self-mentions and collective references each appeared in nine posts. Predictive appeared 18 times across the corpus. Quantification/evidentialization appeared in nine posts, solution/intervention language appeared in 11 posts, and agency assigned to institutions or experts appeared in 10 posts. Close reading revealed a common pattern of legitimation through stances which move from problem definition, to evidence and social alliances, towards solution-carrying organizations, programs/companies, researchers, or technologies. This pattern diffuses moral responsibility while centralizing the capacity for action. Results suggest executive discourse on LinkedIn blends personal judgments, quantified endorsements of urgency, collective solidarity, and futurological expertise to frame institutions and their solutions as natural. Both the community-centered transportation response of the m-mama post and explicit mentions of equity in captions about AI nevertheless caution against reading these captions as purely techno-solutionist.

Keywords: LinkedIn, corpus-informed discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, stance, legitimation, digital authority, Bill Gates

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Professional social media is a space where executives, philanthropists, and founders of institutions professional culture values expertise, leadership, evidence, and solution-focused posts. Multi-platform analysis has found that LinkedIn's norms and affordances don't just determine how content

is shared; they also influence what organizations publish and what kinds of identities are believable there (Faber, 2022). Recent research has also analyzed how executives claim expertise and position themselves through topic, role, institutional affiliation, and strategic visibility settings (Keiper et al., 2025), as well as how users create idealized professional identities through self-presentation and self-praise (Weisi & Hajizadeh, 2025).

Bill Gates has a unique status in this platformed economy of authority. When he posts, he speaks simultaneously as founder of a technology company, chair of a major philanthropic foundation, investor in tech start-ups, and public pundit on health, poverty, climate, agriculture, education, and artificial intelligence. This makes his posts worthy of analytical attention: his posts don't just announce activities—they frame problems, select evidence, assign blame, judge possible futures, and name actors who are portrayed as able to provide solutions. Social media leadership communication can create intimacy by flattening institutional distance and giving the impression of leaders being accessible, but it also allows those leaders to frame the conditions of their authoritative encounter. (Matthews et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022)

Seen through an applied-linguistic lens, however, the foundational question is how language remakes social position and institutional resources as legitimate public authority. Critical research on elite philanthropy has illustrated how large private foundations can help construct needs, rank interventions, spread policy templates, and translate economic advantage into epistemic and moral authority (Haydon et al., 2021; Lambin & Surender, 2023; McGoey, 2021). These dynamics contextualize the analysis that follows, but do not tell us much about the linguistic work by which authority is performed and normalized within platformed genres.

Language is the primary tool by which authority comes to seem available through text. Lexico-grammatically, pronouns can index a speaker with a group, stance markers can index a judgment as sincere and subjective, and modal verbs of prediction can recast speculative technological pathways as future realities. Numeratives can render suffering both visible and pressing but can also limit our attention to outcomes that can be counted and interventions that can be scaled. In the realm of global health, philanthropic knowledge practices shape which problems and people are made governable through evidence (Littoz-Monnet & Osorio Garate, 2024). Narratives of innovation may do comparable rhetorical work by helping technocratic solutions appear actionable and politically innocent despite embodying assumptions about expertise, property, and development that are highly contentious (Canfield, 2023; Smith et al., 2023).

Existing literature offers helpful starting points but is ultimately incomplete. LinkedIn-specific analyses document how professionals construct self-image, professional identities, and executive authority (Keiper et al., 2025; Marin & Nilă, 2021; Weisi & Hajizadeh, 2025). Metadiscourse scholars detail how writers structure their propositions and interact with readers (Biri, 2021; Hyland, 2005; Liu & Zhang, 2021). In critical discourse studies, scholars probe how lexical and grammatical choices index asymmetrical power relationships. A recent study by Alashtary (2024) takes a closer look at ideological portrayals of artificial intelligence (AI) across Gates' social media posts. However, a comprehensive and corpus-driven examination of how Gates' LinkedIn posts linguistically manage personal stance, shared responsibility, quantification, futurity, and institutional agency throughout the frame of global development remains to be examined in digital applied linguistics.

Filling this gap, the current study undertakes a corpus-informed critical discourse analysis of 14 confirmed English-language LinkedIn posts published by Gates from 23 September 2025 through 7 June 2026. Limiting its claims to the captions recoverable in this purposively sampled corpus, the study does not treat the corpus as exhaustive of Gates' LinkedIn posting history, nor does it attribute audience reception based on reactions or comments. In doing so, its bounded design allows all frequencies, percentages, dates, and discourse-analytic claims to be triangulated back to the source register (see Appendix A). Balancing precise token frequencies with post-level qualitative coding, this study asks how micro-level linguistic choices come to constitute a grammar of legitimation. It makes three contributions to the answer. First, it offers a transparent, replicable overview of the

actual 14-post corpus. Second, it describes how stance, modality, pronouns, evidentialization, and semantic fields collectively construct digital authority. Third, it differentiates collective moral alignment from operational agency and highlights counter-trends that challenge elite generalizations and simplistic high-technology interpretations.

Research Questions

RQ1. Which stance, pronoun, and modal resources characterize the 14 captions, and how do they construct authority and audience alignment?

RQ2. How are global problems and interventions framed through themes, quantification, evidence, progress, innovation, access, and future orientation?

RQ3. How do recurring linguistic patterns distribute responsibility and agency in the discursive construction of global development authority?

The following literature review integrates digital applied linguistics, LinkedIn self-presentation, metadiscourse, critical discourse analysis, quantification, and technological solutionism to establish the conceptual basis for the 14-post analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Applied Linguistics and the Discursive Construction of Authority

Authority in digital applied linguistics may be approached as the discursive effect of systematic choices across modes of representation, evaluation, agency, and engagement. As established by critical discourse analysis, these textual practices may be connected to broader dynamics of power (Fairclough, 2013). Examined from this perspective, the relevant question in philanthropic discourse is not simply who or what gets described, but how private actors are discursively positioned to determine public needs, to assess evidence, and to frame permissible responses. Research on elite philanthropy provides the political backdrop for this language-focused inquiry by illustrating donors' asymmetrical agenda-setting capacity (Haydon et al., 2021; McGoey, 20).

Legitimacy conferred through discourse has ethical implications as well as questions of epistemology. Sklair and Glucksberg (201) reveal how elite giving may operate as a strategy of wealth-management and dynastic succession even as it casts wealthy families as stewards of shared resources. Ahmad and Saifer (2024) unpack recurrent narratives of beneficence, progress, and fairness that obscure structural contradictions. For our analysis of captions, these studies help clarify how wealth is translated into ability, vision, and moral aptitude through repeated patterns of evaluation and storytelling. Elite philanthropy is discursively complex. Adewoye et al. (2023) describe how entrepreneurial charity in Africa may merge an empowering vocabulary with neoliberal scripts that position beneficiaries as market-ready, self-managing individuals. This contradiction helps explain the valences in Gates' descriptions. Solutions for education, health, or poverty may be worth pursuing in material terms while still promoting change through the lenses of investment, innovation, efficiency, and scalable systems. Critique should therefore resist deciding whether philanthropy is generous or predatory and instead interrogate the linguistic frameworks that represent problems, populations, and actors.

Projects funded by the Gates Foundation similarly demonstrate how problem definition has political and discursive consequences. Shaw and Wilson (2020) discuss how discourse around climate-smart agriculture can reproduce "technological" and "population-management" solutions while obscuring root causes of agrarian insecurity. Canfield (2023) characterizes a similar "ideology of innovation" where private-sector technologies and partnerships are positioned as default solutions for food-system crises. Global health scholarship has shown how philanthropists' approaches to knowledge-making determines what forms of expertise and evidence are considered legitimate or actionable (Littoz-Monnet & Osorio Garate, 2024). Data sources like statistics, forecasts, and scale are therefore not just informational inputs; they are also discursive tools that privilege interventions that "make sense."

2.2 LinkedIn and Executive Self-Presentation

Platform differences matter because social-media genres enable and reward different performances of identity. According to Faber (2022), platforms constitute unique contexts of communication, with different affordances that structure how users make sense and engage with posted content. LinkedIn places primacy on professional relevance, achievement, expertise, and affiliations with institutions. Philanthropic captions on this platform will therefore probably be interpreted not just as moral appeals but also claims of leadership and capability.

Studies of self-presentation on LinkedIn help contextualize Gates' profile in this way. Marin and Nilă (2021) describe LinkedIn personal branding as arising from purposive displays of expertise and professional value. Weisi and Hajizadeh (2025) chart pragmatolinguistic strategies of self-presentation and self-praise including indirect ("implicit") strategies that enable people to advertise desirable qualities without seeming boastful. Gates' captions can serve a similar function when judgments of worth, examples of projects, and references to institutional cooperation signal expertise by way of explanation rather than self-congratulation.

Leadership communication is necessarily communication with multiple audiences. Palmieri and Mazzali-Lurati (2021) argue that texts like corporate mission statements have "multiple addressees" and internalize the voices of various stakeholders. One of Gates' captions may reach policymakers, scientists, donors, business executives, health-care professionals, and casual followers. Keiper et al. (2025) examine how LinkedIn users position themselves relative to audience and find that executives vary their language use systematically by role and post topic. Wu et al. (2022) explore how leaders communicate via social media to serve as ambassadors for their organizations. The ambassadorship of Gates is enhanced by his hybrid personal-institutional identity, which makes his voices difficult to disentangle.

Ambiguities of perspective bring pronouns into relief. Fladerer et al. (2021) associate frequent CEO use of we with organizing identity around a collective sense of self, and Labrecque et al. (2020) find that pronoun use influences audience responses to brand messages. But a collective we does not always denote egalitarian participation. Orvell et al. (2022) point out that even small pronoun shifts reframe social relations. By using we, high-status individuals in global-health or international-development discourse may universalize empathy while retaining agency and authority for named organizations.

2.3 Stance, Metadiscourse, and Future Orientation

Metadiscourse refers to "the linguistic devices that writers use to structure their discourse, signal their epistemic stance, and interact with their readers" (Hyland, 2005). Online contexts push these elements into brief but salient texts. Biri (2021) approaches social-media metadiscourse reflexively as a result: contributors are managing their own propositions and relations even as they respond to the conventions of the genre (e.g. spontaneity, transparency, conversationality). The present study does not apply an exhaustive metadiscourse lens to a single author's very small corpus. However, it discusses several elements (self-mention, collectivity, modality, and overt stance) through this lens.

Why do these markers matter? Research into corporate communications suggests reasons. Liu and Zhang (2021) argue that metadiscourse helps construct ethos, pathos, and logos in corporate press releases through its ability to guide readers' interpretations, demonstrate writers' confidence, and build relations with audiences. Selfmentions like I believe, I know, I expect, or I'm hopeful could position reader-facing evaluation as transparent introspection on LinkedIn. Modal verbs that signal ability (can, could) make it easier for writers to position technological promises as within reach. Multiple instances of will can help establish determination while making future benefits feel near. Writer.

Jenkins et al.'s (2020) review of health communication on social media suggests that stance helps as well. Readers may judge credibility based not only on formal indicators of evidence but also on whether they perceive a speaker as sincere, competent, and trustworthy. Competency and reliability can vary by genre and platform among science-oriented discourse; they can be enhanced by the use of familiar evidential practices (Boothby et al., 2021). Gates' co-text blends numerical evidence with hopeful first-person vocabulary, which could allow him to draw on two types of authority: objective proof and personal relatability.

2.4 Quantification, Innovation, and Solutionism

Quantification enables institutions to make claims of working effectively. Numbers distill complex suffering into commensurable outputs, identify trends over time, and render intervention seem measurable. This can be ethically and pragmatically important work, especially when pointing to previously ignored harms. However, what gets measured also becomes privileged by what can be counted and attributed to an intervention. In the Gates' rhetoric, mortality rates, percentage points, targets for clinics, and estimates of lives saved can be marshalled to arguments for urgency while also funneling audiences toward programs that will have countable outputs.

There's also a temporal logic that language of innovation embodies. Phrases like progress, breakthrough, solution, access, and scale create associations between investment now and improvement later. Taylor (2021) describes technological solutionism as a kind of policy thinking that approaches complex social issues as if they have singular technical answers. Sharon (2021) argues that we need normative discussions about justice for data-driven health systems rather than assessing them through lenses of efficiency or innovation alone. These critiques are not suggestions that tech doesn't work. They shift analysis to the political assumptions elided when we treat a technological fix as the commonsense or first solution.

Solution-oriented language can also be managerial, not just high-tech. Smith et al. (2023) examine how 'smart economics' language operates through both empowerment and logics of productivity and calculable return. Community-based transport, delivery systems, and partnerships can fall into the same problem-response framework when arguments for their value are centered around ideas of efficiency, scaling, coordination, and outputs. By drawing this distinction I can look for a broader managerial rationality without mislabeling all interventions as technological goods.

2.5 Critical Discourse, Legitimation, and the Research Gap

Critical discourse analysis interrogates how textual resources both enact and are enacted by relations of power. "Key questions concern the process whereby particular representations become taken for granted..., whose interests are served by these representations becoming taken for granted?" (Fairclough, 2013). Systematic analysis of representations on social media therefore demands rigor in attending to aggregatable forms while maintaining sensitivity to medium-specific framing. Tamássy and Géring's (2022) helpful review demonstrates extensive heterogeneity in the operationalization of discourse analysis for social-media research. Of many important contributions, this paper most strongly aligns with their recommendation for explicit rules governing sampling, counting, and coding choices.

Publication itself does not create legitimacy on social media. Illia et al. (2023) helpfully argue that organizational legitimacy results from heterogeneous evaluations coalescing in alignment. The current study does not analyze comments, and does not attempt to measure audience acceptance. By focusing instead on the discursive resources provided for legitimation, we obviate drawing conclusions about persuasive success from rates of engagement. Discursive availability is not conflated with successful public legitimation.

Few existing studies target Gates as the object of research. Alashtary (2024) draws valuable connections between ideological patterns and Bill Gates' representations of artificial intelligence. Fewer studies conceptualize the relationship among stance, quantification, collective responsibility, and institutional agency across Gates Foundation's numerous lines of policy work. An open question—left here as an applied-linguistic exercise for the reader—is how recurring grammar at the caption level moves from problem to evidence, alignment, solution, authorized agency; where that grammar gives way to sincerest forms of low-tech, community-centered, or equity-oriented care.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Scope

The study employed corpus-linguistic methods as part of a broader digital applied linguistic investigation. A corpus-informed critical discourse analysis approach was adopted with a small purposive sample. Quantitative analyses provided descriptions of repeated lexico-grammatical features and qualitative analyses drew interpretations from them to show how these features worked together to construct problems, audiences, responsibilities, interventions and legitimate actors. The research questions were descriptive and interpretive not inferential. There will be no statistical claims of generalization to all Gates posts, LinkedIn posts in general, or effects on audiences.

Our final dataset included 14 English-language captions verified to have been posted by Bill Gates' official LinkedIn page ("Bill Gates") between 23 September 20[6] and 7 June 20[7]. The 14 items between these dates were filtered as described above. These 14 items comprise the entire analytic corpus discussed in this paper. The temporal boundaries of the dataset are based on the earliest and latest dated items we could find and verified; we make no claims of yearlong completeness.

3.2 Corpus Construction and Source Verification

Posts were selected based on four criteria: (a) posted on Gates' official account; (b) had English-language caption extractable from the public post page; (c) textually related to global health, child survival, climate or clean energy, AI and development, poverty or philanthropic focus; and (d) had a permalink and publication date. Excluded were content not germane to Bill Gates' professional and philanthropic focus (personal updates, books he was reading, promotions), comments authored by others users, repeated displays of identical posts, and content with captions that could not be recovered from the post page. Posts were compared against the publicly available items on Gates' LinkedIn page as of 26 July 2026. Posts are numbered based on date of publication from BG01–BG14. Table A1 in Appendix A lists the publication date, analytic unit, word count of caption, and permalink for each post. Given that LinkedIn posts can be deleted or otherwise changed at any time, the list here serves as part of the audit trail and delineates precisely which public-facing content served as data for this analysis.

Only the authorial caption is included in the text corpus. Linked articles, titles of article previews, totals of other users' reactions, other users' comments, and profile information automatically inserted into the page were removed. For BG08, which is a video caption, the transcript was not included. This ensures consistency across analytic units and prevents longer length texts linked or uploaded to the posts from skewing lexical results.

3.3 Text Preparation and Descriptive Counting

The 14 captions were stored as Unicode text files and processed using an open-source Python 3.12.13 script. Tokens were delimited as contiguous alphabetic strings that included internal apostrophes, hashtag tokens, or alphanumeric strings containing commas or decimal points. Curly apostrophes were normalized. Common contractions were split to tag pronoun counts ("I' m" became "I" + "am") and modal auxiliary counts ("we' re" became "we" + "are"). Hashtag symbols were counted but discarded from the total word count. Hyphenated tokens were separated into alphabetic units. These

decisions yielded a corpus of 1,222 words. The subsequent descriptive analysis entailed counts of total words, words per post, major themes, pronouns (I, me, my, mine), plural/polysingular forms (we, us, our, ours), ability/permission modals (can, could, may, might), deontic modals (must, should), commitment to prediction (will, would), and an explicitly coded list of epistemic/modaleffective stance items. Counts were also compiled for semantic-fields of progress, innovation/breakthrough, solution, scale/access, partnership/institution, and evidence/data/research. Appendix B lists operationalized forms.

Absolute token frequencies were reported, as well as counts and percentages of posts featuring each individual form. Rates per 1,000 words and measures of collocation were not reported because the corpus size is too small to make claims about lexical distributions from these statistics. Consistent with Brezina et al. (2015), collocational associations will be interpreted qualitatively rather than inferred from raw frequency rankings.

3.4 Qualitative Coding and Critical Interpretation

One primary thematic code and one primary rhetorical configuration was applied to each caption. Themes included global health/child survival; climate/clean energy; AI/development; and foundations. Configurations included numerical humanitarian urgency; technocratic innovation/milestones of progress; aspirational institutions fundraising/trading value; and forward-looking techno-optimism. Posts were organized under the configuration that most closely resembled its overall problem–solution logic, though secondary aspects were noted during close reading. Five binarized legitimation strategies were then coded at the post level: (1) problem or need, (2) quantification/evidentialization, (3) collectivization, (4) solution/intervention, and (5) named institutional or expert agency. Quantification included numbers, numbered goals, or written comparisons. Named agency included specific reference to organizations, companies, expert groups or programs, or technical entities. Posts were not required to contain all five strategies to be included in the analysis. The final stage of interpretation draws on Fairclough's (2013) critical approach to identify ways in which these textual patterns produced new forms of digital authority and normalized specific types of problem–solution relationships. Themes included how responsibility and agency are allocated, the legitimation effects of quantification, the temporality of innovation narratives, and the exclusion of structural or redistributive frameworks. Close readings are sorted by post and include the corresponding BG identifier in case any interpretation should be reviewed (see Appendix A).

3.5 Research Quality, Ethics, and Boundaries

Quality was assured via direct source links, clear inclusion criteria, a defined counting dictionary, a post-level coding matrix, and table-corpus script consistency checks. No intercoder reliability coefficient is provided because a second coder did not independently code the corpus. As such, calculating a reliability coefficient would be methodologically inaccurate. Single-coder study is a limitation which is partially addressed via a clear audit trail. Public communications by a public figure were analyzed in this study. No private data were viewed, no users were contacted, no comments were collected, and no ordinary LinkedIn members were identified in the course of this study. As such, this research consisted of documentary rather than human-participant analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Corpus Profile and Thematic Distribution

After verification, the corpus consisted of 14 captions and 1,222 words overall. The captions ranged from 24 words (BG08) to 199 words (BG09) with an average of 87.3 words per caption. Table 1 displays that global health and child survival made up the largest thematic group with eight posts, making up 57.1%. Climate and clean energy made up 21.4% (three posts), AI and development comprised 14.3% (two posts), and institutional philanthropy represented 7.1% of one post.

Consequently, this distribution echoes the purposive relevance criteria and should not be interpreted as such for all topics posted on Gates’ account.

Table 1
Primary thematic distribution of the 14-post corpus

Primary theme	Posts	%
Global health and child survival	8	57.1
Climate and clean energy	3	21.4
AI and development	2	14.3
Institutional philanthropy	1	7.1
Total	14	100.0

Note. Each post was assigned one dominant theme. Percentages describe only the purposive 14-post corpus.

4.2 Corpus Size and Caption Features

Table 2 outlines the primary corpus descriptives. Nine captions (64.3%) featured at least one numerical expression written as digits. These included everything from mortality counts/percentages to dates/targets/clinic counts/lives saved. BG03 was the only caption containing hashtags, and no caption among the 14 used punctuation in the form of a question mark. Interestingly enough, captions did not ask direct questions despite aligning with audiences through pronouns, stance, and shared-future language.

Table 2
Descriptive characteristics of the caption corpus

Measure	Value
Number of verified posts	14
Corpus word total	1,222
Mean caption length	87.3 words
Caption-length range	24–199 words
Posts with digit-based numerical expressions	9 (64.3%)
Posts containing hashtags	1 (7.1%)
Posts containing a question mark	0 (0.0%)

Note. Word counts follow the tokenization rules in Section 3.3 and Appendix B.

4.3 Self-Mention, Collective Reference, and Modality

Table 3 reports stance and engagement. First person singular self-mention totaled 19 mentions across nine posts, or 64.3% of posts; this is precisely the same post coverage as collective reference, which totaled 16 mentions. The surface forms further clarify the relationship: I was used 16 times, my three times, we 13 times, us once, and our twice. You or your did not occur. By these measures, captions oriented readers toward alignment through a speaker-centered I/we relationship rather than direct address in second person.

Distribution of pronouns was functional rather than interchangeable. BG01, for instance, universalized responsibility for future health outcomes via “the choices we make today.” BG03 similarly transitioned from paralysis afflicting “200,000 children each year” to “we” and the last mile of polio eradication. By contrast, BG02 employed I twice to describe a revision of expert opinion on geothermal energy, and BG10 surrounded thoughts of Foundation–OpenAI partnership with I-forms clustered around thinking, believing, and excitement. Collective pronouns tended to align audiences with moral problem. Singular self-mention more frequently authorized speakers to evaluate and select solutions.

As with engagement, will was the modal verb form, occurring 18 times across eight posts (57.1%). Ability and possibility modal forms can and could occurred 13 times across eight posts. By contrast, explicit forms of deontic obligation were comparatively rare: must appeared twice, in BG04 and BG09. Taken together, these results suggest a preference for framing beneficial futures as predictions (will) or grounded in technical possibility, rather than commanding audiences to bring them about. BG09 was unusually future-oriented, employing will to predict improvements in agriculture, healthcare, and education enabled by AI before arguing that innovations “must reach” people in need.

Markers of epistemic and affective stance were used explicitly 15 times across eight posts. This set includes believe, thinking, know, expect, optimist, optimism, optimistic, hopeful, hopefully, excited, and favorite. These items work to construct Gates’ authority as personalized: he comes across as reflective, emotionally invested in his work, and intellectually flexible enough to revise his thinking when warranted. BG07’s closing comment that “optimism comes with footnotes” was especially important in this regard.

Table 3
Stance, pronoun, and modal resources

Resource	Occurrences	Posts	% of posts
First-person singular self-mention	19	9	64.3
Inclusive/collective reference	16	9	64.3
Ability/possibility modality	13	8	57.1
Explicit deontic obligation	2	2	14.3
Predictive commitment	18	8	57.1
Explicit epistemic/affective stance	15	8	57.1

Note. Occurrences are token counts. Post coverage indicates at least one operational form. Explicit stance forms are listed in Appendix B.

4.4 Progress, Innovation, Evidence, and Access

Table 4 combines selected words into lexical sets or semantic fields. Fields with the greatest spread included progress (seven appearances across six posts), forms of innovation (five appearances across three posts), breakthrough (two appearances), solution (two appearances), and forms of scale/access (seven appearances across four posts). These relatively small raw frequencies become notable in

aggregate: the health, AI, and energy captions used these words to argue for a shared language bridging otherwise distinct policy areas.

The semantic work these words did in context varied. Numerical percentages and reference to a named company increased the potential scale of geothermal energy from a formerly “limited resource” to something that could technically work “almost anywhere” in BG02. BG12 telescoped this forward-looking frame further by listing geothermal, fusion, and geologic hydrogen and tying accessible/becoming-accessible, scaling up, and progress to the idea of a clean-energy future. Access and reach also became prerequisites for benefiting equitably from AI in BG09 and BG10.

Posts leveraged evidence/data terminology rather than distributing it evenly. Evidence/data/language about research comprised 11 appearances concentrated in three posts, particularly BG13 and BG14. BG13 opened with Gates’s “favorite chart,” deemed the reduction in under-5 mortality “the strongest evidence that progress is possible,” and then pivoted with but to contrast that with slower improvement on stillbirth. BG14 mentions research, sharing data, blood tests, researchers, and clinical trials all in one post, along with a reference to Gates’ father. This posts links specialized evidence with family feeling, so that scale becomes as much a scientific limitation as a moral aspiration.

Table 4
Selected semantic fields in the captions

Semantic field	Occurrences	Posts	% of posts
Progress	7	6	42.9
Innovation	5	3	21.4
Breakthrough	2	2	14.3
Solution	2	2	14.3
Scale/access	7	4	28.6
Partnership/institution	4	2	14.3
Evidence/data/research	11	3	21.4

Note. Fields were counted from predefined surface forms; they are descriptive groupings, not statistically derived topics or collocations.

4.5 Rhetorical Configurations

The captions at or above synthesis level clustered around four configurations, shown in Table 5. Quantified humanitarian urgency appeared most frequently and constituted six posts (42.9%). Typically these captions would frame mortality, paralysis, maternal health emergency, or disease burden in numerical terms and escalate their moral implications. Posts featuring technocratic innovation and progress constituted five posts (35.7%) and linked energy or artificial intelligence to availability, innovation, and scalable futurity. Future-oriented optimism and institutional aspiration each constituted two posts (14.3%) and one post (7.1%), respectively. Finally, BG06 centered around institution aspiration and resource mobilization.

BG05 was representative of quantified humanitarian urgency. The caption moved from “4.6 million children” dying to “more than 200,000 additional children” threatened with death to “thousands of classrooms” filled with missing children. From here, the Goalkeepers Report served as an institutional site of evidence. Taglines like “do more with less” reframed decreasing budgets as

problems in efficiency. “Together, we can” opened up moral obligation to act, but did not clarify who would ultimately hold decision-making power.

BG06 centered institutional aspiration. Three numbered points articulated Foundation targets for preventing mortality, infectious disease, and poverty into a twenty-year agenda. Caption discourse moved from “our work” to “I know,” suggesting ownership by the Foundation while converting it to personal knowledge. Resources were treated as conditional, but actors responsible for priority-setting and resource distribution were positioned as the Foundation and its network.

Table 5
Dominant rhetorical configurations

Dominant configuration	Posts	%
Quantified humanitarian urgency	6	42.9
Technocratic innovation and progress	5	35.7
Institutional aspiration and resource mobilization	1	7.1
Future-oriented optimism	2	14.3
Total	14	100.0

Note. Each post received one dominant configuration after post-level close reading.

4.6 Recurring Discursive Legitimation Pathway

Figure 1. Overview of recurrent caption-level pathway constructed from binary coding. Proportion of posts engaging with each attribute are shown in parentheses. Image description:

Of 14 posts, 12 (85.7%) identified a problem/need; 9 (64.3%) employed quantification/evidentialization; 9 (64.3%) invoked collective reference; 11 (78.6%) posited a solution/intervention; and 10 (71.4%) named an institutional, organizational, or expert agent. A single diagram cannot illustrate every caption verbatim. Instead, this figure illustrates a recurrent pattern. Captions sometimes omitted, reordered, or telescoped these stages.

BG10 opened with poverty, hunger, disease, and unequal healthcare access; then framed AI as a gamechanger; and named the Gates Foundation, OpenAI, African leaders, and a target of 1,000 clinics. BG11 opened with maternal emergency and transport delay, quantified response times and lives saved, and positioned m- mama’s community-driven network as the solution for coordinating care. This second example is important because it demonstrates that this grammar is not exclusive to high-tech interventions. Social infrastructure and logistical networks can be legitimized through the same terms of quantifiable needs, coordination, and scalable impact.

No caption explicitly referenced redistribution, public ownership, taxation of private wealth, labor, or democratic decision-making over philanthropic goals. Language around funding-constraints appears in BG04–BG06. Phrases implying equity/access were only explicit in BG09 and BG10. Across the corpus, smarter allocation, innovation, partnership, or delivery of resources remained the dominant modality of response. To be clear, this claim does not mean that Bill Gates might not think those

things are important if prompted outside of these 14 slides. This claim only describes what made discourse prominent across these slides.

Figure 1

Recurring caption-level discursive legitimization pathway



Note. Counts indicate posts containing each mechanism. The pathway is recurrent, not mandatory; captions may omit or reorder stages.

5. Discussion

5.1 Stance and the Performance of Accessible Expertise

The results above provide one answer to research question 1: How was authority and audience alignment constructed through stance, pronouns, and modality? The balanced distribution between singular self-mention and we references – nine posts each – displays Gates’s double personae. On one hand, he came across as a judging individual who thinks, believes, knows, expects, hopes, and revises his opinions. On the other hand, he spoke from within a collectivity, using we references to describe actions and states. These tendencies align with LinkedIn’s professional genre logic; expertise must be established but cannot take the form of outright bragging, which can instead be obfuscated through distancing tactics and appeals to the public good (Weisi & Hajizadeh, 2025). They also build on prior work on executive positioning by demonstrating how personal stance can bolster institutional legitimacy across sectors/topics of policy rather than simply enact a corporate identity role (Keiper et al., 2025).

What is also notable is what’s missing: Gates almost never constructed followers as addressees with you and your. Alignment was most commonly couched in terms of a shared horizon – temporal (most “days” and “years”) and moral (most “shoulds”). “We” are confronted with challenges from climate, make decisions, have protected gains, and will hand off to younger generations. Regarding metadiscourse, the captions were interactional without being interactive in the narrow Q&A sense (Biri, 2021; Hyland, 2005). The zero frequency for question marks and clustering of hashtags in single post lends credence to this reading.

Finally, Gates’s alternation between self and collectivity also nuances optimistic readings of we-referencing. Using we language can build collective identity and foster audience engagement (Fladerer et al., 2021; Labrecque et al., 2020). Yet as this research notes, its political impact is conditional on “co-occurring agency assignments”. Who or what did the “we” own, who was obligated, who would bring about the future? In this corpus, either Gates personally or we owned the problem, the obligation, or the desired future state, while I, the Foundation, companies, researchers, artificial intelligence, and expert partnerships more frequently performed the work of evaluating or delivering the solution. In short, inclusive language narrowed social distance without disrupting the interpersonal hierarchy of authority.

5.2 Quantification and the Moral Organization of Problems

The second framing question asked how problems and interventions were framed. Digit-based numerals appeared in nine posts, and nine more posts were coded qualitatively for

quantification/evidentialization. Mortality totals, % forecasts, clinic numbers to target, lives-saved estimates, and scale of clinical trials translated heterogeneous problems into a uniform language of quantified need and quantified solution. These cues may bolster perceived scientific legitimacy on social media (Boothby et al., 2021), especially when tethered to known reports, graphs, companies, or researchers.

The substantive point is not that these numbers were irrelevant or that they were necessarily deceptive. BG05's mortality numbers and BG11's maternal emergency endpoints both describe real stakes for real humans. The problem is that quantification formats relevance. Littoz-Monnet and Osorio Garate (2024) describe philanthropic knowledge-making as a mechanism of global governance because it makes certain things visible and actionable. Here, in the specific dataset of problem interventions on Gates' official social media feeds, numerically described problems translated smoothly into interventions that philanthropy can pay for, test, coordinate, or scale up.

BG13 enacts its own reproach to measurement. This paired post first congratulated itself on a graph of improvement in child mortality, then clarified that "this graph doesn't tell the full story. For stillbirths, the slope is less steep and we need to do more" (fig. 3). The caption confirms that Gates' Facebook presence is not universally self-congratulatory, and that data can be discursively used to expose gaps as well as accomplishments. That said, the caveated problem is also inserted into a measurable relation with a quantifiably successful benchmark.

5.3 Innovation, Prediction, and Solution-Oriented Authority

The third research question concerned how captions allocated responsibility and agency in discursive constructions of global development authority. The recapitulated pathway above from problem/evidence to collective alignment/intervention/executed solution/named agency helps answer it. Framing a solution/intervention occurred in 11 posts and invoking named institutional or expert agency occurred in 10. This regular grammar positioned private foundations, firms, partnerships, programs, researchers, and technologies as vehicles through which shared moral objectives could be operationally achieved.

Predictive modality amplified that pathway. Will totaled 18 uses, over twice as many as can and could combined. Repeated promises of future action made innovation seem like less of an option and more of an inevitability: AI will help with guidance, health care will improve, tests will help us screen more children, and energy technologies will help us find new solutions. To repeat: the implied progression toward which expertise and investment are positioned strengthens digital authority by making it future-oriented. Canfield's ((20)23) framing of innovation ideology aids explanation here. Technological or market-compatible pathways toward shared values can take on a sheen of forward-facing self-evidence, while structural alternatives can appear stagnant, unrealistic, or simply nonexistent.

That said, the corpus muddies the waters on a totalizing accusation of technological determinism. BG09 clearly stated equitable impacts would not be automatic and that innovators would have to bring AI to those who need it. BG04 advocated for protecting health and development funding instead of prioritizing climate technology above all else. Both of these sentences qualified the merit of innovation by acknowledging political distributions of technology and resource scarcity. The solution, however, was not to renegotiate who controls the terms of the debate. Better access, funding protection, partnerships, and delivery were the proposed antidotes to misdistribution, not political reform. As such, Taylor' ((20)21) critique of solutionism is more usefully applied to the level of problem-response grammar than as an argument that the captions were oblivious to equity.

5.4 The m-mama Transport Post as a Community-Based Counter-Case

BG11 is critical because it is the strongest qualifying example. This was first and foremost an intervention by means of community-based transport network utilizing cars, bicycles, boats, and

horses—it was not the result of laboratory innovation or cutting-edge software. Drivers were positioned as essential agents in operations at the community level. This insight ensures that the solutionism described above (which was prevalent throughout the corpus) cannot be wholly reduced to technological exceptionalism and allowed for local agency to be considered. This did not occur, however, without the caption adhering to key tropes of the managerial grammar. There was a problem that needed solving (delayed emergencies); the program’s legitimacy was provided by quantitative figures (>125,000 responses, ~5,266 lives saved); and value was communicated as minutes that count. Measurable, coordinated solutionism was therefore the relevant common denominator. This case can therefore be aligned with Adewoye et al. (20 23) and Smith et al. (20 23) finding that market-based development discourse has the ability to frame empowerment and localization through efficiency, entrepreneurship, and performance measures.

5.5 Applied-Linguistic and Critical Media Literacy Contribution

By analyzing legitimation work at the micro-level of language, the paper offers contributions to digital applied linguistics and discourse studies. Pronouns, modals, stance markers, evidential resources, semantic fields, and other categories did not appear discretely as stylistic effects. Recurrent bundles instantiated a familiar relationship: someone acting as a contemplative expert observes a quantified issue, forges a group around the timeliness of tackling it, and proposes a solution administered by prepared institutions and flows. Relating lexico-grammatical patterning to forms of social agency is the paper’s primary applied-linguistic takeaway.

For researchers studying communications crafted for heterogeneous audiences, this narrative helps explain how such strategies work. Gates’ captions spoke to widely distributed audiences. They avoided you, summoned intersecting subject positions, and fused personal narrative with scientific authority, humanitarian urgency, and business opportunity all at once. Polyphony like this could be unpacked further to account for how seemingly accessible communication can simultaneously communicate salience to elite audiences such as policymakers, donors, scientists, and business leaders (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2021).

Teachers of critical media literacy could also begin analysis there. Readers might ask themselves questions such as: How is the problem quantified? Who does we include? Who judges the evidence? Which solution is foregrounded? Which actors gain operational agency? Which options are foreclosed? These questions don’t ask readers to disparage philanthropy or denounce innovation. They help readers see how voice, authority, and political possibility is allocated.

5.6 Limitations and Future Research

This research is limited by the convenience-sample size. While 14 posts is large enough for transparent close reading analysis, it is too small to claim it analyzes all Gates’ LinkedIn activity or shows changes over time. These posts also were included or excluded based on topic relevance to the research question. Therefore, percentages in this paper should only be understood to describe this sample of 14 posts.

This research considered post captions, not full multimodal LinkedIn activity. Posts’ images, article contents, video transcripts, editing activity, comments, or engagement results are not included in this paper. Therefore, the paper offers no findings related to visual-grammar, intersemiotic translation, or reception studies. This paper’s coding was conducted by one coder. No intercoder reliability statistic can be provided. Future researchers should archive a sample of posts defined a priori that includes allowed screenshots or descriptions of media content, include at least two coders trained on the codebook, preregister visual and linguistic categories, and compare across different world-leading philanthropists or organizational accounts.

Such a study could also quantify if the pathway described in this paper changes when discussing different topics, using different linked-content media, or before and after major political events.

Analyzing comments could reveal whether Gates' followers accepted, challenged, or otherwise redeployed the legitimization resources offered by Gates. Such analysis would be a valuable extension because organizational legitimacy is contingent on audience reaction, not authors' statements alone (Illia et al., 2023).

Despite these limitations, this analysis provides an initial explanation for how Gates uses LinkedIn that is grounded in empirical observations: Gates' post captions construct accessibility, shared sacrifice, quantified harm, and expert efficiency while avoiding discussion of the power structures governing philanthropy.

6. Conclusion

This pilot study took 14 authenticated Bill Gates LinkedIn captions and broke them down to show how stance, modality, quantification, and agency choices pattern to produce technocratic authority online. In 1222 words, Bill Gates mentioned "I" or "we" nine times each and used will futures 18 times. His captions regularly quantify global issues and associate them with progress nouns and access verbs. Solutions quickly follow that refer to the work of foundations, companies, programs, name-dropped experts, or technologies. Overall, the consistent legitimization strategy spreads moral accountability widely but places instrumental agency with identifiable experts and institutions. Qualifiers like the m- m ama caption or his unambiguous use of equity in the AI captions caveat a solely techno-centric interpretation; recurring discourse trend is quantifiable, administrative solutionism. Linking linguistic features to depictions of responsibility and agency gives digital applied linguistics and critical discourse studies an observable, post-by-post analysis. Claims made can be reassessed with the documented 14 post dataset.

Data Transparency Statement

Appendix A includes the full source register for the 14 captions treated in this article. Appendix B details the primary counting/coding rules. Captions are accessible via canonical LinkedIn permalinks where possible, per platform terms. Analysis script + coding matrix may be stored with records of the research for editorial/reviewer reproduction. Corpus does not claim to include all Gates posts made during the time frame.

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Appendix A

Table A1

Complete register of the 14 verified LinkedIn posts

ID	Date	Analytical focus	Words	Source
BG01	2025-09-23	Global health and child mortality	54	Post
BG02	2025-09-30	Geothermal energy	50	Post
BG03	2025-10-18	Polio eradication	42	Post
BG04	2025-10-29	Climate, health, and aid	67	Post
BG05	2025-12-06	Goalkeepers and child mortality	93	Post
BG06	2025-12-20	Gates Foundation aspirations	81	Post
BG07	2026-01-12	Global progress and childhood mortality	93	Post
BG08	2026-01-13	New-year global-health optimism	24	Post
BG09	2026-01-19	AI in agriculture, health, and education	199	Post
BG10	2026-01-23	AI and Horizon1000	86	Post
BG11	2026-03-08	m-mama maternal emergency transport	100	Post
BG12	2026-03-27	Next-generation electricity	109	Post
BG13	2026-05-02	Stillbirths	82	Post
BG14	2026-06-07	Alzheimer's research	142	Post

Note. Focus labels are analytical descriptions rather than reproduced post titles. Word counts refer to captions only; linked articles, comments, and media transcripts were excluded.

Appendix B

Table B1

Operational counting and qualitative-coding rules

Category	Operational rule
Self-mention	I, me, my, mine after contraction expansion.
Collective reference	we, us, our, ours after contraction expansion.
Ability/possibility	can, could, may, might.
Deontic obligation	must, should only; lexical need was not treated as a modal.
Predictive commitment	will, would.

Category	Operational rule
Explicit stance	believe, think/thinking, know, expect, optimist/optimism/optimistic, hopeful/hopefully, excited, favorite.
Quantification/evidence code	Statistics, ordered numerical goals, explicit comparative quantities, reports, charts, tests, trials, data, or researchers used to authorize a claim.
Solution/intervention code	A proposed technology, program, funding action, partnership, delivery system, or named response to the identified problem.
Institution/expert code	A named foundation, company, program, partnership, researcher group, or technical actor represented as capable of action.

Note. All categories were applied to the authorial caption only. A post could receive multiple binary mechanisms but only one dominant theme and rhetorical configuration.