

Obama's Techniques of Persuasion in His Speech on Striking Syria

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Abstract: This paper focuses on Obama's techniques of persuasion in speech on striking Syria. The model which is adopted to analyze Obama's speech is critical discourse analysis under the impact of Norman Fairclough's and Halliday's perspective. This study investigates the various persuasive strategies employed by President Obama to establish his proposal on attacking Syria. And explores these persuasive strategies used to influence the audience to believe him. The use of first personal pronoun is to shorten the distance between him (president) and the audience. So it can help him persuade the public to accept and support his policies, actions and what he determined for his future businesses. Finally, the speaker uses modal verb to make the audience to understand his speech easily and also to agree his speech by using modal verbs.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Systematic Functional Grammar, Power, Ideology, Barak Obama.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in human life; usually through language human beings express their own feelings, ideas, attitudes, actions...etc. Language is inseparable from human beings as it is used in whole walks of life. It is the best man-made means of communication by which people effectively communicate with each other to assert all situations of human affairs. This role of language would be clearly recognized in political discourse. The relationship between language and politics is, recently, the main focus of scholars in the sense that how politicians exploit language to persuade their audience of their present or future plans. Further, politics is seen as a struggle for power to set up certain political, economic and social ideas (Baker & Ellece, 2011)

According to Chilton (2004: 3) politics can be defined as a social activity in the sense that it is a struggle for power between who has authority and who has not. That is, it can be defined under a set of cooperative strategies carried out by some social institutions on the basis of solving some social conflicts. This is a crucial part of politicians' ideology. The term 'ideology' is a basic concept in critical discourse analysis. Fairclough (2001a: 77), states that ideology can be defined in terms of two forms: first it means "any social policy which is in part or whole derived from social theory in conscious way", second, it refers to "ideas which arise from a given set of material interest".

On the other hand, Fairclough (1995) shows that the analytic framework for the text or discourse has three dimensions of analysis: text, discursive practice and sociocultural practice. So, the meaning of text is even written or spoken text i.e., the analysis of the text involves the study of language structures which are produced in a discursive event. While discursive practice is including the interpretation and the production of texts, it means to focus on the production, consumption and reproduction of the texts. Whereas, the sociocultural practice is a part of social practice, i.e. the analysis is to investigate on the events of particular sociocultural framework. So, this study analyses from CDA perspective President Obama's speech delivered for a military strike against the Syrian government on Sept. 10, 2013, at the White House.

According to Dijk (1995) politics is a struggle for power and a tool for establishing certain political, economic and social ideas into practice. In this sense, language acts a crucial tool for politicians to accomplish and influence actions played by language. Discourse covers a large area in linguistics, sociology, philosophy and other disciplines and it refers to the whole process of interaction of which a text is just a part (Fairclough, 1989).

In this sense, it refers to using words expressing one. It can be used for asserting power and ideology of the politicians. Thus, politicians express their ideological intentions in a text as do the linguistic forms of the text. As a case in point, this research tries to find out the strategies of persuasion in Obama's speech and how he tries to persuade not only the Americans but also the Public. So, he used different persuasive technique to address both Americans and the public. Such various techniques may make his speech more persuasive. Thus, the aim of this research is to reflect the ideology and attitudes of the speaker and how these various strategies of persuasion in his speech used to impose his own opinion to act 'a targeted military strike'.

Political discourse can be based on two criteria: functional and thematic. It is a result of politics and it is historically and culturally determined. It acts different functions due to different political activities. The political discourse is thematic because its topics are primarily linked with politics such as political activities, political relations. Thus, individual's choice and use of different language systems varies according to who the speakers are and whether the situation is public or private, formal or informal.

The aim of this study is to investigate the link between language, ideology and reality from critical discourse analysis perspective. That is, to reveal the persuasive techniques of Obama's speech.

- 1) To investigate the various persuasive strategies employed by President Obama to establish his proposal on attacking Syria.
- 2) To explore these persuasive strategies used to influence the audience to believe him.

Thus, this research tries to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the persuasive strategies employed by President Obama to establish his proposal on attacking Syria?
- 2) How are these persuasive strategies used to influence the audience to believe him?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is concerned with Persuasive Strategies employed by President Obama. There are many researchers interest in the field of CDA, especially who focus on the work of the persuasive strategies in Fairclough's model. Thus the researcher tries to mention some of previous studies in this field.

According to Shayegh and Nabifar's "Power in Political Discourse of Barak Obama" (2012), the phenomenon of power exists in Obama's interview on the base of Hallidayian Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) from critical perspective of Fair Clough. Also, they analyze seven interviews delivered from different websites to show how the ideological loading and socio-political relations of power have been manifested in discourse of Obama. They used Fairclough's model in order to analyze hesitation, threat, persuasion, illusive and religious statement. The results of the study are, Obama as a dominant character, the pronouns "I" and "we" more frequently used than other pronouns, more religious statements and more persuasion. Finally, Obama's language is very easy and this can shorten the distance between him and the audience.

Also, Horváth (2009) "Critical Discourse Analysis of Obama's Political Discourse", examined the persuasive strategies and the covert ideology of Obama's public speaking. The analysis of this speech is grounded in Fairclough's model. The results of this study are summarized as the concepts: pragmatism, liberalism, inclusiveness, acceptance of religious and ethnic diversity and unity.

In addition, Kulo "Linguistic features in Political Speeches" (2009), aims to explore implicit statements in the language of politics seeing that political speeches are not mainly suitable as they are true. The research takes two speeches for the American presidential campaign of 2008 are analyzed. The first speech is Democratic president candidates Mr. Barack Obama, and the second speech is the Republican candidate Mr. John McCain. So, the writer analyzes the rhetorical strategies metaphors, metonymies, analogies, pronouns and the active or passive voice of transitive verbs.

Furthermore, Adamec "Persuasion in Political Discourse" (2011), investigates five speeches of Obama so as to reach type of persuasive which are used by politicians to persuade the others about the validity of politician's suggestions and make them willing to act according to him. The speeches are evaluated by qualitative and quantitative criteria, qualitative approach as the main ideas and themes are commented. Whereas, quantitative approach is the content of the speeches is evaluated in percentage on the ground of particular paragraphs.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper tries to analyze the ideologies and attitudes of Obama's speech. This study focuses on techniques of persuasion in Obama's speech and how he uses these techniques in order to persuade Americans and the public. The model which is adopted in this project is critical discourse analysis which is mostly under the impact of Norman Fairclough. The study deals with linguistics of Obama's speech extracted from Washington Post Staff1, September 10, 2013.

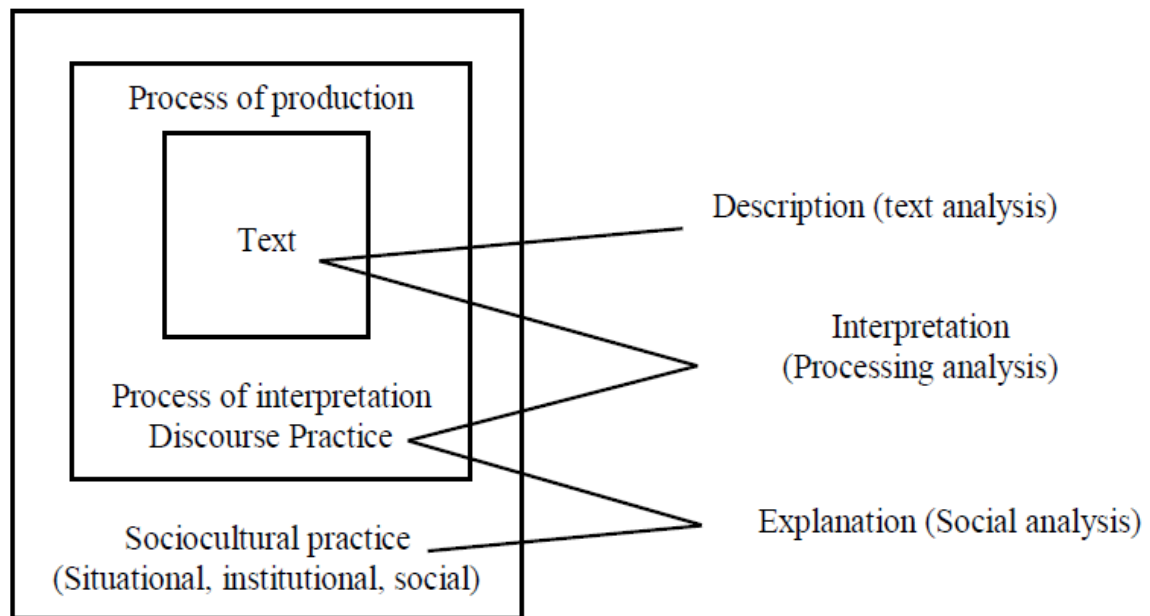


FIGURE I: DIMENSIONS OF DISCOURSE (FAIRCLOUGH, 1989)

Based on Blommaert (2005) and Fairclough (1989), the main focus will be on the text, its discourse, genres, style, and generally the discursive content. The main content of the text will be the main focus of the researcher. As the content is the focus, vocabulary, grammar, semantics and other aspects are analyzed. Moreover, the collocation will be emphasized by the researcher. Besides, the element of social events, exclusions and inclusions of specific features in the genre will be analyzed too. Baker and Ellece (2011) noticed that description is related to the Hallidayian Systemic Functional Grammar.

Blommaert (2005) highlights that the second level of the text analysis deals with the discursive practice. As such the (socio) linguistic aspect is not emphasized. Fairclough (1989) highlights that the social actors will be the main focus as the interrelation of the texts in the discursively and power relation between people are analyzed. At this level, actions interactions and social relations are focused on any social injustice is studied. Jorgesen and Philips (2002) emphasized that the texts are produced and consumed through discursive practices and these practices constitute the social world such as social relations and social identities. Social and cultural change and reproduction happen through these discursive practices.

The third level delves into discourse as social practice which deals with hegemonic processes. Fairclough (1992b) defined hegemony as the practice of domination in which the dominant group wins the other groups to ideologies what defines its domination. Moreover, Fairclough (1989) believes that the dynamics of the text is related to its institutional and historical contexts and structures. This level deals with explanation that is why it explains the underlying power relations, the methods of exploitation that is why it explains the underlying power relations, the methods of exploitation and marginalization.

Based on Zhuanglin (1988), Baker and Ellece (2011), Hallidayian Systemic Functional Grammar is mentioned as the foundation of text analysis as the internal relations of language are put into consideration. Fairclough (2003) emphasized that Systemic Functional Linguistics deals with the relationship between language and other social aspects.

¹http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-09-10/politics/41939044_1_chemical-weapons-poison-gas-sarin-gas

3.1 Findings:

Fairclough states that the assumed readers for his text are students and teachers in higher education and "others in a position to act as educators in a broad sense" (1994). Therefore, he makes a style in writing for those how are not excellent in linguistic, his style makes the text accessible, understandable and easy for the readers. Treating his readers as intelligent partners, he is neither simplistic nor condescending the points he makes are coherent and well substantiated. Thus, Fairclough says that when the writer or the speaker uses first person singular and plural 'I', 'we' rather than other pronouns like third person pronoun, he means that not only to manipulate, he is also not trying to claim a spurious reader solidarity in attempt to convince and persuade, but, rather, to stress the collaborative nature of the undertaking, treating the reader as partner.

3.2 Analysis of Personal Pronouns:

Obama begins his speech with the possessive pronouns 'my'. According to Crystal (1995) personal pronoun is a grammatical form which refers directly to the speaker. So, he regards the speaker as 'first person' while addressee is 'second person' and others elaborated in an interaction 'third person'. 'My fellow Americans, tonight I want to talk to you about Syria -- why it matters, and where we go from here.' Obama begins his speech 'My fellow Americans' to refer to the unity between American public and him as a president. So, Obama's style can be clarified that the whole system and the American republic are based on a grass root of diplomacy.

3.3 The Use of Person Pronouns:

According to Fairclough (1989) Personal pronoun has certain values that are encoded in different formal aspect of language. So, they have important role in the relationship between power and Ideology. Thus, Obama uses first person pronoun to reflect this idea (ideology and Power). The table 1.1 shows that the president uses the personal pronoun 'I' as a persuasive technique more than one time to add a personal sound to the speech and thus represents that Obama is committing himself to his beliefs and will stand by his action '**I want to talk to you about Syria**'.

This technique is used when the president maybe refers to his individual responsibility for certain actions. In addition, the personal pronoun 'I' is used to express his ideology, power and words. Also, the president uses 'I' when he ensures about success, thus he begins his words with his conviction and authority '**I determined that it is in the national security interests of the United States to respond to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike**'.

Another personal pronoun is used 'We', Obama uses it more than once in his speech to address the nation because it denotes to the president and the Government who are assert of each other. '**Where we go from here**'. Therefore, the purpose of using the personal pronoun 'we' is to shorten the distance between the speaker and the audience, nevertheless of their difference in age or social status or professions...etc. '**we know the Assad regime was responsible**'.

Here the personal pronoun 'we' refers to the speaker and the audience in order to make the listeners or the audience feel very near to the speaker.

The president also uses 'Me' and 'My' in order to show his opinion or view. So, 'Me' is used to refer to the same function or role of the personal pronoun 'I' which means that the speaker is committing himself. Whereas, 'My' is used to denote the personal opinion of the president like 'My fellow Americans'.

TABLE I: A LIST OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal pronoun	Numbers	Sample speech
I	3	Tonight I want to talk to you about Syria. But I have resisted calls for military action.
We	9	We know the Assad regime was responsible. We've also studied samples of blood and hair from people.
My	1	My fellow Americans
Me	1	Let me explain why

As mentioned above, the table 1.1 shows that the pronoun which is used more than once in the Obama's Speech is 'We'. So, the writer wants to determine how it is used as a persuasive technique.

The use of the pronoun 'we' is difficult to understand whether it can refer to a number of different people or to refer to the president and the government. From this speech 'We' occurs in terms of exclusive and inclusive.

According to Wales (1996: 66) exclusive 'We' means that does not refer to the addressee. It is usually used in order to denote the president and the government represent in the immediate situation. This means that the use of exclusive 'we' to exploit to portion duty. For example, ' **we cannot resolve someone else's civil war through force**', '**If we fail to act**'. Whereas the meaning of inclusive 'we' refers to the president and the listener. So that, inclusive 'we' means that the president share discussion and knowledge between them, such as the world '**that we will not tolerate their use**'.

TABLE II: THE USE OF INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE 'WE'

Use of 'We'	Number	Example
Inclusive 'we'	3	We cannot resolve someone else's civil war through force. This is not a world we should accept. We will not tolerate their use.
Exclusive 'we'	6	We know the Assad regime was responsible. We've also studied samples of blood and hair from people

From the table above, the writer notices that the use of inclusive 'we' more than once refers to the president and the people. Also, it is used to persuade the audience to work as a team as if 'we will', 'we should'. The meaning of the personal pronoun 'we' which is used by the speaker has two meanings. First, it refers to the president and Government (exclusive). Second, it denotes the share between the president and the audience.

Therefore, Fairclough (1989: 127) states that 'the rhetorical implication is that the audience must share the Government's views as being the only correct ones'. The reason behind the use of the pronoun 'we' is that the politicians are not sure when they choose the decisions whether these decisions are positive or not. Though, the use of 'we' is to spread the responsibility. The use of the personal pronoun 'we' is to manipulate and establish a sense of group unity. In addition, the first pronoun 'our' is used as the same as 'we' like, '**our sense**', '**our security**', '**our troops**' which means unity and belonging.

3.4 The Use of Second Person Pronoun:

The use of the second person pronoun 'You' is to refer as a form of direct address such as ' tonight I want to talk to you about Syria', this using means to attempt to involve all of his audience and make them an active part in his speech.

3.5 The Use of the Third Person Pronoun:

There are numbers of the third person pronouns include 'they', 'their', 'them', 'he', 'him', 'his', 'she', 'her', and 'it' to refer to different people. In Obama's speech 'them' is used to denote mostly to the Syrian people, and sometimes refers to the weapons. In addition, the pronouns 'they' and 'their' have the same function for that 'them'. Therefore, the use of two terms 'we' and 'they' have different meanings because they give the effect of positive versus negative. This means that 'we the people' is a positive force and 'they' or 'their' represents to enemy is negative force. In Obama's speech the use of 'their' refers to the weapons (negative). The last third person pronoun 'it' refers to different situations. Sometimes, the third person pronoun 'it' refers to Syrian and other times denotes to weapon, violation. The following table shows the use of pronouns in Obama's speech.

TABLE III: THE USE OF PRONOUNS

Personal pronoun	Number	Sample	Density
First person	I (me)	I want to talk to you about Syria.	% 0.14
	We (us)	we know the Assad regime was responsible	% 0.33
Second person	You (you)	I want to talk to you about Syria	% 0.3
Third person	He, (him)		
	She, (her)		
	It (it)	It's also a danger to our security.	% 0.14
Possessive pronoun	Number	Sample	Density
My	1	My fellow Americans.	% 0.3
Our	3	It's also a danger to our security.	% 0.11
Your	0		
His	2	A father clutching his dead children	% 0.7
Her	0		
Its	0		
Their	3	They distributed gasmasks to their troops.	% 0.11

IV. MODALITY ANALYSIS

The use of modality is to express interpersonal function. So, Halliday (1971) states that modality denotes to the middle range between positive and negative. This means modality is a term which refers to the speaker's attitude or opinion about the truth of a proposition expressed by a sentence. In addition, Halliday (1985: 75) states that 'modality is often associated with power'. Also, he (ibid) explains modality by dividing it into two types 'high' modalities which are indicated to certain about what the speaker has said, and 'low' modalities which are used to express uncertainty.

Flower (1985: 73) shows that modality can be found in certain types of main verbs, also can be expressed through different parts of sentence such as adverbs, adjectives and noun. Flowers illustrates the type of modality as: 'Modality is signified in a range of linguistic form: centrally, the modal auxiliary verb may, shall, must, need, and others'.

Thus, this research is based on Halliday's Systematic Functions. It analyzes Obama's speech from serve to show the ideology and power. Model of clarification of modal verbs is that of Zhang Cuoling (2006) cited in Wang (2010).

TABLE IV: MODAL VERBS (ZHANG GUOLING, 2006)

	Low politeness	Median politeness	High politeness
Positive	Can, may, could, might, dare	Will, would, shall, should	Must, ought to, need, has/had to
Negative	Needn't, doesn't, didn't, need to, have to	Won't, wouldn't, shouldn't, isn't/wasn't to	Mustn't, oughtn't to, can't, couldn't, mayn't, mightn't, hasn't/hadn't to

TABLE V: MODALITY ANALYSIS OF SAMPLE SPEECH (MODAL VERBS)

Sample speech	Total number	Low politeness		Median politeness		High politeness	
		NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%
positive	99.99	3	27.27	6	54.54	1	09.09
Negative	09.09	0	0	1	09.09	0	0

From the above table, the speaker uses the modal verb 'Will' more than once in order to assert and focus on certain thing that will happen and also to make the audience to concentrate to his speech and also to make the audience to understand his speech easily such as: '**If we fail to act, the Assad regime will see no reason to stop using chemical weapons**'. Another example '**other tyrants will have no reason to think twice about acquiring poison gas, and using them**'.

V. CONCLUSION

Fairclough's work, in its attention to language as social practice dealing with the social condition of discourse production and its hidden power, ideology and domination dimensions. So, this paper analyzes the ideological component enshrined in the president Barack Obama. It is embedded in Fairclough's notion of ideology residing in text and that 'ideology invests language in various ways at various levels' (1989). The model which is adopted to analyze Obama's speech is critical discourse analysis under the impact of Norman Fairclough's and Halliday's perspective. The use of first person pronoun is to shorten the distance between him (president) and the audience. So it can help him persuade the public to accept and support his policies, actions and what he determined for his future businesses. Finally, the speaker uses modal verb to make the audience to understand his speech easily and also to agree with his speech by using modal verbs.

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