



Critical Discourse Analysis of the President Barack Obama' Victory Speech

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How to cite this paper: Alweldi, S. (2024) Critical Discourse Analysis of the President Barack Obama' Victory Speech. *Open Access Library Journal*, 11: e11428.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111428>

Received: March 13, 2024

Accepted: April 20, 2024

Published: April 23, 2024

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Abstract

Using the language to achieve social or political goals is a skill that is needed for any president to have the power of words to win the election war, and the people's hearts and voices. Barack Obama was the president of the United States of America from 2008 to 2017 and he used the language in a great way when he spoke to the audience. This study focused on one of Barack Obama's speeches as data, which is his victory speech, and has two aims; the first one is whether Barack Obama gave the audience what they wanted to hear; the second one is, was the language used in the social context to make it serve the political goals? The researcher used Fair Clough's three-dimensional model, both of the macro analysis (semantic macrostructures) and microanalysis (local semantics) were used, the researcher only used the repetition strategy from the local semantics strategies. The findings of this study revealed that the language was used in the social and political context, to support the speaker's plans for the future, and the goals that he wanted the audience to believe in them. It also showed that Barack Obama gives priority to the audience's needs.

Subject Areas

Discourse Analysis

Keywords

Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Discourse Analysis, Barack Obama, Speech Victory, Semantic Macrostructures, Local Semantics

1. Introduction

Every country has its system regarding who will rule the country next. Some countries have a president, and that president governs for a while then another individual will run for the presidency next to the previous president. This type of

ruling system is used in the United States of America. Furthermore, the United States of America supports democracy, which means that its government is elected by its citizens, and since it is based on democracy, this means any American citizen can run for the election. According to the White House, [1] was the first president of the United States of America, “On April 30, 1789, George Washington, standing on the balcony of Federal Hall on Wall Street in New York, took his oath of office as the first President of the United States. “As the first of everything, in our situation will serve to establish a Precedent”.

More than 45 presidents have ruled the United States of America, and all of them were white people except one, did not have white skin, and his winning proved that the United States of America does support democracy, as Obama stated at the beginning of his Victory Speech in 2008, “who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer”. Barack Obama’s winning did not come by accident, the language that Barack Obama used, type of words, intonation, and the way that he spoke to the people, all are factors that helped Barack Obama during his campaign. Verbal and non-verbal language when used within a social context, and using these two types of language with certain aims to accomplish goals, they are more powerful than physical power. However, the researcher attends to investigate Barack Obama’s Victory Speech and its heading meaning, and how Barack Obama uses the language to achieve his social goals, by analyzing the spoken text said Barack Obama on the 4th of November 2008 after winning the election, by using the CDA approach as presented in Norman Fair Clough’s 1992 publication *Discourse and Social Change*. The analysis will examine the structure, substance as well as language of Barack Obama’s speech. Several levels will be observed: semantic macrostructures, local meanings, and lexical style in order to determine whether the speaker's linguistic choices served him in his speech or not.

1.1. Research Questions and Aims

In general, the main problem of this study is to analyze one of the speeches delivered by President Barack Obama in terms of the main tenets of CDA.

This study investigates the political speech of the President 44th of the United States of America from 2009 to 2017, Barack Obama on his winning day. This study attempts to explore the salient linguistic features of the speech and the main words and strategies used to achieve his long-standing electoral goals, and also How Barack Obama’s speech draw the audiences’ attention and makes them believe in him as a new president.

1.2. Research Objectives

This research paper has the following objectives:

- To determine whether Barack Obama gives the audience what they want to hear.
- To determine if Barack Obama used the language in the social context to

make it serve his political goals or not.

The question that this research planning to answer is: How does Barack Obama's speech draw the audiences' attention, and make them believe in him as a new president.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA or Critical Discourse Analysis is based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics [2] and the Critical Linguistics approaches which origins from the work done by Roger Fowler at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s. Both Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Linguistics rejected two widespread notions in linguistics at that time: the treatment of language systems as autonomous and independent of the use of language, and the separation of meaning from style or expression [2].

Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach to language analysis that is concerned with issues of language, power, and ideology. Critical Discourse Analysis is neither a homogenous model nor a school or a paradigm, but mostly a shared perspective on doing linguistics, semiotic, or discourse analysis [3]. Being an interdisciplinary approach to discourse, it does not consider language as independent from social studies; rather, it focuses on language as a form of social practice [4]. Critical Discourse Analysis aims to perceive language use as social practice. Language users do not function in isolation; rather they function in a set of cultural, social, and psychological frameworks. Critical Discourse Analysis explores not only the connections between textual structures but also the links between textual structures and their function in interaction within society. Therefore, it could be assumed that the one element of Critical Discourse Analysis that differentiates it from other forms of Discourse Analysis exists in its attribute of "critical". "Critical" implies showing connections and causes which are hidden [2]. It is important to expose the hidden things since these are not evident for the individuals involved; hence, they cannot be fought against. Hidden meanings, hidden messages have a deeper meaning than clear ones.

2.2. Fair Clough's Model

According to Norman Fair Clough, one of the well-known theoreticians who wrote and published many articles and books, and also established Critical Discourse Analysis as a field of research, there are three levels of discourse, the first one is social conditions of production and interpretation, i.e. the social factors that led to the origination of a text and, at the same time, would affect the interpretation of the text. The second one is the process of production and interpretation, i.e. in which way the text was produced and how this way affects interpretation. The third one is the text which is the product of the first two stages. The analysis of specific data requires analysis of each of these three dimensions and their interrelations. However, analysts should understand the social and

discourse practices before analyzing a text or speech to achieve the best results. Fairclough also describes the power of social category as the core of language use.

2.3. Related Studies

[5] did a study that was based on analyzing the use of the 1st person plural, 2nd person, and 3rd person references in Obama's and Bush's victory speeches? The two researchers used different patterns of personal references and transitivity structures [6]. Their finding showed that Obama's victory speech cared more about the audience and made them feel like his victory where their victory as well, which is considered a high level of social intelligence, whereas Bush's anti-triumphant speech did not give the priority to the audience.

[7] did a study in (2012) about critical discourse analysis of speeches of Bush and Obama on terrorism. The main aim of their research was to find out which linguistic resources Obama and Bush used as terrorism and anti-terrorism concepts. However, their study showed that both Obama and Bush utilized verbs and nouns as the vocabulary items to describe terrorism and anti-terrorism. It also, showed that Bush and Obama frequently used phrasal categories to illustrate terrorism and anti-terrorism such as adjectival phrases, verb phrases, noun phrases, verbal phrases, and prepositional phrases and clauses. The data of their study were simple, compound, and complex sentences said by Obama and Bush. Their study shed light on the concept of terrorism from the linguistic point of view.

3. Methodology

The present study is a linguistic study of Barack Obama's victory speech on election day, to reveal how the language is utilized as a part of Barack Obama's speech to draw the audience's attention and make them believe in him, as a president. With a general view of the speech (text), the total number of words are 2011. A descriptive-analytic method of research based on the critical discourse analysis model presented by Fair Clough's three-dimensional model, both of the macro analysis (semantic macrostructures) and microanalysis (local semantics) are used, the researcher only used the only repetition strategy from the local semantics strategies, they were utilized throughout the current study to find out the answers to the research question. (See **Table 1**)

Table 1. Macrostructures in Barack Obama's Victory Speech.

Welcoming
Confirmation of America's Democracy
Congratulated
Thanking
Dedicate his Victory to the American People
Women and Colored People Rights

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Semantic Macrostructures

4.1.1. Welcoming

The first message delivered by the Elected American President Barack Obama, is welcoming the city where the final Election was made as a resample for the place where he was declared as President of the United States of America.

- Hello Chicago.

4.1.2. Confirmation of America's Democracy

After welcoming the audience, Barack Obama sent messages to those who do not believe that America is a democratic country or has doubts. Barack Obama emphasized on the democracy of the United States of America and that it is a free country with different origins, ethnicity, and colors. His messages gave hope to everyone that they still catch their dreams and be whatever they want, America is the dreamland. His sentences are listed below.

- If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.
- It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the very first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different; that their voice could be that difference.
- It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled—Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of red states and blue states; we are, and always will be, the United States of America.
- It's the answer that led those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, and fearful, and doubtful of what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.
- It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America.

4.1.3. Congratulated

After his historical speech about democracy, he congratulated the other candidates for what all they had achieved.

- I just received a very gracious call from Sen. McCain. He fought long and hard in this campaign, and he's fought even longer and harder for the country he loves. He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine, and we are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader. I congratulate him and Gov. Palin for all they have achieved, and I look forward to working with them to renew this nation's promise in the months ahead.

4.1.4. Thanking

Fourthly, Barack Obama started thanking everyone who helped him to win this election, starting from Joe Biden, and his wife as he described her as the rock of his family and the love of his life, and then he introduced her as their nation's next first lady, Michelle Obama, then his daughters, and his dead grandmother. This speech tall the audience how much family is important to Barack Obama. Finally, he thanked his campaign team, and he stated that without them he would not reach this winning.

- I want to thank my partner in this journey, a man who campaigned from his heart and spoke for the men and women he grew up with on the streets of Scranton and rode with on that train home to Delaware, the vice-president-elect of the United States, Joe Biden.
- I would not be standing here tonight without the unyielding support of my best friend for the last 16 years, the rock of our family and the love of my life, our nation's next first lady, Michelle Obama. Sasha and Malia, I love you both so much, and you have earned the new puppy that's coming with us to the White House. And while she's no longer with us, I know my grandmother is watching, along with the family that made me who I am. I miss them tonight, and know that my debt to them is beyond measure.
- To my campaign manager, David Plouffe; my chief strategist, David Axelrod; and the best campaign team ever assembled in the history of politics you made this happen, and I am forever grateful for what you've sacrificed to get it done.

4.1.5. Dedicate his Victory to the American People

After he thanked all the Americans and all those who stood next to him during his campaign, he dedicated the victory to them, Barack Obama touched his audience's hearts and emotions, he made them feel that his victory was their victory.

4.1.6. Women and Color People Rights

Barack Obama talked about the right to vote for women at an era of time where voting was not allowed for women or color people, and he mentioned the time when colored people were slaves and owned by white people, and had no rights, and he ends the sentence by saying yes we can! As a sign that nowadays America is for everyone to be whatever they want, whether women or colored, Christian or non-Christian, etc.

- And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America—The heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we couldn't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes, we can.
- At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. Yes, we can.

4.2. Repetition

As can be seen in **Table 2** (see appendices for more details), Barack Obama used

Table 2. The frequency of repetitive words in Barack Obama’s victory speech.

The Word	Frequency
The Personal Pronouns We	47
The Possessive Determiner Our	35
The Personal Pronouns I	27
The possessive determiner Your	6
The possessive determiner My	10
The word People	9

the plural form of the personal pronounces and the personal, more than the singular form, this made the audience feel like Obama is talking about their plans and goals for the country and what they have in common. This action considers a high level of social intelligence when the speaker uses the language in social context using semantic and grammatical features to achieve his hidden intentions. In this part, the finding proved that Barack Obama gives priority in his speech to meet the audience's emotional needs, to make them believe in his role as a new president. This finding supported the finding of [5] study.

5. Conclusion

This study has answered its question, how does Barack Obama’s speech draw the audiences’ attention and make them believe in him as a new president. The results related to this question have shown that Barack Obama used the language in the social context in rhetoric, in other words, Barack Obama knew how to use the language and make it servers his goals. The language he used has a great impact on the American people especially those who come from lower social classes or those how have lost their hope or dreams in a better future. Barack Obama has a great sense of what people want to hear, and what language will affect their emotions and hearts, that why he made them feel like his victory was not his, it was their victory, “But above all, I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to, it belongs to you”, “The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year, or even one term, but America I have never been more hopeful than I am”. “So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves but each other. Let us remember that if this financial crisis taught us anything, it’s that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers. In this country, we rise or fall as one nation as one people”. Barack Obama emphasizes on the personal pronoun “we”, as a symbol of the union between him and the audience. Barack Obama is one of his kind as a president, he spoke to the poor people before the rich ones, to the elderly before the youth, to children, to women, and to anyone who lost hope or felt alone, Barack Obama succeeded to teach their hearts when he was the president of the United States of America.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Appendices

The analyzed test available online on

<https://www.npr.org/2012/11/06/164540079/transcript-president-obamas-victory-speech>

- *In these prepared remarks provided by his campaign, President-Elect Barack Obama calls himself the unlikeliest presidential candidate. He thanks many members of his campaign, along with his enormous army of volunteers, and he warns supporters about what he calls the enormity of the tasks at hand that now face the U.S. He concludes by telling an anecdote about a 106-year-old African-American voter from Atlanta.*

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the very first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different; that their voice could be that difference.

It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled—Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of red states and blue states; we are, and always will be, the United States of America.

Article continues after sponsor message

- It's the answer that led those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, and fearful, and doubtful of what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.
- It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come to America.
- I just received a very gracious call from Sen. McCain. He fought long and hard in this campaign, and he's fought even longer and harder for the country he loves. He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine, and we are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader. I congratulate him and Gov. Palin for all they have achieved, and I look forward to working with them to renew this nation's promise in the months ahead.
- I want to thank my partner in this journey, a man who campaigned from his heart and spoke for the men and women he grew up with on the streets of Scranton and rode with on that train home to Delaware, the vice-president-elect of the United States, Joe Biden.
- I would not be standing here tonight without the unyielding support of my best friend for the last 16 years, the rock of our family and the love of my life, our nation's next first lady, Michelle Obama. Sasha and Malia, I love you both so much, and you have earned the new puppy that's coming with us to the White House. And while she's no longer with us, I know my grand-

mother is watching, along with the family that made me who I am. I miss them tonight, and know that my debt to them is beyond measure.

- To my campaign manager, David Plouffe; my chief strategist, David Axelrod; and the best campaign team ever assembled in the history of politics—you made this happen, and I am forever grateful for what you've sacrificed to get it done.
- But above all, I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to—it belongs to you.
- I was never the likeliest candidate for this office. We didn't start with much money or many endorsements. Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington—it began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and the front porches of Charleston.
- It was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give \$5 and \$10 and \$20 to this cause. It grew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation's apathy; who left their homes and their families for jobs that offered little pay and less sleep; from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on the doors of perfect strangers; from the millions of Americans who volunteered and organized, and proved that more than two centuries later, a government of the people, by the people and for the people has not perished from this earth. This is your victory.
- I know you didn't do this just to win an election, and I know you didn't do it for me. You did it because you understand the enormity of the task that lies ahead. For even as we celebrate tonight, we know the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime—two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century. Even as we stand here tonight, we know there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us. There are mothers and fathers who will lie awake after their children fall asleep and wonder how they'll make the mortgage, or pay their doctor's bills, or save enough for college. There is new energy to harness and new jobs to be created; new schools to build and threats to meet and alliances to repair.
- The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year, or even one term, but America—I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you: We as a people will get there.
- There will be setbacks and false starts. There are many who won't agree with every decision or policy I make as president, and we know that government can't solve every problem. But I will always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I will listen to you, especially when we disagree. And, above all, I will ask you join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it's been done in America for 221 years—block by block, brick by brick, callused hand by callused hand.
- What began 21 months ago in the depths of winter must not end on this au-

tumn night. This victory alone is not the change we seek—it is only the chance for us to make that change. And that cannot happen if we go back to the way things were. It cannot happen without you.

- So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other. Let us remember that if this financial crisis taught us anything, it's that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers. In this country, we rise or fall as one nation — as one people.
- Let us resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long. Let us remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House—a party founded on the values of self-reliance, individual liberty and national unity. Those are values we all share, and while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress.
- As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours, “We are not enemies, but friends... Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.” And, to those Americans whose support I have yet to earn, I may not have won your vote, but I hear your voices, I need your help, and I will be your president, too.
- And to all those watching tonight from beyond our shores, from parliaments and palaces to those who are huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of our world—our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand. To those who would tear this world down: We will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security: We support you. And to all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright: Tonight, we proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope.
- For that is the true genius of America—that America can change. Our union can be perfected. And what we have already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.
- This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election, except for one thing: Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old.
- She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons—because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin.
- And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America—the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the

times we were told that we can't and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes, we can.

- At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. Yes, we can.
- When there was despair in the Dust Bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs and a new sense of common purpose. Yes, we can.
- When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved. Yes, we can.
- She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "We Shall Overcome." Yes, we can.
- A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination. And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change. Yes, we can.
- America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, let us ask ourselves: If our children should live to see the next century; if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?
- This is our chance to answer that call. This is our moment. This is our time—to put our people back to work and open doors of opportunity for our kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American Dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth that out of many, we are one; that while we breathe, we hope, and where we are met with cynicism, and doubt, and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless ocreed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of Americ