

LINGUISTIC PERFORMANCE OF FORMER US PRESIDENT OVER DEVELOPING TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal how a single reality, i.e., terrorism, is presented and viewed by US officials. The corpus of the current study is US President Barack Obama's speeches from 2011 to 2015. The approach used in this study to detect discursive structures within the transcripts of the American officials' speeches and discover the ideologies underlying them is Van Dijk's (2004) as well as a content-based analysis method. As far as the analysis the data is concerned, the macro strategies of 'positive self-representation' and 'negative other- representation' are useful to evaluate attitudes and opinions on the one hand, that is, Obama has applied polarization, victimization, actor description, national self-glorification, presupposition, lexicalization, and actor description among other strategies in his speeches. On the other hand, the findings prove that Obama's impressions of terrorism versus terrorists and states versus people are changing from 2011 to 2015. The findings of the present study is hoped to be useful for both critical discourse analysts and political activists.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), political discourse, Obama, terrorism*

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism can be defined as the unofficial or unauthorized use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims. Terrorism has many types like international and domestic terrorisms in many ways like violent acts, mass destruction, assassination, and kidnapping. It is easy to detect that today the use of terrorism is widespread from religious groups and revolutionaries to even state institutions such as armies, intelligence services, and police. In 21st century, terrorism has become increasingly one of

the most important concerns and crisis the whole world.

Different politicians have different points of view regarding terrorism. One of the most important officiates involved with terrorism is said to be America's Barack Hussein Obama. Barack Hussein Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii (August 4, 1961). He is serving as the 44th President of the United States (since 2009) and he is a Democratic politician. Additionally, he is the first African American President of the United States. Regarding Obama's

presidency, one can say that Iraq played an important role in his decisions.

Literature on CDA is enormous. A brief review of literature shows that many scholars belonging to critical discourse community have used CDA to analyze relevant political texts. For instance, Dastpak and Taghinezhad (2015) shows that the key ideological parts of Obama's discourse can be condensed into the accompanying ideas as pragmatism, liberalism, inclusiveness, acceptance of religious, and ethnic diversity and unity. It also shows that most noticeable words utilized by Obama are country, new and America, and a general strength of the individual pronoun we. According to Dastpak and Taghinezhad (2015), the mentioned finding is believed to prove Obama's comprehensive impression of the American culture and a requirement for solidarity.

Aschale (2013), similarly, shows that the political discourse of Barack Obama regarding the Middles stresses on condemning the tyrants, extremists, nuclear armed countries and change resistant's. This study shows that the political discourse of Barack Obama regarding the Middles concentrates on the moldable and accommodable for change with the vaccines and instruments of 'freedom, democracy, equality, tolerance, technology and globalization' in order for America to easily slip and swipe into a given country (abundant in resource or politically important) without war and confrontations. This study confirms that narrating ideology, change, morality, religion, hegemony, identity and the allay dilemma discourse analysis are 'the clear evidences from Obama's (America's) own words'. Aschale (2013) believes that these words 'are backed by masked' terms of support, allay, cooperation, renewal,

engagement, partnership, interference and other beneficiary means of doorways for America to easily access the required resources or political advantages.

In addition, Martínez, and González (2012) discuss victory and non-victory speeches of Obama and the former US President George W. Bush. This study shows that the different conditions surrounding the election of both Bush and Obama were encoded in their speeches. It is believed that Obama's words were 'the words of victory' and his speech focused on the audience and 'he turned his victory into the victory of the people'. Meanwhile, Bush's words were 'the words of failure' and 'resentment turned into discourse punishment for voters'.

Further, Rashidi and Souzandehfar (2010) show that the candidates of each party, i.e., Democrats and Republicans, utilized different subtle ideological discourse structures to achieve its goal in election. Both parties have utilized the two major strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in their speeches. Accordingly, viewpoints of all politicians are important regarding this issue including Obama who is serving as the 44th President of the United States. Therefore, this current study is aimed to analyze Obama's speeches from 2011 to 2015 by using Van Dijk's (2004) framework in an attempt to uncover his viewpoints regarding terrorism.

METHOD

The materials used in this qualitative study are the transcripts of Obama's speeches from 2011 to 2015. The framework employed in the current study is Van Dijk's (2004) framework. Van Dijk elaborates 27 ideological strategies among which the fundamental dichotomy of 'self

positive-representation' and 'other negative representation' stand out. Positive self-representation or in-group favoritism is a semantic macro-strategy used for the purpose of 'face keeping' or 'impression management' (van Dijk, 2004). Negative other-representation is another semantic macro-strategy regarding in-groups and out groups, that is, their division between 'good' and 'bad', superior and inferior, us and them. Van Dijk (2004) introduces these two major strategies in the form of an 'ideological square':

Emphasize Our good things
Emphasize Their bad things
De-emphasize Our bad things
De-emphasize Their good things (p. 18).

Another part of the framework of the current study is content-based analysis. It is a wide and heterogeneous set of techniques for 'contextualized interpretations of documents produced by communication processes in the strict sense of that phrase (any kind of text, written, iconic, multimedia, etc.) or signification processes (traces and artifacts), having as ultimate goal which is the production of valid and trustworthy inferences' (Wikipedia, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using content based analysis and critical discourse analysis, Obama's speeches have been meticulously analyzed. In order to fully understand different ideologies behind his dictions, the main themes and words mentioned in his speeches have been detected and counted. The strategies used by Obama in his speeches based on van Dijk (2004) are presented in the following.

The strategies used in Obama's speeches in 2011

Polarization: "For there should be no doubt that so long as I am President, the United States will never tolerate a safe haven for those who aim to kill us. They cannot elude us, nor escape the justice they deserve."

Victimization: "Terrorists have taken the lives of our citizens in New York and in London."

The strategies used in Obama's speeches in 2012

Authority: "Every one of you who served there can take pride in knowing you gave the Iraqis this opportunity that you succeeded in your mission."

Actor description: "Iranian people have a remarkable and ancient history, and many Iranians wish to enjoy peace and prosperity alongside their neighbors. Iranian government continues to prop up a dictator in Damascus and supports terrorist groups abroad. What we've done is organize the international community, saying Assad has to go. We've mobilized sanctions against that government. We have made sure that they are isolated. We have provided humanitarian assistance, and we are helping the opposition organize. And we're particularly interested in making sure that we're mobilizing the moderate forces inside of Syria."

The strategies used in Obama’s speeches in 2013

Authority: “We’ll need to help countries like Yemen, and Libya, and Somalia provide for their own security, and help allies who take the fight to terrorists, as we have in Mali.”

Actor description: “When I think about five Israelis who boarded a bus in Bulgaria.... That’s why every country that values justice should call Hezbollah what it truly is – a terrorist organization.”

National Self Glorification: “We are the largest humanitarian donor.”

The strategies used in Obama’s speeches in 2014

Authority: “At the request of the Iraqi government -- we’ve begun operations to help save Iraqi civilians stranded on the mountain.”

Presupposition: “Still, we continue to face a terrorist threat. We can't erase every trace of evil from the world, and small groups of killers have the capacity to do great harm.”

Lexicalization: “Now, it will take time to eradicate a cancer like ISIL.”

The strategies used in Obama’s speeches in 2015

Authority: “We will destroy ISIL and any other organization that tries to harm us.”

Actor description: “ISIL does not speak for Islam.”

As mentioned earlier, another part of data collection of the current study is done by means of a content-based analysis approach. Regarding content-based analysis, the most frequent vocabularies of Obama are shown in the following tables.

Table 1. *The most frequent vocabularies used by Obama in 2011*

Word	Frequency	Percentage
Middle east	20	20/6%
Terrorist	14	14/4%
Iraq	14	14/4%
Iran	10	10/3%
Syrian	10	10/3%
Syria	8	8/2%
Islam	4	4/1%
Muslim	4	4/1%
Iranian	4	4/1%
Terrorism	3	3/0%
Counterterrorism	3	3/0%
Terror	3	3/0%

As it is seen in table 1, the most frequent words are Middle East, Terrorist,

Iraq, Iran and Syrian. An interesting point is that Terrorist is used more than Terrorism.

Table 2. *The most frequent vocabularies used by Obama in 2012*

Word	Frequency	Percentage
Syria	19	23%
Iran	18	22%
Iraq	15	18%
Syrian	11	13%
Muslim	9	11%
Iranian	4	5%
Terrorist	3	4%
Middle east	2	2%
Islam	1	1%
Terrorism	0	0%
Counterterrorism	0	0%

One of the most important points about table 2 is that Syria is ranked first in

2012 despite the fact that it was ranked sixth in 2011.

Table 3. *The most frequent vocabularies used by Obama in 2013*

Word	Frequency	Percentage
Syria	60	23/8
Terrorist	41	16/26
Terrorism	31	12/3
Iran	24	9/52
Iraq	23	9/12
Counterterrorism	13	5/15
Muslim	15	5/95
Syrian	13	5/15
Middle east	13	5/15
Islam	8	3/17
Iranian	11	4/36

This table shows that Obama used the words terrorist and terrorism 72 times, but he used counterterrorism 13 times. So, counterterrorism is less important than terrorist and terrorism. Also, Obama used

Syria more than Iraq that shows Syria is more important than Iraq for America in this year since, in 2013, Syria is ranked first.

Table 4. *The most frequent vocabularies used by Obama in 2014*

Word	Frequency	Percentage
Iraq	110	34/7
ISIL	73	23/0
Terror	58	18/2
Syria	54	17/0
ISIS	22	6/9
Iranian	11	4/36

In Obama’s speeches during 2014, he used ISIL more than ISIS. ISIL stands for "Islamic state of Iraq and Levant",

while ISIS stands for "Islamic state of Iraq and Sham". It is clear that ISIL is more extended than ISIS.

Table 5. *The most frequent vocabularies used by Obama in 2015*

Word	Frequency	Percentage
ISIL	12	63%
terrorism	5	26%
Iraq and Syria	2	11%

This table is extracted from Address to the Nation on Foreign and Domestic Counter-Terrorism Strategies. In this part, some examples of Obama’s speeches will be provided. At the beginning, Obama sees terrorism as a newborn cancer that his administration ought to root it out and stop it from spreading in the world. So, he says: *“We’ll work with the Pakistani government to root out the cancer of violent extremism (Afghanistan Troop Reduction Address to the Nation, 2011).”* On the death of Bin Laden, he says that justice is done: *“On nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al Qaeda’s terror: Justice has been done (On the Death of Osama Bin Laden).”*

It is clear that Obama does not categorize the threat of terrorism as large as the U.S. should send its troops to fight directly and says: *“But to meet this threat, we don’t need to send tens of thousands of our sons and daughters abroad or occupy other nations (state of the union, 2013).”* But some thoughts crossed his mind in a bid to persuade American congress on his plan to target terrorists as he says: *“I will continue to engage Congress to ensure not only that our targeting, detention and prosecution of terrorists remains consistent with our laws and system (state of the union, 2013).”*

In 2014, we see that he used his troops to target terrorists: *“To stop the advance on Erbil, I’ve directed our*

military to take targeted strikes against ISIL terrorist convoys should they move toward the city (On Authorizing Air Strikes and Humanitarian Effort in Iraq, 2014).”

Briefly, A close examination of the transcripts of Obama’s speeches from 2011 to 2015 through van Dijk’s (2004) comprehensive framework and a content-based analysis revealed that Obama’s points of view are malleable. That is, at first he talks about terrorists rather than terrorism. It can be argued that he does not see terrorism as an important and effective event or a trend rather he conceives it as a terrorist action done by some people. Obama categorizes Iran as the most crucial supporter of terrorism. He also proclaims that he wants to fight against terrorism but he has no war with Islam. In 2012, Obama names Iraq, Syria, and Iran because, in his viewpoint, these counties have faced with a modern and furious phenomenon called terrorism. An interesting point is that Obama uses the names of the countries more than the nationalities. In other words, he applies Iraq, Syria, and Iran more than Iraqi, Syrian, and Iranian. This shows that countries are considered and have crucial roles in Obama's speeches. It can be argued that since the most powerful and influential part of countries are their states, American foreign policy concentrates on regulating power and balancing the regional policy by choosing this linguistic choice. In 2013, the loci of

Obama speeches are on Syria rather than Iraq and Iran. He also stresses on conserving Syria rather than Syrians. In 2014, the frequency of ISIL is higher than ISIS in Obama's speeches. He declares that terrorism is tripling and believes that a state is going to be formed to do terrorist actions that are composed of extremist Muslims. In 2015, Obama has a different viewpoint about terror and terrorism. His behavior is softer in comparison with last years. Maybe he is going to monitor terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing the transcripts of Obama's speeches from 2011 to 2015 through van Dijk's (2004) framework shows that to justify his claims, Obama utilized different subtle ideological discourse structures that can be categorized under the two major strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Polarization, victimization, actor description, national self-glorification, presupposition, lexicalization, and actor description were frequently used as effective devices in persuasion and justification by Obama.

Further, a detailed reviewing of the transcripts of Obama's speeches from 2011 to 2015 through van Dijk's (2004) comprehensive framework proves that Obama has applied numerous linguistic tricks to achieve his ideology. The results of this study proves that CDA provides a great opportunity to discover the realities particularly in political discourses which, according to Fairclough (1995), has been distorted and naturalized as "non-ideological common sense." It is also fruitful for the scholars of critical discourse to make a more specific contribution to shed more light on the crucial role of discourse in the reproduction of dominance and hegemony.

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Ice cream

There was an elderly couple who in their old age noticed that they were getting a lot more forgetful, so they decided to go to the doctor. The doctor told them that they should start writing things down so they don't forget. They went home and the old lady told her husband to get her a bowl of ice cream. "You might want to write it down," she said. The husband said, "No, I can remember that you want a bowl of ice cream." She then told her husband she wanted a bowl of ice cream with whipped cream. "Write it down," she told him, and again he said, "No, no, I can remember: you want a bowl of ice cream with whipped cream." Then the old lady said she wants a bowl of ice cream with whipped cream and a cherry on top. "Write it down," she told her husband and again he said, "No, I got it. You want a bowl of ice cream with whipped cream and a cherry on top." So he goes to get the ice cream and spends an unusually long time in the kitchen, over 30 minutes. He comes out to his wife and hands her a plate of eggs and bacon. The old wife stares at the plate for a moment, then looks at her husband and asks, "Where's the toast?"

(Source: <http://www.study-express.ru/humour/funny-stories.shtml>, picture: www.google.co.id)