

Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of American Presidential Victory Speeches

تحليل لغوي وظيفي منهجي لخطابات النصر الرئاسية الأمريكية

Huda Tariq Jumaa Abed Al Hyali Asst. Prof. Meethaq Khamees Khalaf

hud20h1016@uoanbar.edu.iq

ed.methak.khamis@uoanbar.edu.iq

University of Anbar - College of Education for Humanities

ميثاق خميس خلف

هدى طارق جمعة عبد الحيالي

كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية، جامعة الانبار

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Abstract:

The aim of the current study is to investigate the discoursal function of transitivity in the speeches of Obama and Biden. Also, it is to reveal the functions of transitivity represented by two victory speeches of Obama and Biden. These issues were presented through transitivity processes. To this end, The Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics SFL (2014) was adopted as a theoretical framework to study language structure and function. Major findings reveal that the six processes were used in which, material and relational processes were ranked in the first places in both speeches.

Keywords: Systemic, Functional Linguistic, American Presidential Victory Speeches

المستخلص:

ان الهدف من الدراسة الحالية هو التحقيق في الوظيفة الخطابية لمتعددية الفعل في خطابات أوباما وبايدن. وكذلك الكشف عن وظائف متعددية الفعل المستخدمة في خطابي النصر لأوباما وبايدن. تم عرض هذه القضايا من خلال انواع متعددية الفعل. وتحقيقا لهذه الغاية، فقد تم اعتماد نظرية علم اللغة الوظيفي المنهجي المقترح من هاليدي (٢٠١٤) كإطار نظري لدراسة بنية اللغة ووظيفتها. وكشفت

النتائج الرئيسية بان استخدام الانواع الستة لمتعددية الفعل والتي أظهرت بان نوعي متعدية الفعل المادية والعلائقية في المرتبة الأولى في كلا الخطابين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظامية ، لغوية وظيفية ، خطابات النصر الرئاسية الأمريكية.

1. Introduction

Speech is used to express one's perspective and viewpoints. Speech is a technique used to convince a speaker's beliefs in a variety of contexts such as politics, economics, humanitarian concerns, and other formal events (Sinaga, 2018). Speech can be used in a political context to discuss politics and influence society of certain beliefs. A political victory speech is intended to convey what the president is thinking about. According to Wareing (2004) (as cited in Sinaga, 2018), "language has the ability to impact people's mind, belief, perception, and attitudes" (p. 3). A political speech is presented with a clear goal in mind which is stated as the communicative function of a discourse. Presidents use their speeches as a campaign to persuade others to alter their minds about certain political topics. They believe that their remarks will influence others' perception.

In general, transitivity refers to how content is encoded and expressed in a clause. It is associated with the dissemination of worldviews. It also plays a role in demonstrating how speakers encode their mental sense of reality in language and account for their perception of the world around us. The use of transitivity along with various types of processes manipulated within victory speeches of political discourse by the presidents have certain intended function cannot be understood comprehensively without examining the speech in context. Thus, transitivity is not just a matter of style, but further ideological implications which are used to initiate further goals; these ideologies cannot be revealed out of context. These are also structured in a way, whether being direct or indirect, to assert some intended values which again cannot to be fully understood without understanding the whole text.

Victory speeches have a great influence on the audience as the main concern of politicians is to convince the public of their political point of view's validity. The influence practiced on public is accomplished by the employment of the linguistic choices that express the politicians' beliefs and thoughts about different matters in America and in the world. Surrounded by

the framework of SFG, the current study aims at identifying Transitivity used in Barak Obama and Joe Biden's victory speeches. Also, identifying Transitivity functionalized in both speeches.

This study is considered important and useful in linguistics in general and in discourse analysis in particular, as it contains an effective scientific participation in the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. From the theoretical side, this study provides an extensive presentation of transitivity in selected political victory speeches. From the practical side, it presents examples and analytical pieces that illustrate the application of the theoretical model in a scientific and practical way; the study displays how to analyze any piece of a spoken discourse according to Halliday and Matthiessen's Model (2014).

2. Literature Review

Some researchers have explored transitivity in political discourse like Liani, Annidi, & Wirza (2021) which investigates the political ideologies in the speech of Kamala Harris (the vice president-elected 2020). The study is qualitatively conducted using Halliday's transitivity system as the foundation for data analysis. Chalimah and Sumarlam's (2017) main goal of the study is to analyze the speech of the president of Indonesia Jokowi (Joko Widodo) in terms of transitivity and modality. Finally, in the political world, Farhat's (2016) objective is to realize how process types and their participants roles in Obama's discourse used to achieve experiential meaning. It also aims to figure out how interpersonal meaning is realized by choices of modality in the structure of the clause. The data used in the study is selected from speeches of Barak Obama were delivered in the period between 2009-2013.

The current study is different from previously mentioned studies in that the data used in the current is the political victory speeches of Obama and Biden respectively. Moreover, the main objective is to identify the transitivity processes and how they functioned in both victory speeches. In resemblance to the current study, the major findings of Chalimah and Sumarlam's (2017) showed that material, relational, and mental processes are the most common types used in the selected political speech.

3. Transitivity in Systemic Functional Linguistics

SFG is concerned in the language use and gives the importance to the language function than the language structure (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997). Halliday viewed language as a system which relates meaning to form as a system of signs (Fontaine, 2012: 5). According to SFL, languages are seen as systems that can deconstruct and elaborate language production in terms of their efficiency, one of which is the transitivity system (Halliday, 1981). The ideational meta-function, according to Downing and Locke (2006), allows us to encode both a semantic and syntactic mental representation of the real world as well as the imaginary worlds. In systemic functional Grammar, there are six different process types identified by Halliday: material, behavioural, mental, verbal, relational, and existential (Boor and Bloor, 1995: 109). These processes introduce models to construe particular areas of experiences as a particular model for construing 'Token' + 'process' + 'value' (Halliday, 2004:170). A Process is a central to the transitivity system and refers to the semantic verb (doing, happening, feeling, sensing, saying, behaving, and existing) and things which express such as event, relation, physical, mental or emotional state that are classified in the semantic structure of the clause. "Processes" are as a semantic product of our awareness as 'participants' of the world both socially and culturally (Halliday, 1985: 101-102). The process centers on that part of the clause that is realized by the verbal group, but it can also be regarded as what 'goings-on' are represented in the whole clause (Bloor and Bloor, 1995:110).

4. Political Speeches

According to Schäffner (1996: 202), "political discourse, as a subcategory of general discourse, can be classified according to two factors: functional and thematic". It is described as a 'political action' (Van dijk, 1997). However, Schäffner (1997: 2) argues that political discourse can be internal or external, and it can take many different forms. A contribution made by a member of parliament to a cause during an election campaign or during a political party's convention, parliamentary debate, newspaper editorials or commentaries, a politician's press conference, or a politician's memoirs are all examples of political discourse.

Politics produces political discourse which is historically and culturally structured. Furthermore, political speeches encompass both remarks

conducted in front of an audience and speeches broadcast on Television. Also, it is defined by Johnson (2000:31) as the informal exchange of reasoning and perspectives as to which of various courses of action should be adopted to solve a society problem.

John Whilson (as cited in Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001; 2008: 398) states that the term of political discourse is ambiguous and suggest two alternatives. Firstly, the term 'discourse' is political itself and secondly, political discourse is analyzed as a simple example of discourse type, with no explicit reference to political content or context. Van Dijk (1997: 12) characterizes political discourse by participant who are involved of the activity of political discourse: "actors or authors, viz., politicians" within the political context. Many studies relate political discourse to professional politicians or presidents or any other members in the governments in many different levels (local, national, and international). He argues that from an interactional standpoint, political discourse, and politicians in addition to the political practices are not only participants in politics domain. People, masses, and other categories in political communication should also be included. The same is true for other types of discourse with audience. Such complication suggested by Van Dijk who further explains that political discourse is not concerned only with participants who are professional in politics. In a broader definition, "political discourse identified by all participants in the political process". Moreover, participants in the political activity are members in the political discourse only when they are functioning as political actors and thus when they are taking part in political action like governing, ruling, voting, legislating and so on. Texts and talks forms have political further "functions and implications" (Van Dijk, 1997: 14).

Fairclough (1989: 185) elaborates that it is a commonplace for political tendencies to have a social base. Social bases are not always ready-made; they (and, by extension, 'the people') are frequently formed through fusing disparate social groups into a coherent political constituency. The importance of political discourse in molding people's views and attitudes is critical. Politicians typically use their rhetorical skills to influence and control the opinions and attitudes of the public. To be a successful politician,

one must be an effective speaker who can manipulate the emotions, attention, and thoughts of the audience (Hussein, 2016: 88).

5. Methodology

The current study is concerned with identifying transitivity and its functionality in political victory speeches. two political victory speeches have been selected which are Obama and Biden's. Thus, a descriptive-qualitative method was preferred as the most suitable research design to be used in this investigation. To this end, Hallidayan perspective (2014) is adopted to be the modal of analysis of the current study.

5.1 data collection

The researcher purposefully selected two speeches: Victory speech of Barack Obama in 2008 and Joe Biden's victory speech in 2020. The circumstances in the world in general and in America accompanied the elections for both presidents were different, which may affect the linguistic structure of Transitivity and Modality used by presidents when delivering victory speeches. The first speech was chosen since it is delivered by first African American president of America (Barack Obama) and what could that change bring as a linguistic diversity. While the second speech was chosen since it is the most modern speech for latest American president of America. From there, it was found that these speeches are a fitting source for the data needed for the study as the two speeches seen as a diverse area of transitivity and modality. The first speech was downloaded from "Obama'speeches.com", and the second speech was downloaded from "<https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-11-07/joe-biden-victory-speech-2020-election-transcript>". Both speeches were reviewed on YouTube and reliable transcripts. The selection of these speeches focusses on the shared linguistic systems within the political discourse.

5.2 Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the victory speech of Obama begins with chunking the transcription of the speech into clauses in a table and classify each type of processes which are: material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, and existential. These clauses are computed based on the

frequency with which they appear in the victory speech to reveal the hidden ideology behind the president Barak Obama and Joe Biden as presidents of the United States. There are (277) processes recorded in the speech of Obama. The majority of the process types is material process with (118) occurrences, accounting for (43%) of the total. Material process is followed by (69) occurrences of relational process, accounting for (25%) of the total. The frequency of the material processes and the relational processes represent the highest which account for (68%) of the total. In addition, table (1) shows that there are (42) mental processes, accounting for 15% of the total. The behavioral processes appeared (23) times, accounting for (8%) of the total. However, the least type of processes occurred in Obama's victory speech are the verbal process (16) times, accounting for (6%) of the process and the existential process (9) times accounting for (3%) of the total process respectively. As for Biden, 240 process types are analyzed in his victory speech. There are (104) material processes, accounting for (43%) of the total. There are (63) relational processes, accounting for (26%) of the total. The frequency of the material processes and the relational processes represent the highest which accounting for (69%) of the total. In addition, it was observed that the rate of the material process in both speeches are equal, account for (43%) of the total. there are (31) mental processes, accounting for (13%) of the total. The behavioral processes appeared (21) times, accounting for (9%) of the total. The verbal process occurred 17 times in the speech, accounting for (7%) of the process. While the existential processes occurred 4 times accounting for 2% of the total process.

The process type	The number of occurrences in Obama's speech	The number of occurrences in Biden's speech
Material	118	104
Relational	69	63
Mental	42	31
Behavioral	23	21
Verbal	16	17

Existential	9	4
The total number	277	240

(Table (1): Frequency of transitivity and their percentage of Obama and Biden's speeches.

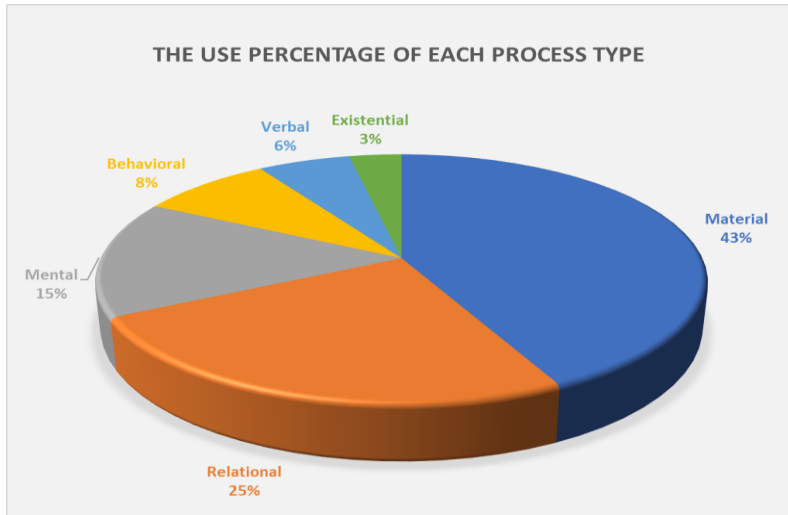


Figure 1: Percentage of transitivity processes of Obama's speech.

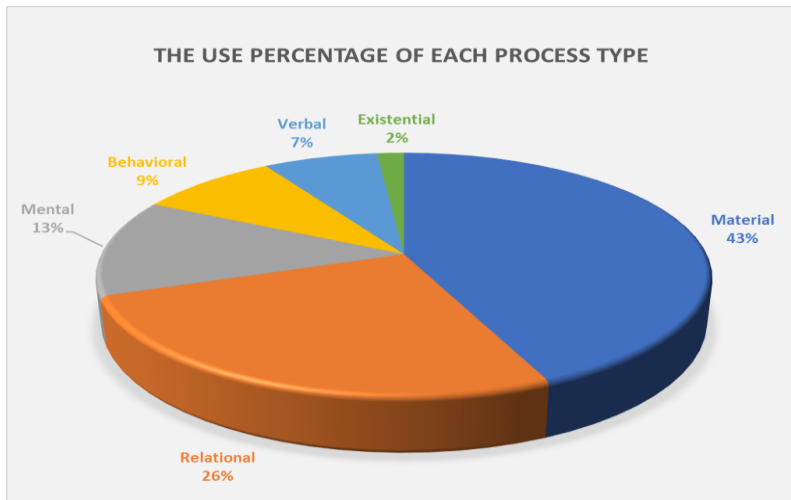


Figure (2): Percentage of transitivity processes of Biden's speech.

From the table above, the findings shows that the material and relational processes are the major processes are used in both speeches, followed by the mental process which ranks in the third place.

The findings reveals that both presidents utilize the material process mostly from the Transitivity processes. The highest occurrence of the process of doing gave the audience an energy of power and strength. They used this process to describe the situation of the country which is in a real hardship and what they are facing as presidents to America. In both Obama and Biden's speeches, material process hired to give a picture to the audience of what the new president will make to revive the economy of America and to restore its glory besides protecting their country. The relational process takes up the second rank in both of Obama and Biden's speeches. The analysis of the process is great of necessity for the important relations are made by both presidents referring to important issues. Obama made an important relation in his speech, in which he related his presidency to the democracy and to his predecessors' "dream". On this basis, Obama portrait how he will run the country during his presidency time. Moreover, relations were made by Obama such as possibilities that are found in America, the value of the people who are living and their influence on the life in the country as he related their voice to the power of change. Some other important relation like shedding the light on the protection line of America who are fighting to guarantee the safety for American people and their families. Such relations made the audience feel they are powerful, noticeable and there is someone really feel of their suffering and ready to make their life better and consequently he deserves the position of being the elected president. Concerning Biden's speech, important relations also took place like his believe of the glory of America, relation to his vision to retore that glory with the help of his parties and the support of family members. The most important relations were made by Biden is that to the people who get hurt of corona pandemic, as he made another important relation to the peaceful ideology towards other parties in the nation of the United States. With such relation, Biden's is also giving the audience a hint of his policy to rule the country. Mental process is also taking a high proportion in the two speeches in which inner activities like cognition of the presidents, affection, and perception of people were expressed. Because of the instability of the

situation of America, both presidents aimed to propose their future policies with the support of people. In order to accomplish that, they have to make our policies clear from the beginning to make the audience realize the next situation through presenting thought and ideas. After making the audience understand the new policy, they try to gain their trust and support to move on in their strategies. From the data, 'I and we' are used the most as the sender in the mental process in both speeches by which the determination of performing a new policy. More frequently, the use of the plural form with mental process as an indication that they together will take an action, to make the audience more involved in their viewpoint. Totally, the verbal, the behavioral process, and the existential process are not very much used in both Obama and Biden's speeches. Since the speeches were face to face then there is no need to use many verbal expressions. Generally, both presidents hired these processes relatively aiming the same aim. To be mentioned, Obama successfully functioned the existential process in his speech; he hired it in a way that drive the attention of the audience to the existence real crises, the unstable situation, and the hardness that are lied on people who are trying to live with dignity. But at the same time, he is giving hope of promising future. On the part of Biden's speech, verbal process is used more than Obama's speech, and this is an indication. To sum up, the most used processes in both speeches are Material process, relation process, and the mental process respectively. These processes are used to give the audience an idea about the policy will be taken to build back their country with convincing them that the action will be done by the government and people together. Also, they attempt to raise awareness of audience liberty and that all people will receive their right whatever their race or color since they are belong to one country which is America.

6. Conclusion

The study reveals that transitivity types in relation to the political ideology function as a tool to accomplish linguistic features which can be used to uncover some political implications and intentions in the speeches. In the speeches of Obama and Biden, the real, tangible projects and future plans are outlined in the form of material process. Thus, both presidents used this process successfully to inform the audience of their intended plans for America in the interest of their citizens in different fields like economy,

science, safety, and enhancing the social life. Relatively, Material processes use is higher in Obama's speech compared to Biden's use of material process in his speech. Therefore, great determination to work and built reflected in Obama's speech, and the opposite to Biden who seems not quite sure of his ability to change. Consequently, Biden only mentioned few things he aims to accomplish with low rate of promises. Moreover, both presidents used relational processes to identify themselves with the audience. They tried to make a good image of themselves in the minds of people. The relations made by Obama are successfully functioned in the discourse. He used effective relations to important events and serious issues which really matter to the audience. However, relations made by Biden are normal and not salient. Additionally, the discourse made by mental process represents the inner experience to reflect the awareness of the current reality of the country and work to address people's minds to realize their rights as citizens who belong to this country and the necessity to raise patriotism and belonging regardless of gender and race. Verbal and behavioral processes are not used much since the speeches were direct and face to face with audience, therefore, they were not in focus. however, the behavioral process reflects a good portrait of the presidents. Both presidents used effective quotations; they used religious and famous quotes to touch the audience's feelings to earn their support. The occurrence of Existential was used in both speeches in very limited number.

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