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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Nationalism in Obama's Speeches

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Abstract

The current study investigates the notion of nationalism in terms of a critical discourse analysis in Obama's speeches. It aims at discovering how nationalism is employed in political discourse and what are the ideological linguistic strategies that politicians use to uncover this notion for the purpose of reinforcing and strengthening their governmental position. For the method of analysis, the current study uses a qualitative method to describe how Obama employs these strategies in his speeches. For the model of analysis, Vandijk (2002) is utilized in this study. The study concludes that politicians, like Obama in their political speeches, aim to foster a strong sense of American identity and national unity by using inclusive and ideological linguistic strategies such as national self-glorification, actor description, metaphor, lexicalization, populism, honesty, and repetition. These linguistic strategies serve political leaders in achieving their political interests and objectives by conveying their concern for the general national interests of their nation.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, nationalism, political speech, national self-glorification, repetition.

1. Introduction

Language is more than just a means of communication; it is a potent weapon for the formation of identities, ideologies, and social realities. Language has strategic purposes in political contexts, including mobilizing the masses, establishing collective identities, legitimizing authority, and persuading. Political speech is intertwined with the symbolic use of language to construct

national narratives, project visions of unity and power, and construct the self and other. According to Fairclough (1995), Speech both influences and is influenced by social actions, such as those pertaining to ideology and power. In this linguistic view, one of the most prevalent ideological issues in political discourse is nationalism. Nationalism, in its rhetorical form, encourages those

who belong to an accepted nation to feel a feeling of common identity, historical continuity, and cultural coherence. To promote unity, defend their leadership, and disassociate their party from perceived outsiders or threats, politicians commonly use nationalistic rhetoric. In order to construct the "nation" as a uniform and sacred entity, this rhetorical technique typically entails exalting national accomplishments and mythologies (Wodak et al., 2009). In addition to communicating, this kind of discourse actively shapes and questions national identity. Furthermore, nationalism usually reflects underlying ideology and power dynamics rather than being neutral or constant in political discourse. Nationalism is a versatile yet powerful rhetorical tool that political leaders can modify to fit various audiences, historical periods, or political objectives. Billig (1995) observes that "banal nationalism" normalizes national identity and allegiance without explicitly calling for patriotic action by using ordinary language and symbols. Therefore, researching the language realization of nationalism in political discourse provides important insights into the ideological function of discourse and how it influences public opinion.

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach of language study. Fairclough (1995) asserts that CDA studies the ways in which ideologies and social power structures mold, reflect, and impact language. It highlights the role that language plays in the reproduction of power, inequality, and social dominance, particularly through political and institutional texts. Instead of concentrating only on linguistic structure, CDA looks at how discourse patterns affect and are influenced by larger sociocultural contexts and processes. According to Van Dijk (2001), CDA is dedicated to revealing the nuanced ways that language, occasionally in the shape of seemingly neutral or everyday statements, supports the upholding of dominance. He highlights how speech may serve as a platform and a tool for struggle, especially in relation to concerns of gender, class, racism, and other social difference axes. The ability of CDA to combine language analysis with social theory is one of its special benefits. Wodak and Meyer (2016) assert that CDA methodologies cover a wide range of levels of analysis, from macro-level sociopolitical processes to micro-level textual elements. They maintain that CDA combines text structure with historical context. Thus, through CDA, researchers can ascertain how discourse contributes to the formation of social identities, the validation of authority, and the swaying of public opinion.

3. The notion of Nationalism

Kohn (1965) defines nationalism as a mindset in which one feels that their highest allegiance is to the nation-state. According to Minogue (1967), nationalism is a collection of beliefs and a mode of self-expression that allows an elite to convey a particular type of political fervor to the general populace. According to Plamenatz (1973), nationalism is the will to build a people's national or cultural identity when it is lacking or to protect or strengthen it when it is in danger. According to him, nationalism is a cultural phenomenon that emerges when individuals recognize cultural diversity and change and serves to differentiate between groups. According to Smith (1989), nationalism is an ideology movement aimed at achieving and preserving the independence, solidarity, and identity of a current or prospective "nation." He underlined that nationalism frequently comes before a country is formally established and is based on fundamental networks of association

and culture. In a similar vein, nationalism was defined by Spencer and Wollman (2002) as an ideology that envisions the community in a specific way (as national), prioritizes this collective identity over others, and pursues political power in its name. Kacowicz (1998) described nationalism as a feeling of pride in a country and a bond with its citizens. In this investigation, this definition is used as the operational definition in this study.

4. Methodology: Model of Analysis

In his work *Ideology and Discourse*, Van Dijk (2002) proposes valuable linguistic strategies in critical discourse analysis, such as national self-glorification, repetition, metaphor, actor description, populism, lexicalization, honesty, and illustration. In this study, these strategies will be used to show how politicians, especially Obama, employ them strategically and ideologically in their political speeches to express the notion of nationalism. These strategies will be explained as follows:

- i. **National Self-glorification:** It is used when the speakers highlight the norms and ideals of his own nation, such as democracy, hospitality, and human rights. Speakers often employ this strategy for the aim of projecting a positive image of themselves while ignoring or downplaying unfavorable information about their country for ideological reasons (van Dijk, 2002).
- ii. **Repetition:** It is a discourse technique that involves precisely rehearsing facts in order to get readers or listeners to focus more intently on what a speaker or writer is saying. It is the act of repeating a word, phrase, or even a sentence. Politicians use this rhetorical device to reveal their secret beliefs (van Dijk, 2002).
- iii. **Metaphor:** It is a rhetorical device that uses meaning extension to implicitly compare two categories. "War is a game." This type of political metaphor is nothing new to us. Additionally, a metaphor can both reveal and conceal features of a reality. It can change meanings that are complex, abstract, unknown, novel, or emotional into something more tangible and recognizable (van Dijk, 2002).
- iv. **Populism:** It is a political tactic that politicians employ to help their nations' citizens. They also use it to communicate their policies and views in order to become more popular (van Dijk, 2002).
- v. **Honesty:** This tactic uses expressions like "frankly and honestly" and "we shouldn't hide the truth." Speakers utilize it as a way to show that they are honest. The speakers participate in unfavorable, even disparaging, presentations while simultaneously expressing their good values of openness and honesty (van Dijk, 2002).
- vi. **Illustration:** Argumentation is the process of providing specific instances, usually in the form of vignettes or short stories, to support or bolster the main idea being discussed. One of the most powerful argumentation strategies is the use of tangible examples (van Dijk, 2002).
- vii. **Lexicalization:** It examines how conceptual meanings are expressed through language. Because vocabulary choices reflect group beliefs and influence how items are perceived and portrayed, it provides deeper insights on ethnicity than simply looking at descriptive words (van Dijk, 2002).

- viii. Actor Description: It implies that depending on their beliefs, people either describe themselves, other people, and society as a whole negatively or positively (van Dijk, 2002).

The visual representation of these strategies is shown in the figure below.

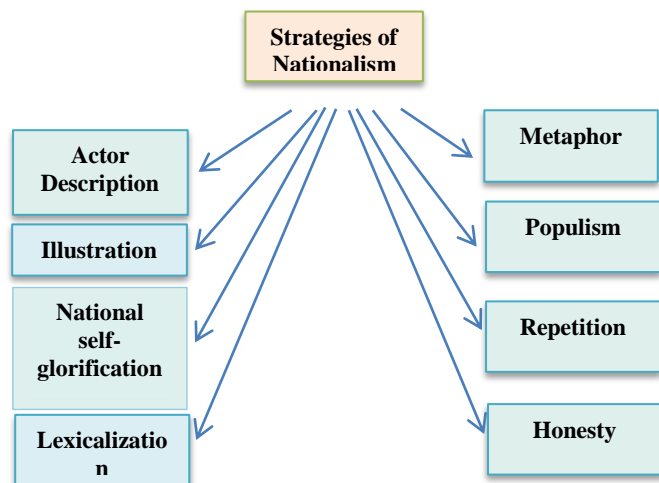


Figure 1. Mode of analysis depending on van Dijk (2002)

5. Data Collection and Description

Concerning data collection, this study selects two speeches of Obama's. They are taken from authentic and available web sources. In the first speech, which is entitled "A More Perfect Union," in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008, Obama invoked the principles of the American Foundation in his response to the controversy surrounding his former pastor, addressing issues of race, inequality, and unity. He emphasized common ideals and the necessity for collaborative progress using patriotic rhetoric. Concerning the second speech, Barack Obama delivers it on December 6, 2011, in Osawatomie, Kansas; it focuses on economic fairness and the middle class to show his national interest in restoring economic balance. Nationalistic elements appeared in his emphasis on American values like equal opportunity and collective responsibility. The researcher chooses five representative extracts to analyze the political notion of nationalism and how the linguistic strategies mentioned above are employed.

6. Data Analysis: qualitative analysis

In this section, five representative extracts of Obama's two speeches will be analyzed qualitatively. In these selective extracts, the researcher describes the employment of nationalism through the aforementioned strategies.

Extract 1 (speech 1)

"I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together — unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction — towards a better future for of children and our grandchildren."

In the above mentioned extract, Obama employs a number of strategies to convey nationalism, including lexicalization,

metaphor, illustration, populism, and national self-glorification. National self-glorification strategy is shown by emphasizing that the country can overcome its obstacles "together," he implies that the power of the country is in its cohesion and common goal. The notion that "we all want to move in the same direction" represents a faith in the country's capacity to advance, strengthening the sense of national identity by implying a better, shared future. Through using the strategy of illustration, Obama illustrates that there is a common sense of purpose and unity in the country despite its diversity. Although he admits that people differ from one another in ways like "different stories" and "looking the same," he states that "we all want to move in the same direction." Through utilizing these examples the argument for collective action is made more approachable and feasible. The populism strategy is shown via emphasizing the role of the people in solving the nation's issues. By using inclusive terms like "we" and "our," Obama demonstrates his support for the populace and belief in teamwork. This populist tactic directly appeals to the public by claiming that the only way to address the country's problems is through cooperation. Obama wants to instill a feeling of shared responsibility and give the people the ability to take charge of the country's future.

Extract 2 (Speech1)

"But I have asserted a firm conviction a conviction rooted in my faith in God and my faith in the American people that working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact, we have no choice is we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union".

In this extract, the strategies such as national self-glorification, populism, lexicalization, and repetition and actor description are included. Obama uses national self-glorification by asserting that he has a deep faith in God and the American people. His belief in the American people's ability to overcome challenges and go forward is a form of self-glorification since it extols the country's resilience and tenacity. Obama's assertion that "working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds" supports the idea that the nation can progress and achieve its goals despite previous disagreements. Obama employs populism to advance the idea that the country can only mend its racial wounds via cooperation. The phrase "working together" highlights a cooperative endeavor that involves every citizen. He argues that the only way to resolve the country's problems, especially racial tensions, is for the people to stand together. This serves to emphasize that the people are in charge of determining how the country is developed and that they have the authority to do it. Obama uses terms such as "conviction," "faith," "working together," and "old racial wounds" to evoke a sense of shared duty and national confidence. The term "old racial wounds" highlights the history of racial injustice and presents it as a persistent problem that has to be solved collectively. Obama reinforces his main call for cooperation and unity via repetition. The constant focus on "working together" highlights how important cooperation is to breaking down racial barriers and advancing the country. Here, repetition serves as a rhetorical device to emphasize the necessity of unity in creating a brighter future, which is consistent with a fundamental nationalist belief that a nation's strength is in its oneness. Obama asserts that the American people are the primary decision-makers who will determine the course of the country. In his saying "my faith in the American people," he describes them as strong, resilient, and vital to the country's progress. This actor description highlights the people's agency in addressing national

issues and mending past wounds, highlighting the notion that the country may advance via their combined efforts.

Obama creates a narrative that supports the notion of a single national endeavor to bridge racial gaps and keep moving forward toward a more ideal union by utilizing populism, national self-glorification, lexicalization, repetition, and actor description. He calls for collaborative action to mend past scars and create a stronger, more cohesive society, emphasizing the American people's power and responsibility to define the country's destiny. In the face of historical adversity, these rhetorical devices support a nationalistic image of solidarity, fortitude, and common purpose.

Extract 3 (Speech 2)

"grandparents served during World War II. He was a soldier in Patton's Army; she was a worker on a bomber assembly line. And together, they shared the optimism of a nation that triumphed over the Great Depression and over fascism. They believed in an America where hard work paid off, and responsibility was rewarded, and anyone could make it if they tried -- no matter who you were, no matter where you came from, no matter how you started out".

Obama uses multiple strategies in this extract, including national self-glorification, illustration, populism, repetition, honesty, and actor description. By highlighting America's victories over historical adversities like the Great Depression and fascism, Obama exalts the country. The perception that America is stronger, more resilient, and morally superior is reinforced when World War II and its success are brought up. By presenting the nation as a place where diligence and accountability are rewarded, he strengthens its sense of national identity and fosters a sense of pride in American values and accomplishments. In illustration strategy, Obama illustrates the larger American experience with a personal story about his grandparents. By mentioning his grandfather's participation in Patton's Army, and his grandmother work in a bomber production line, he recounts their distinct responsibilities to provide particular examples of national service and perseverance. This example strengthens nationalism by connecting individual sacrifice to national advancement; it assures the idea of American possibility and resiliency. To emphasize the repetition technique, the words "no matter who you were, no matter where you came from, no matter how you started out" are repeated. The nationalist notion of unity and shared destiny is strengthened by this repetition, which restates that all Americans have equal opportunities. Regarding his use of honesty, Obama grounds his message in actual historical problems by sharing a heartfelt and intimate story of his grandparents' World War II accomplishments. Obama uses historical references to demonstrate his sincerity and reliability in order to implement the honesty strategy. By bringing up his grandparents' humble but heroic efforts during World War II, he firmly establishes his case on real, personal experiences. In addition to upholding a common American ideal, this particular narrative shows a genuine belief in values like opportunity, justice, and hard work. His straightforward tone and inclusive language ("no matter who you were...") elevate his speech to a more honest and morally decent level. According to the actor's description in the excerpt, his grandparents were common folks who helped the country succeed and served as metaphorical representations of the American people. By portraying them as embodying American values of hard work and resilience, Obama frames the broader population as dedicated,

optimistic, and committed to national progress. This actor description enhances nationalism by attributing noble qualities to the American people, reinforcing their role in shaping the nation's identity. Obama creates a nationalistic narrative that honors American resiliency, opportunity, and unity through national self-glorification, illustration, populism, repetition, and actor description. In addition to paying tribute to earlier generations, his address reaffirms that America is still a place where everyone may achieve their full potential.

Extract 4 (speech 2)

"I am here to say they are wrong. I'm here in Kansas to reaffirm my deep conviction that we're greater together than we are on our own. I believe that this country succeeds when everyone gets a fair shot, when everyone does their fair share, when everyone plays by the same rules. These aren't Democratic values or Republican values. These aren't 1 percent values or 99 percent values. They're American values. And we have to reclaim them."

Regarding this extract, the strategies like national self-glorification, populism, lexicalization, repetition, honesty, and actor description are utilized. Obama depicts the US as a country that is strong because of its unity and justice. By claiming that "we're greater together than we are on our own," he exalts the concept of national unity and presents America as a nation that prospers when its citizens work together. By highlighting a shared destiny and the value of national unity, this strengthens nationalism. The populism strategy is utilized when Obama's support of equality and justice appeals to the whole public. He emphasizes things like making sure that "everyone does their fair share," ensuring that "everyone has a fair shot," and making sure that "everyone plays by the same rules." By promoting the idea of equal opportunity for all people and reaffirming the notion of shared duty and common identity, this populist rhetoric supports nationalist ideas. Lexicalization is shown by using words that invoke concepts of justice and equality, such as "fair shot," "fair share," and "same rules," which are intentionally employed in the speech. Obama reinforces a nationalist view that America is essentially a land of justice and equal opportunity by framing these as "American values," which are intrinsic to the country's identity. The phrase "when everyone..." is used repeatedly to highlight equality and inclusivity. "These are neither Republican nor Democratic values," the statement reads. These figures are neither 1 percent nor 99 percent. "They're American values" is another instance of repetition that strengthens the attractiveness of nationalism by reiterating the notion that national identity transcends political and economic divides. In the honesty strategy, Obama uses the phrase "I'm here to say they are wrong" to assert his views and opinions in a straightforward and conviction-driven manner. His emphasis on justice and unity through the use of inclusive words ("we're greater together," "everyone gets a fair shot") conveys sincerity and moral clarity. He appeals to a common sense of national identification by claiming that these are "American values" rather than party principles, which strengthens the message's credibility and authenticity. Using actor description strategy, Obama characterizes Americans as a group that values justice and shared accountability. He suggests that these qualities are fundamentally American but have been lost by saying, "We have to reclaim them," which feeds a sense of nationalism that the populace must restore the foundational ideals of their country. Making the American people the legitimate stewards of their national identity is in line with

nationalism. Obama perpetuates a nationalist view of America as a single, equitable, and just society through populism, lexicalization, repetition, national self-glorification, and actor description. In order to appeal to a wide range of listeners and promote a feeling of shared national identity, his language frames national values as nonpartisan and universal.

Extract 5 (speech 2)

"The world is transforming into an innovation economy, and no one is innovating more than America. No one is innovating more. But we need to keep up with the moment. We need to do better. We need to remember that we can only do this together. We've got to up our game. That starts by making education a national mission—a national mission."

In this extract, the strategies of national self-glorification, populism, repetition, and lexicalization are employed. Obama claims that "no one is innovating more than America," presenting the US as the world's most innovative nation. By highlighting American exceptionalism and positioning the nation as superior globally, the statement enhances the nation's reputation and fortifies nationalism. Obama makes an appeal to the public by highlighting teamwork—"We need to keep up with the moment," "We need to do better," and "We need to remember that we can only do this together"—in order to encourage participation in a common national objective. By restating the idea that active citizen participation is crucial to the nation's progress, this populist language promotes nationalism. Using the phrase "no one is innovating more" repeatedly reinforces the idea that Americans are the most inventive country. In addition to that, by emphasizing the significance and urgency of education as a shared national duty, the phrase "a national mission a national mission" strengthens the sense of togetherness and fosters nationalism. Obama strategically employs terms like "national mission" to define education as a basic role of the entire country. By designating it as such, he reinforces a nationalist viewpoint that places a higher priority on collective achievement and the notion that national identity and progress are linked to education. The metaphor is exemplified in the phrase "We need to step up our game", Obama likens America's advancements in technology and the economy to a competitive sport or game. It suggests that, like a team in a championship match, the United States needs to perform better in order to maintain its lead. Obama reinforces nationalism—the belief that all Americans must cooperate to sustain their country's success—by portraying innovation as a competition, which instills a sense of urgency and shared responsibility. By highlighting America's worldwide leadership, the communal duty of its citizens, and the national relevance of education, Obama cultivates a sense of nationalism through populism, repetition, lexicalization, and national self-glorification. His speeches strengthen the audience's sense of shared identity and responsibility by uniting them around a single national objective.

7. Result and Discussion

Based on the analysis the five extracts, these aforementioned strategies demonstrates national representation by combining persuasive discourse, emotional appeals, and ideological affirmation. Obama's use of national self-glorification, such as when he calls the United States "the most respected country on Earth," is not merely a patriotic declaration; rather, it is a planned move to bolster national pride and unity. By restating the idea that America is a morally superior and internationally renowned nation,

this portrayal creates a narrative of American exceptionalism. He reframes the country as both powerful and moral, reinforcing the idea of a shared future and moral leadership. Additionally, through his use of personal experiences and the stories of particular citizens, Obama humanizes national issues and personalizes the collective narrative. By encouraging inclusivity and emotional ties, these tales serve as a link between popular opinion and political action. The speech also makes extensive use of the personal pronoun "we" in an effort to promote a feeling of group agency and purpose. This inclusive populist speech reduces the hierarchical gap between the president and the people, supporting the notion of a participatory democracy in which everyone has a voice and importance. Furthermore, strategies like actor description, metaphor, and lexicalization are used to strategically shape social reality and national unity. Word choices like "rising from recession" and "moving forward together" portray the national experience as a path toward resilience and achievement as a group. Obama divides social actors into "those who want to divide us" and "those who strive for unity" in order to create binary oppositions that moralize political alignments. Such language formulations strengthen the conceptual foundations of his political program by fostering a feeling of national identity based on common values of tenacity, solidarity, and democracy.

8. Conclusion

This study concludes that, Politian's like Obama uses planned ideological strategies such as national self-glorification, metaphor, illustration populism, lexicalization, actor description, honesty, repetition to construct and advance a national identity based on solidarity, resiliency, and democratic principles. Obama purposely uses them to gain his political objectives and purposes through connecting his leadership to the values and aspirations of the American people. By using communicative strategies based on ideology and representation, political discourse has a wider sociopolitical purpose in forming collective identity, influencing public opinion, and bolstering the legitimacy of leadership.

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