Interpersonal Analysis of American Presidential Victory Speeches

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Abstract

The current study aims to investigate the discoursal function of modality and to reveal the functions of modality represented by two victory speeches of Obama and Biden. Some issues were reflected in the speeches throughout using modality system. To this end, the Halliday's perspective (2014) was selected as a theoretical framework to investigate the language structure and its functions. Findings revealed that types of modality were used in the victory political discourse with the dominance of inclination and probability in both speeches.

الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى التحقيق في الوظيفة الخطابية لمساعدات الفعل في خطابي أوباما وبايدن وتوضيح وظيفتها المتمثلة بخطابي النصر لاوباما وبايدن. هنالك بعض المسائل تم عكسها في الخطابين من خلال استخدام أنماط مساعدات الفعل وتحقيقا لهذه الغاية، فقد تم اعتماد نظرية علم اللغة الوظيفي المنهجي المقترح من قبل هاليدي (٢٠١٤) كإطار نظري لدراسة بنية اللغة ووظيفتها. وكشفت النتائج ان أنواع مساعدات الفعل تم استخدامها في خطابات النصر السياسية مع هيمنة الميل والاحتمال في كلا الخطابين.

1. Introduction

In linguistics, the linguistic structure used in political discourses to get certain functions of messages between the speaker and listener, was a central topic need more investigation (Wilson, 2015, 201). People use speech to express views and opinions, it is a technique used by the speaker in political context to discuss variety of topics that has the influence on the society. Language used in a speech has the ability to influence minds, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of listeners (Sinaga, 2018). Political speeches are presented with specific goals serve the communicative discourses. Generally, presidents use the language to persuade the audience and to draw their attention to certain political topics. Such influence is practiced on people by employment of linguistic choices that convey beliefs and thoughts of politicians towards different issues in America and around the world.

Overall, modality is a linguistic system which expresses someone's judgement about the fact of a proposition that is perceived by the producer and by the receiver (Hussein & AL-Marrar, 2016: 55). It means that the truth of a proposition can be arguable. There are four types of modalities investigated namely: probability, usuality, inclination and obligation. Current research employs modality types to show the self-representation of Obama and Biden as a representative of the Democrat party. The selection of the two speeches is convenient since they display the interactions, and judgments presidents try to construct with their citizens at first speech directed to them. Modality used in the speech to reflect the meanings that the presidents want to say and images they want the listeners to see. Surrounding by SFG's framework, the goal of the current study is to identify modality used in the victory speeches of Obama and Biden. Also, to identify modality and how it is functionalized in the speeches.

The importance of this study is reflected general in discourse and particularly in discourse analysis. It has efficient scientific contribution in the theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, the study provides broad presentation of modality in victory speeches. Practically, it introduces examples and analytical pieces that illustrate the application of the theoretical model in a scientific and practical way; the study shows how to analyze any piece of a spoken discourse according to Halliday and Matthiessen's model (2014).

2. Literature review

Many researchers were interested in investigating modality in different kinds of speeches. Pionery, and Isti'anah (2017), used modality analysis as a basis of their study modality types which are employed in Melania Trump and Ivanka Trump speeches. Also, the study tries to investigate the ideologies that are reflected in the speech using modality. Findings revealed that the four types of modality were employed to reflect two ideologies which are commitment and self-promotion. The study of Setiawan, Laksana, Mahyuni & Udayana (2018) aims to describe text modality system of presidential candidate debates (2014-2015) of Indonesia. The result of the study shows that the president Prabowo Subianto uses probability, usuality, obligation to convey probabilistic, frequency and mandatory consequently while Joko Widodo used modality to reflect certainty, usuality (always) obligation as required to urge people do actions.

The present study is different from the previous studies in that the data used in the current is the political victory speeches of Obama and Biden. Furthermore, the main aim is to identify the modality types and how they functioned in the victory speech of Obama and Biden.

3. Interpersonal metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday (1994) positions that the use of language for the interpersonal function enables the speaker to involve in communicative acts with others, assume roles, and communicate and comprehend feelings, attitudes, and judgments. This function implies mood structure, that reflects interactional meanings including what the clause is doing during a verbal encounter, and modality, which relates to the speaker's viewpoint or judgment of the clause's subject and the function of the speech (Manalu, 2018: 9). Interpersonal metafunctions deal with variant of means by which people communicate and interact by using language. Communication is realized by interaction mechanisms for example turn-taking, interpretations, and things that can be fulfilled by using language (speech acts, implicature). The interpersonal functions enable the speaker to use the language possibilities as a participant in a certain context of a situation. The speaker can express judgments, attitudes, and evaluations through the interpersonal meaning. Furthermore, the speaker tries to use specific influence on others. (Zhang, 2017: 66). The clauses meaning functions as an exchange this function is characterized by the mood system of the language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Modality is an element of interpersonal metafunction in SFL have mostly focused on conservative, media, academic, political, legal, literary, and medical discourse, as well as modern English use (Aboh, 2012). Halliday (1994) states that modality lies in two types: Modalization incorporates probability and usuality, and modulation incorporates inclination and obligation. In terms of probability, modality examines how reliable the provided information or how likely it is to be accurate. (Thompson, 2014: 70). Usuality is defined as "how frequently it is true" (Thompson, 2014: 70). It indicates the frequency of any activity. Obligation signifies the speaker's desire to do something as well as the ability to do so based on the feeling. Obligation expresses the responsibility or the pressure which is experienced by the addressee to meet the addresser's demand. Moreover, inclination expresses willingness and readiness of the speaker to meet an offer (Rosyda & Citraresmana, 2020).

4. Political discourse

"Political discourse" can be used to describe a variety of distinct spoken language or writing formats (Wilson, 2015, 275). Van Dijke (cited in Dunmire, 2012, 736) defined 'political discourse piece of text and speaking of politicians in a political context. 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.

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 focuses on identifying modality patterns and their functionality in political discourse. The victory speeches of Obama and Biden have been selected as data for this study. Therefore, a qualitative method was chosen as the convenient research design to be utilized in this investigation. To this end, the modal which is adopted in the current study is the Hallidayan perspective (2014).

5.1 data collection

Two speeches have been selected, they are victory speeches of Barak Obama's (2008) and Joe Biden's (2020). The elections were companied with unique circumstances in America and the world. These circumstances influence the linguistic structure of modality used in the speeches. Obama's victory was significant as he is the first African American president of America. Thus, such an important change of American presidential brings with it a linguistic diversity. While the second speech was chosen since it is the very modern speech for latest American president of America. These speeches are a suitable example 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". 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 Data analysis

From the analysis, it was found that Obama used (59) modal verbal operators in his speech as shown in table (1). The majority of modality types is 'probability' followed by 'inclination'. 'obligation' and 'usuality' employed the least in his speech. On the other hand, Biden used (40) modal verbal operators in his speech. The highest occurrence is for inclination and probability and the least occurrence is obligation. There is no occurrence of usuality in Biden's speech.

Table (1) Modality types in Obama and Biden's victory speeches

Modality type	Frequency of modality in Obama's speech	Frequency of modality in Biden's speech
Probability	41	16
Inclination	9	20
Obligation	8	4
Usuality	1	0
Total	59	40

The most modality type frequently used is probability in Obama's speech, counted for (69%) which corresponds to (40%) only in Biden's speech (see figures (1) and (2)). By using this rate, Obama is indicating future expectations of action that he may performs with his presidency more than the expected actions from Biden. He utilizes probability to refer to things that are very likely to happened and that he is very certain of the validity of things he is promising the audience with. Obama utilizes 'will' to express probability which reflects his credibility in denoting some issues that may face the country on the way to constancy. Generally, Obama and Biden use 'can' to express probability to shorten the distance between them and the audience. They don't tend to imply any authority in their very first speech which encourage the audience follow their instruction willingly. They were continuously encouraging people by showing them hope the darkest days the country is living and let them see chances they may use to live the glory of America again. As shown in Figure (2), inclination showed a high percentage in Biden's than Obama which indicates Biden's desire and willing to change with the audience participating in achieving his vision. Both presidents used the future form mostly to express inclination, and this gives the implication that they are determined to lead America and to strengthen their nation. Thus, this type of modality gives the audience hope of better future.

Obligation and usuality are the least frequencies in both speeches. Obama as a president uses his authority to command more than Biden. They asked goods and services from people to perform more action

and to have a role in building the country and to protect it. The usage of obligation in Obama's speech was emphasizing the need for change and not to allow difficulties and temptation to weaken the people's resolve. While in Biden's speech, obligation used to urge people to fight the corona virus and to make peace with other parties in the government because they are after all 'American'. The application of usuality was very limited in the speech of Obama and it was not used in Biden's speech. An important relation was made by Obama as a kind of affection by using usuality, by which he told people that he feels for them and their suffering. To sum up, both of Obama and Biden dedicated some priorities as being presidents of the United States. Through the use of modality patterns, they reflect their intentions and determinations and desires.

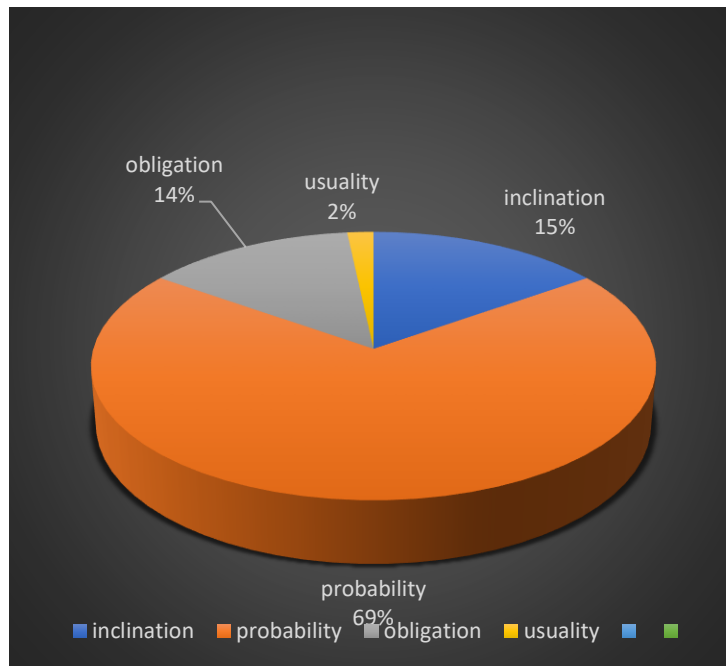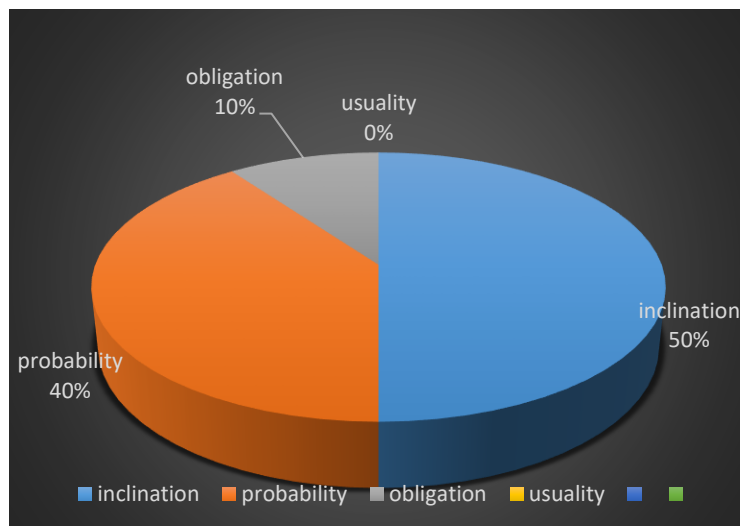Figure (1) Percentage of Modality types in Obama's speech.

Figure (2) Percentage of modality types in Biden's speech

6. Conclusion

Modality analysis provides understanding the judgments and thoughts concerning the issues discussed with regard of the presidents' social relations with the audience. In their speeches, presidents have mentioned serious events, some of them are highly important while others have less importance. The four modality types have been functioned in the political discourse. Probability and Inclination have the majority in Obama and Biden's speeches. Obama reflected his honesty and confident about the

mentioned issues to the audience. Furthermore, probability used to sign positive and negative future events. There was no sign of occurrence of usuality in Biden's speech and only one occurrence by Obama. Patterns of usuality were not being contributed to find occurrence of events or actions. The only occurrence was by Obama in which he used it to assure people and showing sympathy for them who may think that they are unnoticeable. The use of inclination displays the presidents' wish and their readiness to change and provide the citizens positive services and developments. Their intention was to give the audience the full picture of the next policy and to show them both negative and positive sides of the way of change. The analysis shows that Biden used more inclination than Obama which gives his speech credibility as a caring president who worry about his country's future and that he is keen to work hard to repair what was damaged during the last years. Finally, both presidents didn't want to reveal high authority to audience through excessive use of obligation, rather, they tried to show modesty. Yet, leaders can use obligation in kind of giving permissions, recommendations.

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