

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECHES OF MICHAEL OBAMA: A REFLECTION OF PRONOUNS AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the speeches of Michael Obama in the light of Van Dijk CDA model. The fine relation between identity and pronouns, and the way they are being implemented are the focal points investigated in the paper. Teun Van Dijk is quite a known name in discourse studies, and his model of CDA analysis is one of the powerful approaches in the domain. His model involves three dimensions of ideology analysis, namely, discourse, sociocognition and social analysis. Two of the speeches of Michelle Obama have been selected randomly. First speech has been addressed to “Democratic National Convention” (2012) and the second speech is taken from “Democratic presidential nominee’s campaign rally in Salem, N.C. To evaluate her speeches discussion has been done by using CDA model of Van Dijk. (2001) and qualitative approach has been used. Speech has been analyzed at different levels. It has been found that Micheal Obama uses a lot of pronouns like “I”, “You” and “We” etc in a variety of ways that reflects identity and a strong sense of belonging. She is trying to endorse values and ethics by using powerful and watchfully chosen pronouns which reveal identity and leave therapeutic effects on her audience. She smoothly drifts from “My” to “Our” and “I” to “You” to demonstrate a strong connection between people and her life, particularly by using real life examples. She skillfully uses repetition in her speeches to leave mark on her audience’s mind. Thus, it proves that, a politician’s pronominal use of pronoun explains about one’s diverse identity, particularly one’s combined and shared identity. This also strongly reflects a politician’s aim to connect to the audience by certain sociocognition practices, to which they can relate. The schema of this research is to demonstrate the fine amalgamation of identity and pronoun through the prism of Van Dijk CDA model. Furthermore, this study will open doors for the innovative entities in terms of analyzing speeches through a different dimension. Basic purpose is to seek meaning via certain grammar tools mentioned above as well as to build a certain paradigm in order to clarify certain vistas with regard to probe the meaning under the surveillance of Van Dijk CDA model.

KEYWORDS: Identity, Pronoun, CDA, Speech, Discourse

INTRODUCTION

As stated by Irimiea (2010) political addresses have been taken as a supreme component of American democracy, and they have always been similar all through the history. One of the major aims of presenting political speech is to elevate the reliability of a politician. Such speeches will boost the participation of the masses and guide them to comprehend important issues. Speeches use persuasive vocabulary and they are addressing a particular sort of issue or they are designed to give a certain sort of exposure. (Irimiea 2010, p 3).

Teun Van Dijk is a pioneer of the study and research in domain of CDA. The analysis on the topic depicts that whatever people talk about represents their mindset, as per his point of view those things are mental and personal tenets about ethnic events. Now a days, audience plays an important role in political speeches. They consist of such immense number of people who are the daily followers of such speeches available in print and electronic media. (Beard 2000, p37).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How identity has been exhibited through the medium of pronouns in the light of Michael Obama addresses, with relation to Van Dijk CDA model?
2. How does Michelle Obama exhibits her individual and collective identity in her political addresses?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Van Dijk CDA Model

Van Dijk CDA model exhibits that whatever people talk about represent their mindset. Those things are mental as well as personal tenets about ethnic events. Furthermore, he talks about other positive and negative self-representation or other representation. In addition to that, Van Dijk offers some practical principles, guidelines and such claims that do not come under any special school or approach. He does not consider CDA as a branch of discourse analysis, like conversation analysis or psycho discourse analysis so he recommends the researcher to look at critical discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary approach and advises researchers to take an eclectic approach towards it.

Van Dijk (1995) basically sees discourse analysis as ideology analysis, because according to his point of view, ideologies are not solely articulated and replicated in discourse and communication, counting nonverbal semiotic messages as well, for instance pictures, photographs and movies. He investigates ideologies according to 3 parts which are social analysis, cognitive analysis and discourse analysis. Over here cognition refers to personal and social cognition, beliefs, goals, values, emotions, and other mental structures.

Pronouns and identity

Pronouns are considered as an entity of words which are capable to emerge in the position of existing words, mainly a lot of nouns, other pronouns or noun phrases. Particularly they are used primarily as a way for the orator or writer to avoid repetition (the Oxford Dictionaries). According to Collins (1990), there are numerous kinds of pronouns: personal, reflexive, possessive, indefinite, demonstrative, reciprocal, relative and interrogative.

The personal pronouns are used to pin point the concerned audience that the speaker is communicating with, or about and it can also be used as a source for him to refer to himself. Therefore, the subjective personal pronouns are referring to a subject complement or subject of a clause that comprises of I, we, you, he, she, it and they. Whereas, objective personal pronouns refers to the same people or things presented as the corresponding subject pronouns (Collins 1990:29). Object pronouns are used like the object, subject complement or prepositional complement of a clause (Quirk et al. 1972). Moreover, he said that the objective personal pronouns are: me, us, you, him, her, it and them.

Politicians employ the pronoun “I” to exhibit themselves as individuals and to articulate their own viewpoint, while stressing on one’s fine qualities and achievements (Bramley 2001). The pronoun “You” is used by the orator to concentrate on parts of, or the whole spectators. Mine, my, our(s), your(s), his, hers and their(s) are known as possessive pronouns. They are used to discuss about how things or people are associated with different entities. The orator points out that something is strictly associated with something or someone by mentioning a possessive pronoun.

Personal pronouns play a vital role in political addresses; they give the thought of whom the orator in question relates to. According to Beard (2000), the pronominal preferences made in political speeches are also appealing because they make a significant influence on the overall effect. Politicians exhibit themselves as being capable to recognize themselves with the needs, interests, and demands of the followers . Furthermore, politicians through their speeches persuade their audience and also to opponents in such way to be recognized as fine politicians. According to Allen 2007, a way of attaining this is by deliberately making use of particular personal pronouns that relates to themselves or others.

Moreover, identity is always evolving. It builds surface into an interaction. In the process of discourse, individuals connect in such a way where each spokesman puts himself in a societal affiliation with others in the communication and specifies his position in the process. The utmost prominent purpose of identity is as a conceptual entity that combines a community (Jansen 1999). Identity is identified linguistically via differential use of pronouns and it is one of the major sources. Regardless of the fact that the focal point in linguistics had always been on the basis of syntactic properties of pronouns, whereas ignoring its social (and indexical) nature (Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990).

According to Bramley (2001), 'You' is a complex and a generic pronoun that can be utilized to normal or common form which can be referred to anyone. He furthermore elaborates that the pronoun 'We' can be used to call upon a group relationship or a communal identity, it also creates severance between us and them. He also suggests that a politician's pronominal selection of pronoun points out his or her diverse identity, particularly individual, combined or shared identity.

'We' is a central and mostly used pronoun in political addresses and it conveys 'institutional identity'. It is also used to disconnect 'us' from 'them'. While adding an 'us' and 'them' segregates the orator and creates a representation of an entity he belongs to in a positive and the negative connotation.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research. Two speeches of Micheal Obama have been selected randomly for the discussion. Van Dijk CDA model has been used for the analysis of the speeches of Michael Obama. Chosen texts is descriptive and have been investigated while keeping in mind the very scrutiny of fine relation between identity and pronouns, and the way they are being implemented. Therefore, the very scheme of methodology encompasses society, cognition and discourse and the fine amalgamation of three.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of Michelle Obama's speeches reveals that whatever people say, actually represents their mind set. It is their abstract mental system which depicts their socially shared attitudes. It also exhibits their mental and personal views which are specifically mirroring their belief. A speaker should have clear principles and goals to communicate that is where Michael Obama gets success because she has a clear socio political position and she knows how to make connections. Her speeches have strong streaks of magnetic waves that attract not only audience rather introduces a whole new horizon that encompasses Van Dijk CDA model.

While keeping in mind the very essence of socio cognition, researchers have scrutinized her speeches and found that the various ways in which people process social information. Micheal Obama not only presents the socio cognitive streaks but also interprets the connection among people and leaders. Talking in the perspective of integrating masses in the speeches and filling the gap via specific pronouns, researchers reached on the analysis that she has somehow knitted well the use of vocabulary and then the very spirit lies in the socio cognition of her remarkable speeches.

The very notion depicted in Van Dijk CDA model triggers the essence of these speeches. Van Dijk urges on the fact that like conversational analysis and psycho discourse he does not considers CDA as a branch of discourse analysis so he recommends the researchers to view CDA as an interdisciplinary and adaptan eclectic approach towards it. Eclectic methodology develops certain ideologies which help to create the ideal treatment of the concern phenomena. Micheal Obama speeches have been explored with regards to a certain rubric that encapsulate the wide range of pronouns and identity that she has vocalized and seemingly visible in her speeches. Therefore, the researcher has opted for the eclectic approach to probe through certain reasons for instance strong use of pronouns and identity.

Use of first person pronoun

She has placed the pronoun “I”, “You” and “We” as an authenticity to justify her aura being first lady and at the same time we find the glimpse of the very soul of determination, a strong will that is illuminating through her expression. The researchers have also probed the fact that various emotional streaks are luminous or visible with the collaboration of personal pronoun “I”. By delivering stances like “I have seen”, “I mean there”, “I was certain”, “I still had”, “I was worried”, “I knew, I love”, “I just want”, “As We look into”, “We think about”, “We take”, “We take”, “We are worried”, “You see”, “Let me tell you”, “We go high”, “We are making”, “You may have seen”, “You are trying” etc portrays the use of personal pronoun s and identity. We find traces of high motivation mingled with the fine choice of wording that is surprisingly gripping the audience and of course targeting all genre of audience.

Use of anaphora or repetition

There is much repetition in her addresses that exhibits her desire to reach out to the common everyday people for example “I have seen it”, “I loved”, “I see”, “Let me tell you”, “I respect Hillary” etc which shows her persistence towards her stance of making connections with people.

Use of real life examples

By giving real life examples of her parents’ life and her life before and after marriage she is trying to inspire people by transferring the inspiration to lead a happy and satisfied life. She is also depicting how contented they were in normal circumstances. Her message of hard work and setting examples for her fellow men (Americans) to follow is very clear and motivating. Moreover, her authentic views help people to connect with her vision that is crystal clear.

Use of identity words

It is quite evident in the beginning that the severe sense of identity and belonging has been conveyed by her speeches. A strong urge to get noticed seem quiet intense. The word “Let me” signifies the fine opportunity to speak and owning that right and at the same time feeling the responsibility. stances like “I have seen”, “I mean there”, “I was certain”, “I still had”, “I was worried”, “I knew, I love”, “I just want”, “As We look into”, “We think about”, “We take”, “We take”, “We are worried”, “You see”, “Let me tell you”, “We go high”, “We are making”, “You may have seen”, “You are trying” etc also proves the use of identity word and identity reflected by the use of powerful vocabulary.

Therapeutic effects in the light of pronoun and identity

It has been observed that she is tackling audience with therapeutic effects of her carefully chosen words. Her expression acts as a healing and encouraging agent to the listeners. She has made her aura strong enough to take the responsibility while using, “I”, “me”, “You”, “our”. She is using diction very appropriately to take it as an instrument that can break the barriers between her and people. Micheal swiftly drifts from “I” to “You” and then to “us”. She is being comfortable in vocalizing her emotions such as “Whoa”, “Well”, “Wow” and words like “Folks”, “Guys”. At the same time, we are exposing to the valuable encouragement that she has offered to her audience. Her sense of belonging gives the traumatized people therapeutic effects that is diminishing the sufferings and giving them hope. It seems that whenever she is in front of the audience, she is just not a lady; she is not just a “first lady”, rather a whole package of grace, patriotism and sobriety. Moreover, she has the extraterrestrial power to transcend people, a certain chemistry that has therapeutic outcome.

Promoting values and ethics in the light of pronoun and identity

She seems to be a family-oriented lady who is strong and at the same time she is fully in control of herself. Her strong inclination towards family values actually gives us the very flavor of American dream that is lost yet achievable as well as it encapsulates the very schema of identity. In the speeches of Michael Obama she is integrating values and ethics by making connections to the real world and individuals. Her choice of words describes the concrete representation of identity and one's responsibility with regard to identity. For instance, "I've seen it in the incredible kindness and warmth that people have shown...", "And we were taught to value everyone's...", "we learned about honesty and integrity". In aforementioned examples, again we find the strong bonding between pronouns and yes the very concrete surge for identity.

Identity elaborated through pronoun

"My husband, our president, Barack Obama.", in these lines, she is actually trying to prove herself as a commoner but she is unique in herself. She is also showing feminist possession and sense of responsibility that directly shifts from "My" to "Ours" but yes sense of possession and owning your decision is the nucleus.

CONCLUSION

The speeches of Michael Obama have an enormous impact on audience. She has the capacity to mesmerize the audience by sensitively rather aptly incorporating various daily life examples extracted from her life. She skillfully diminishes the space between the orator or ruler and audience. That unique sort of blend makes her the incredible orator and somehow it results in the whole new chemistry that emerges and binds the audience.

It has been noted that in the light of Van Dijk CDA model, researchers have found out the fine lines between identity and pronouns glimmering through both her speeches. Frequent use of pronouns in political speeches helps in creating identity and making connection with its audience. The diverse use of pronouns, "I", "we", "you", "our", and her swift shift from "My" to "Our" and "I" to "You" conveys the strength driven by identity. It has been noticed that her speeches are the true embodiment of good fusion of pronouns and identity. Identity is considered as a broad term and she mixes it well and made it quite relevant.

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