

## A Cognitive Discourse Analysis of Political Concepts in the Speeches of Barack Obama and Donald Trump on Terrorism

تحليل الخطاب المعرفي للمفاهيم السياسية في خطابات "باراك أوباما"،  
و"دونالد ترامب" حول الإرهاب

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### الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تقديم تحليل خطاب نقدي؛ للتحقيق في طبيعة وتطور تحليل الخطاب المعرفي للمفاهيم السياسية في خطابات "باراك أوباما"، و"دونالد ترامب" حول الإرهاب. وتهتم الدراسة بتطور الخطاب منذ أن أصبح "باراك أوباما" رئيساً للولايات المتحدة حتى انتهاء ولاية "دونالد ترامب" في عام ٢٠٢١، ولقد تناول الزعيمان كلاهما موضوع الإرهاب في العديد من المناسبات ما قدّم لنا كمّاً وفيراً من البيانات الكافية لإجراء هذا البحث. وتستعين هذه الدراسة بالنموذج الذي يقدمه "فيركلوف" (FAIRCLOUGH) لتحليل الخطابات التي قدمها كل من الرئيس "باراك أوباما"، و"دونالد ترامب" في أثناء الفترة المعنية، فتناول هذه الخطابات من الجانب "النص"، و"التفاعل"، و"السياق"، ويظهر أن خطابات الرؤساء حول الإرهاب تختلف عن بعضها بعضاً في بعض النواحي، وتُظهر النتائج أن "أوباما" يختار النهج الدبلوماسي والسلمي في التصدي للإرهاب، بينما يختار "ترامب" طريقة القوة والشدة. يخلص التحليل إلى أن هذا التباين ربما يكون متوافقاً مع الأيديولوجيات الليبرالية، أو المحافظة لكلا القادة السياسيين. يمكننا أيضاً أن نلاحظ أن الأيديولوجية الليبرالية لأوباما، وأيديولوجية ترامب المحافظة تؤدي إلى تناقض صارخ في المواقف الأيديولوجية، وتوزيع السلطة في مختلف القضايا المثيرة للقلق، على الرغم من أن كلا الزعيمين يشتركان في بعض أوجه التشابه.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الخطاب، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، تحليل الخطاب السياسي، الإرهاب، مقاومة الإرهاب، الإقناع، نموذج فيركلوف لتحليل الخطاب.

### Abstract:

This study examines the political concepts in Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's speeches on terrorism through the lens of cognitive discourse analysis. It focuses on the evolution of discourse from the election of Barack Obama to the end of Donald Trump's presidency in 2018. Both political leaders have discussed terrorism on numerous occasions, providing rich linguistic data sufficient to conduct the intended investigation.

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model is used in this study to examine official statements made by the two US Presidents during the time period under consideration. It focuses on Fairclough's method's textual, intertextual, and contextual levels, revealing that the presidents' discourses on terrorism differ in some ways. The results demonstrate that Obama chooses the diplomatic and peaceful approach to address terrorism, whereas Trump chooses the route of force and strength. The analysis concludes that this variance is probably compatible with either the liberal or conservative ideologies of both political leaders. It is also noted that the liberal ideology of Obama and the conservative ideology of Trump lead to a stark contrast in the ideological stands and power distribution on various issues of concern, even though both leaders share some interests.

**Key Words:** CDA, PDA, Political Speeches, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism, Discourse, Fairclough Model, Persuasive Strategies.

## 1. Introduction

Given the idea that ideologies are actively obtained and transformed through discourse, this study investigates the relationship between discourse and ideology, one of the essential features of critical discourse analysis. There are numerous arguments in support of this paper. It truly provides a comprehensive framework for the investigation of aggressive ideologies toward the concept of terrorism and its use in discourse. It also focuses on the study of ideology across two distinct mindsets and eras of the two American political parties, the Republicans, sometimes known as the Grand Old Party (GOP) and the Democrats. The Republican Party is noted for its conservative ideology, which includes both economic policies and social ideals. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, adopts modern liberalism worldview which combines ideals of civic liberty and social equality.

This study is concerned with investigating the ideologies of two American political parties in relation to the concept of terrorism, with Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump serving as representations of both mindsets. This investigation looks not only at counter-terrorism strategies and methods, but also at how terrorism is portrayed and represented. It seeks to examine the characteristics of terrorist discourse at the presidential level in the United States and how it has developed over time between the two administrations.

## 2. Literature review

Discourse Analysis, as defined by Cameron (2001), is a term that refers to an area of research on the use of language; it may be characterized as "the study of language viewed communicatively and linguistically." He (Cameron, 2001, p. 11) also stated that any more extensive application of such a definition usually entails references to ideas such as "language in use, language beyond the phrase, language as meaning in interaction, and language in situational and cultural context." Furthermore, Schiffrin (1994, P. 39) said that Discourse Analysis investigates a wide range of discourse such as "natural speech, professional documentation, political rhetoric, Internet communication, journals, and broadcast media.

Discourse analysts are particularly interested in the contrasts between spoken and written discourse, such as lexical density, grammatical structures, and situational features. According to some observers, spoken language is less ordered and provides fewer information. while according to Biber (1998, P. 105) it has "interactive markers, planning fillers, and other hesitation phenomena

CDA holds the belief that the connection between language and meaning is never arbitrary. The usage of a certain genre or a certain rhetorical strategy embodies specific meanings, ideologies, and intents (Kress,1991, as quoted in Paltridge, 2012). Politicians nowadays often deliver the majority of their public speeches to invited audiences of their own supporters and

followers. According to Beard (2000), the true goal of those politicians is to manipulate the public into consenting to policies that serve solely their ambition to win or retain power.

### **3. Research problem and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to look at the political concepts in Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's statements on terrorism in order to demonstrate the power of language in their speeches since they demonstrate a high degree of proficiency in utilizing words. More specifically, the study seeks to evaluate and analyze Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's speeches by applying Fairclough's (1995, P. 97) three-dimensional CDA method of discourse analysis.

### **4. Theoretical framework**

#### **4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

Although critical discourse analysis is a well-known term, it is challenging to explain precisely because it is not a comprehensive method with a single specific meaning. Critical discourse analysis research does not have a long history. Despite the fact that it had existed before the 1990s, it was during that decade that the first significant debates about it took place. Critical discourse analysis was initially discussed by Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, and Ruth Wodak. They did not always reach the same result, and their definitions and methodologies varied significantly even now (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, P. 4).

Van Dijk (2001a, P. 352) states that critical discourse analysis is concerned with:

“The way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit

position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.”

In critical discourse analysis, Wodak emphasizes the importance of the relationship between language and power, and she argues that speech is responsible for a substantial share of societal issues and inequalities. Critical discourse analysis, she believes, is concerned with "dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language." That is to say, critical discourse analysis seeks to investigate social inequality as it is expressed, indicated, created, legitimized, and so on through language usage (or in discourse)" (Wodak, 2001 P. 2).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), according to Van Dijk (2003), is a sort of discourse analytical research that focuses on how political and social contexts cope with, reproduce, and enact social power abuse, dominance, and inequality.

In contrast to the numerous other fields of research in discourse studies, Van Dijk (2003) refutes the notion that CDA is a direction, school, or specialization. Van Dijk establishes various prerequisites in order to achieve the goal of critical discourse research. CDA studies should be superior to other types of studies in that they should focus on social and political issues and attempt to explain discourse patterns in terms of social interaction.

Fairclough's (1995) provided a CDA model incorporates three interconnected analysis processes linked to three interconnected discourse dimensions. In his three-dimensional model of CDA, Fairclough (1995, P. 97) identifies these stages as follows:

- i.* Description stage, includes linguistic description of the language text.
- ii.* Interpretation stage, deals with the interpretation of the relationship between the (the productive and interpretive) discursive processes and the text.

*iii.* Explanation stage, deals with the explanation of relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes.

Ideology, according to Fairclough (1992), can be seen in all of these stages, as a result, it can be found in the text, the interaction, and the social context. Consequently, when doing CDA, it is critical to consider all of these stages.

Rahimi and Riasati (2011) believe that CDA has been used as an educational discipline which attempts to provide answers for inquiries about the relationships between language, society, power, identity, ideology, politics, and culture.

### **3.2 Political discourse analysis**

Political discourse analysis deals with the political speeches, it is deeply associated with the languages which the politicians use in their discourse. Politicians regularly gain their power through the support of the public. that is why they are really concerned to gain the support and approval of the public. Language is one of the tools politicians use to achieve this goal and control the public and direct them towards specific attitude and belief (Van Dijk, 2008). This is defined by Van Dijk (1997, P. 25) as efficiently highlight or de-emphasize “political attitudes and opinions, garner support, manipulate public opinion, manufacture political consent.”

Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001, P. 399) clarify that reviewing political discourse has been existed as long as politics itself. The weight the Greeks located on rhetoric is a situation in point. As quoted in Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton (2001, P. 400), Orwell is the first one who gave due attention to the political possibility of language. This can be seen in his classic article “Politics and the English Language”. In this article he reflects the way in which language can be used to employ thought and proposes, for instance, that “political speech and

writing are largely the defence of the indefensible” (Orwell, 1969, P 225).

Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001, P. 408) clarify that daily used words, prepared and organized in certain ways, may become politically implicated in leading thinking regarding exact issues, and with real and overwhelming effects. Even the process of saying someone’s name may become a political performance, as it did in the notorious McCarthy trials of the 1950s. They also mention that comparable words and phrases may come to be reinterpreted within dissimilar philosophical frameworks. Associated directly to this procedure is the notion of “representation.” Representation refers to the issue of how language is employed in different ways to represent what we can know, believe, and perhaps think.

In this study, tools of analysis will be used to examine features of context of anti-terrorist notion in the speeches of both Barack Obama and Donald trump in order to provide an understanding of overall structure and the discourse of stimuli.

## **5. Research Questions:**

Throughout the analysis of the said article, this study aims at answering several questions.

1. How is language used for revealing the hidden ideologies and political intentions of the two presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump
2. What are the different styles used by both presidents when talking about terrorism?
3. How are rhetorical features and style of each president different from one another according to their background, work and history?

## **6. Methodology**

### **6.1 Data collection**

The data used in this research was obtained from the website [www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com) (see References for specific details). These speeches were delivered by Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump during their terms in office (2008-2021). The speeches were delivered at a variety of locations, including the White House, Oslo City, Cairo University, the United States Department of State, the United States Congress, and West Point Military Academy. The speeches selected were given at events where both presidents spoke; while some of them may not have been primarily about terrorism, the two leaders did discuss "terrorism" in each of them. Although all of the talks are listed in the citation, the research may also relate to additional addresses.

## **7. Analysis and discussion of data**

### **7.1 Analysis of data**

The first section will cover Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's persuasion tactics for persuading their audiences to believe in their views, particularly when it comes to terrorism. the researcher employs Fairclough's (1995, P. 97) three-dimensional method to completely comprehend how both political leaders persuaded their audiences to believe in their ideological and political positions. The researcher emphasizes the connection between the text and social practices in these strategies. That is, metaphor, positive rhetorical devices, negative rhetorical devices, and intertextuality are all tied to the social circumstances that shape the speeches under investigation. Speakers usually use these strategies to direct audiences' interpretations toward certain concepts in a broader meaning. Indeed, as Fairclough (1995) proposed, the interpretation step mediates the relationship between the description and explanation stages. The textual element used in the speeches under investigation, as well as the social contexts in general, lead



and shape the participants' interpretation. That is, while evaluating these persuasive methods, the micro (textual components) and macro (wider sense) levels of discourse analysis are connected. This study reveals the political leaders' entrenched ideologies and power distribution, as well as the impact of liberalism and conservatism on the selected speeches.

## 7.2 Qualitative Analysis

### 7.2.1 Barack Obama

Throughout his political career, Barack Obama has delivered several speeches, many of which have dealt with terrorism. His statements often have a more conciliatory tone, and unlike George Bush, he does not frequently dehumanize terrorists. As is evident in the "9/11 Pentagon Memorial Speech" in 2010, he does not characterize terrorists as wicked throughout his first term in office, instead focusing on the crimes that they are doing. In his address the same year, he frequently refers to them as "men."

"So, the threat will not go away soon, but let's be clear: Al Qaeda and its affiliates are small men on the wrong side of history."

But this didn't endure long; during his second term, his approach shifted in response to the threat posed by ISIL, as seen by his address on Iraq and ISIS. (Obama, 2014)

"As I've said, rooting out a cancer like ISIL will not be quick or easy, but I'm confident that we can -- and we will"

He calls them "cancer." so reducing their humanity. Even if he does not dehumanize terrorists as much as his predecessor did, he still links terrorism to hatred and violence. Obama (2009a) also employs the contrast between good and evil by characterizing terrorists as being driven by hatred.

"Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred"

While at the same time he describes their victims as innocent civilians.

"They were innocent. Harming no one, they went about their daily lives. Gone in a horrible instant, they now "dwell in the House of the Lord forever"

In his second tenure as president, he is typically moderate; indeed, this is the only aspect of his speeches that is more confrontational. In fact, he (Obama, 2016a) no longer refers to terrorism as an existential danger, as he did in his 9/11 Pentagon Memorial Speech during his first term.

"We will never waver; in pursuit of al Qaeda and its extremist allies, we will never falter."

Moreover, he (Obama, 2009b) claims that terrorism is a tactic and claims that religions other than Islam are also used to justify violence. He adds that terrorism itself is not new and reminds people of earlier crusades.

"These extremists are not the first to kill in the name of God. The cruelties of the Crusades are amply recorded. But they remind us that no Holy War can ever be a just war."

Later, he also admits that terrorism cannot be entirely destroyed. Obama, however, still asserts that ISIL must be finally destroyed when discussing it (Obama, 2015a).

"Our mission to degrade and ultimately destroy the terrorist group ISIL."

His rhetoric does not instil terror as much as George W. Bush's does because he understands that doing so would be ineffective.

Instead, he seeks to increase public understanding so that they will join the government in opposing this philosophy. Although he soothes people's fears and gives them hope that they can thwart and eliminate the ideology of terrorism, he nonetheless portrays terrorism as a live threat.

On the intertextual level, Obama uses pre-existing discourses. We can see that he discusses how outstanding and magnificent the US is (Obama, 2016c)

"We should take great pride in the progress that we've made over the last eight years. That's the bottom line. "

He also discusses US ideals, citing Guantanamo as an example of a policy that goes against such principles (Obama, 2016d).

"This facility open is contrary to our values. It undermines our standing in the world. It is viewed as a stain on our broader record of upholding the highest standards of rule of law."

Obama believes that the US is resilient and unbreakable (Obama, 2015d).

"As Americans, we are strong, and we are resilient. And when tragedy strikes, when we take a hit, we pull together, and we draw on what's best in our character ... we recover, and we emerge stronger than before. That's who we are."

Like George W. Bush, he frequently brings up the tragedies of 9/11 and does not want people to forget them, as he emphasized in his statement at the 58th National Prayer Breakfast (Obama, 2010f).

"Sadly, though, that spirit is too often absent when tackling the long-term, but no less profound issues facing our country and the world. Too often, that spirit is missing without the spectacular tragedy, the 9/11 or the Katrina,

the earthquake or the tsunami, that can shake us out of complacency."

On the contextual level, Obama spoke on various occasions, for example, on policies and strategies. In his First Speech to a Joint Session of Congress, he discusses the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the termination of combat operations in Iraq, and the repatriation of soldiers (Obama, 2009d).

"We are now carefully reviewing our policies in both wars, and I will soon announce a way forward in Iraq that leaves Iraq to its people and responsibly ends this war. "

We may observe the same thing with reference to Afghanistan as he discusses handing over responsibility to the Afghan government (Obama, 2010g), aiding in Afghanistan's development (Obama, 2009e), reducing military levels (Obama, 2013d), and altering the mission to support and train local forces, which is expressly mentioned in his Statement on Afghanistan (Obama, 2015e).

Barack Obama has given numerous speeches throughout his political career, many of which have addressed terrorism. In contrast to George Bush, he typically adopts a more neutral tone in his speeches and does not frequently dehumanize terrorists. Throughout his first term in office, he does not portray terrorists as evil, instead focusing on the crimes that they are doing. But this didn't last for very long because, during his second term, he changed his policy in reaction to the threat that ISIL posed. He nevertheless draws connections between terrorism and violence and uses the difference between good and evil by depicting terrorists as being motivated by hatred, even though he does not dehumanize them as much as his predecessor did. We may say he is generally moderate. His goal is to promote public awareness so that more people will adopt his ideology. Obama employs pre-existing discourses at the intertextual level. He constantly makes reference to the ideologies that George W.

Bush developed. On a contextual level, Obama discussed policies and strategies on a number of occasions.

### **7.2.2 Donald Trump**

Trump's speeches appear to be a touch more confrontational than those of Obama. His inauguration speech made it quite obvious that he dehumanizes terrorists and views them as beings of evil who must be driven off the planet (Trump, 2017a).

"We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth."

Additionally, he frames the conflict as one between good and evil (Trump, 2017b) and presents terrorists as brutal killers of innocent people, presenting them as even more ruthless. (Trump, 2017c)

"Every time a terrorist murders an innocent person, and falsely invokes the name of God, it should be an insult to every person of faith. Terrorists do not worship God; they worship death ... (we should) stand together against the murder of innocent Muslims, the oppression of women, the persecution of Jews, and the slaughter of Christians."

In his statement to the American people on Afghanistan, Trump also emphasizes that,

"...terror groups stop at nothing to commit the mass murder of innocent men, women, and children." (Trump, 2017d)

which emphasizes the risk they pose. Further dehumanizing them, he frames the conflict as one between the civilized world and terrorists, portraying the latter as the enemies of civilization (Trump, 2017e). we also may notice that his focus on recent

incidents like this in the United Kingdom (Trump, 2017b), Manila (Trump, 2017g), and Barcelona, which he labelled as savage, are only a few examples of how his remarks may incite fear (Trump, 2017d).

"We need look no further than last week's vile, vicious attack in Barcelona to understand that terror groups will stop at nothing to commit the mass murder of innocent men, women and children. You saw it for yourself. Horrible."

Additionally, he lists additional terrorist incidents and claims that terrorism is a global threat (Trump, 2017c), that has "gathered strength" and the assistance of rogue governments (Trump, 2017h).

"Terrorists and extremists have gathered strength and spread to every region of the planet. Rogue regimes represented in this body not only support terrorists but threaten other nations and their own people with the most destructive weapons known to humanity."

Trump also claims that the US and its allies' freedom and life depend on this battle and their participation in it, and that the danger of terrorism is an existential one (Trump, 2017f).

"Our own fight for the West does not begin on the battlefield -- it begins with our minds, our wills, and our souls ... Our freedom, our civilization, and our survival depend on these bonds of history, culture, and memory."

Trump does not frequently reference other discourses in his speeches on the intertextual level. However, we can see that He makes reference to the war against terror, which was a concept made up by of George W. Bush and was frequently used by Barack Obama as well (Trump, 2017g). He also discusses the

glory of America, much like the previous two presidents (Trump, 2017a).

"We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement... And we all salute the same great American flag."

He also mentions the terrorists desire to acquire weapons of mass destruction (Trump, 2018b)

"I am asking Congress to address the fundamental flaws in the terrible Iran nuclear deal."

On a contextual level, we can plainly see Trump discussing tactics for continuing the battle against terrorism. For example, he advocated a new approach for the Afghanistan conflict. Even while he would like to leave Afghanistan, he vowed that the US will continue its objective war there. He would not establish a departure date since he does not want to alert the US enemy about the end of combat activities there. He claims that the new policy includes economic and diplomatic measures in addition to military ones, and he does not exclude any future negotiations with the Taliban; hence, he does not endorse the notion that we cannot negotiate with terrorists. Regarding the India-Pakistan issue, he wants to modify policy toward both countries, choosing to forge relations with India rather than blindly backing Pakistan, which the US claims continues to assist terrorists. He also wants allies of NATO to back this new approach. The major difference in the new policy for Afghanistan is that the US will not engage any nation building and is not interested in establishing democracy in Afghanistan (Trump, 2017d).

## **8. Findings and Results**

The major findings of this study are not surprising; one may expect a president of the United States of America to commonly use the phrases "Americans," "people," and "nation" to refer to his people in his statements. Given that both presidents face

tremendous challenges, it is not surprising that they often address America's security in their meetings. It is worth noting, however, that four of the ten phrases on both lists—People, America, World, and Country—are the most frequently used words by both leaders. The most frequent terms are Isil, War, and Qaeda, which is not unexpected given that they are all associated with terrorism. Indeed, we can link terrorism to all of the most frequently occurring phrases in the corpus. It is clear that both leaders prioritized this issue above all others.

Despite the fact that both presidents discussed a number of issues, they gave special attention to counterterrorism. They used quotes from other religions to show that extremism and terror are not tied with any single faith or culture. Nonetheless, they showed no complacency in the face of danger, whatever its cover. They used the power of words to persuade their audience of their ideals and points of view, attract them to join their coalition, and reveal the challenges and obstacles they confront, whether political or on the field.

## **9. conclusion**

This study revealed that, Trump seems to be more confrontational in his speeches than Obama was. His inauguration speech made it very clear that he regards terrorists as beings of evil who must be eradicated from the world and degrades them by frequently referring to them as losers. He casts the battle in terms of a struggle between good and evil and portrays terrorists as vicious killers of innocents. He said there is a worldwide threat from terrorism. He emphasizes the danger by comparing terrorism with the desire to obtain a WMD (WMDs). Trump also eases anxiety by highlighting the US's successes in the fight against terrorism and his dedication to winning this war. he also vows to prevent terrorists from ever again entering the US. Trump does not frequently reference other discourses in his speeches on the intertextual level. However, we can see that He refers to the war against terror, which was a concept made up



by of George W. Bush and was frequently used by Barack Obama as well. On a contextual level, Trump plainly discusses tactics for continuing the battle against terrorism. He believes that it is critical to counter terrorist's finance, ideology, and geographical control. His policy focuses on governments which support terrorists by offering safe havens.

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