

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Barack Obama's Inaugural Address

Yan Yu

Zhoukou Normal University, Henan, China

Abstract

Critical Discourse Analysis is an analytical method that aims to connect language and language use with its ideological meaning. It is a commonly used analysis framework for analyzing political discourse. Obama's speech contains a wealth of information such as ideology and power in his carefully considered language, which is endowed with important political connotations. This paper analyzes the speech from the perspective of CDA to reveal the implicit political intention and ideological significance, and explore the relationship among discourse, ideology, and society. In the study, it combines quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis for the discourse analysis. The theoretical framework of this paper is Fairclough's Three-dimensional framework theory, and it also uses Halliday's systematic functional grammar as a tool for language feature analysis. According to the Three-dimensional framework theory, discourse analysis is divided into three stages: description, interpretation and explanation. The study finds that Obama uses a variety of language skills and strategies in his speech, and successfully realized his political intention to inspire citizens to rebuild the United States. Therefore, the speaker will consciously use language to implement ideological manipulation in political speeches. The purpose of CDA is to reveal the implicit relationship between language and ideology through surface language forms and explain how the ruling class uses language to control ideology and maintain their power.

Keywords

Critical Discourse Analysis; Barack Obama; Inaugural Address; Three-dimensional Framework.

1. Introduction

Obama's inaugural address in 2009 at the U.S. Capitol was passionate, rousing, and uplifting. To leave a good impression on the public and be prepared for his future political career, Obama cleverly used a large number of language skills and strategies in his inaugural address. As a world power, Obama's political decisions and views on the international situation in his speech affect the world to a large extent, and attract global attention.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as one of the significant perspectives in political discourse, can better analyze the intricate relationship among language, ideology and right and expound the origination of discourse (Xin & Gao, 2013). CDA originated from "critical linguistics". According to CDA, social practice is the base of discourse, and it helps to construct society identity, knowledge and meaning systems, and social relations (Ji & Xin, 2009). In recent years, scholars have carried out a wide range of researches on political discourse. And the study of Obama's inaugural address under CDA is also received considerable attention. Stobbs (2012) conducted a CDA of Obama's inaugural address by focusing on the choice of grammar and explored how Obama gains emotional resonance from the public. Wang (2010) analyzed Obama's political goals by explaining the usage of transitivity and modality. Ji & Xin (2009) used systemic functional linguistics to analyze Obama's inaugural address, aiming to reveal his

language characteristics. From the above, it can be seen that scholars have different research perspectives, theoretical foundations, and purposes to expound Obama's speech by using CDA. However, few scholars combine the Three-dimensional Framework with the Halliday's three Meta-functions to analyze the political ideologies in Obama's inaugural address. Hence, this paper uses this way to explore the underlying ideologies, which can prove the feasibility of the research on the mutual combination of two methods, and understand the political discourse from the standpoint of CDA more scientifically and rigorously.

To analyze the speech from the perspective of CDA, this paper reveals its implicit political intentions and ideological significance, and explores the relationship among discourse, ideology, and power. Specifically, it aims at dealing with three research questions, namely: (1) What language strategies do Obama use in his Inaugural Address? (2) What effects do the language strategies of Obama's Inaugural Address have on audiences? (3) What is the underlying relationship among discourse, ideology, and political power in Obama's inaugural address ?

2. Theoretical Overview

The theoretical overview of this paper is the Three-dimensional theory, and it also uses Three Meta-functions as a tool for language analysis.

2.1. Fairclough's Three-dimensional Framework

The Three-dimensional theory is an important method for CDA. "CDA analyzes not only the text or the process of production and interpretation, but also the relationship between text, processes and their social conditions" (Fairclough, 1989). Corresponding to the three-dimension of discourse analysis, the description, interpretation and explanation are three steps of CDA. The description stage describes the text's linguistic characteristics, for example, morphology, grammar and text structure. The interpretation stage explains the text and the communicative process that generated, transmitted and received by the text. The explanation stage interprets the process of text communication and its social environment. Actually, these three stages are interrelated, which aim to discover the underlying ideology in the text. Meanwhile, it provides an analytical model for Obama's speech to carry out in-depth CDA study.

2.2. Halliday's Three Meta-functions

The Three-dimensional Framework regards language as a multifunctional system, so Halliday's three Meta-functions have naturally become its main source of methods. Halliday (2000) believes ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function exist in all language. Ideational meta-function mainly involves transitivity and voice. According to Halliday (2000), transitivity is the grammar of the clause in its ideational aspect which consists of six processes. In general, the type and content of the text influence the choice of the process, which reflects the ideology of the discourse. By studying the voice, the writer's real intention can be found. Interpersonal function can be realized by mood and modality. On the whole, there are four types of mood, namely, declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative. In political speeches, mood indicates the status or ideology of the speaker. Modal verbs, modal adverbs, and pronouns usually represent modality, which is often associated with the power. Textual meta-function involves information structure, the cohesive system, and thematic structure. The thematic structure involves Theme and Rheme. Generally speaking, the theme is the significant information that the speaker wants to convey to the listener, so it can express the speaker's ideology. This paper also discusses the cohesion to explore Obama's intentions.

3. Methodology

This paper selects Obama's inaugural address as the data, and it combines quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis. This article uses quantitative method to analyze the transitivity, voice, mode, modality, theme, and cohesion. When carrying out the analyses, the percentage of these items can check if there is ideology hidden in Obama's speech. Meanwhile, the results can be interpreted by the qualitative method, which makes the statistics more clearly. Therefore, the combination of two methods can make the article more convincing.

4. Discussion and Results

As an excellent politician, Obama's inaugural address makes his frustrated people confident and courageous, which also receives international attention. This part will analyze Obama's political intentions and the hidden ideology from the point of CDA, with Three-dimensional Framework and Halliday's three metafunctions.

4.1. Description

Description, the first step of Three-dimensional theory, aims to describe the formal language features in a discourse. The part will analyze the linguistic features from three Meta-functions. According to ideational meta-function, there are 227 clauses that include six types of processes Obama's speech. It is illustrated as follows.

Table 1. Usage Rate of Process in Obama's Inauguration Address

Process	Existential	Mental	Behavioral	Verbal	Material	Relational	Sum
Data	4	14	6	10	141	52	227
%	1.76%	6.17%	2.64%	4.41%	62.11%	22.91%	100%

From the table, it can be seen that material and relational processes are used most frequently, with percent of 62.11 and 22.91. The examples extracted from Obama's speech are as following: *"Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remarking America."* -- "Ourselves" indicates that Obama is one of the publics. "Pick, dust, begin" expresses Obama's idea of working with the public to contribute to a better future for American. *"Our challenges may be new. The instruments... they have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history."* -- The relational processes in these sentences make the statement quite believable so that the public will support Obama, which reflect the present status of the American -- their current challenges and success based on hard work, courage, curiosity, and enthusiasm. In political discourse, passive voice is an effective way to obtain the goals of discourse. There are some logical objectives that *are* replaced in the theme of the passive clause, which expresses the speaker's intention properly.

From the angle of interpersonal meta-function, there are 108 declarative sentences and 4 imperative sentences in Obama's speech, so it's more objective and convincing. The imperative sentence such as "Let us mark this day..." impose Obama's ideas on the public, which means he is in the same class as the audience. Obama adopts some modal auxiliary in his speech. They will be shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Modality Verbs in Obama's Inaugural Address

Auxiliary	must	can	could	will	would	should	may	might	total
No.	8	19	1	19	1	0	3	2	53
%	15.09	35.85	1.89	35.85	1.89	0	5.66	3.77	100

Modality verbs can strengthen Obama's authoritative status and build a solid relationship with the public. In Table 2, it is clear that "will" and "can" appear most frequently. As we all know, "will" expresses the possibilities in the future, so it can convey the speaker's promises and intentions. By using "will", Obama promises to the public that they will build a beautiful country together if he gets the support of Americans. "Can" is also used for 19 times so that Obama can show his authority and affect the audience's ideas with theoretical and logical possibility. Obama uses "Must" 8 times to show his political status and his right and authority to do some things.

From the point of textual mate-function, it is principally based on the unmarked and marked theme. In political discourse, speaker use marked theme to express his ideology. Some examples are as follows: 'For us,... For us,... For us,...' — The marked theme "for us" is adopted to express Americans' sacrifice in the past in order to make today's Americans live a better life. In this way, Obama's political intention can be conveyed to audiences. Cohesion is also used in the speech so as to know Obama's intentions. For example: in some sentences, "they" involves "the challenges". Obama use reference in order to make the text more systematic and coherent. In an elliptical sentence, "our patchwork heritage is" is omitted before "not a weakness", which conveys Obama's advantage to reconstruct the public's confidence.

4.2. Interpretation

Firstly, the paper will discuss the content of Obama's inaugural address in order to know how Obama interacts with his audiences. In the inaugural address, Obama notes the challenges and economic crisis that the Americans face and also inspires the public that all difficulties will be overcome. He announces a series of policies that will benefit the American people, so as to create a better life and a beautiful world for humans. By analyzing ideational mate-function, it can be seen that Obama does his best to convince people that he can make the country better. Secondly, the participants in the speech are president-Obama, Americans and people all over the world. Through analyzing the speech from the standpoint of interpersonal mate-function, we can see that Obama takes himself as the member of the public, and he wants to obtain his authority and affect audiences' ideas to realize his political attentions. Thirdly, the role of language will be stated so as to know the hidden meaning from the language features. By analyzing Obama's speech, it can be seen that language is an efficient tool to persuade people. From the textual mate-function point, the language in the discourse is carefully organized and the thematic structure is used to present his attitudes and ideas so as to attract the public's support.

4.3. Explanation

At this stage, political discourse should be analyzed in the social context for exploring the hidden relations among the discourse, power, and ideology. At that time in American, the Bush Government left many problems including economic problems, energy crisis, unemployment problems and environmental issues. Under such social context, Obama's idea of "change has come" receives supports from different classes. On one hand, he regards himself as an ordinary citizen in order to build a friendly relation with audiences. On the other hand, his authority as a president and his power to command audiences is strongly felt. In fact, Obama's inaugural

address is also a strategic tool to implement his political policies around the world. Meanwhile, the speech also expresses that the U.S. will become the leader of the world and bring happiness to the world people. In the end, Obama says “*God bless you. And God bless the United States of America*”, which indicates God support the U.S. and its policies are legal because God is the emblem of power and ethics.

5. Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can know how Obama unites the public to achieve his political aims with his speech. Through analyzing the discourse, the underlying relationship among discourse, ideology, and political power can be exposed. In the stage of description, the language features in Obama’s inaugural address such as the transitivity, voice, mood, modality, theme, and cohesion are discussed, which can reflect his ambition and ideology to control the world. Obama mainly uses declarative sentences and modal verbs such as “will” and “can” to make the audience accept his ideas. The thematic structures are used frequently so as to establish his power. In fact, the relationship between ideology and language is dialectical, which means that ideologies are reflected in the discourse and discourse can strengthen the ideologies in return. By the analysis, we can see how the language chosen by Obama expresses his attitudes and ideas and how the power or authority is built.

By analyzing the discourse, it can be found that CDA is a practical and suitable method to research presidential speech, which can explore the underlying ideology and power in the discourse. In the meantime, this research can help people cultivate critical thinking and awareness in reading so that they have a better understanding of political discourse.

It is clear that some limitations exist in the paper. Firstly, the analysis of the article is not comprehensive. Secondly, the CDA of political discourse needs the analyst to be familiar with the political environment and social context. Due to the author’s limited knowledge and personal experience, there are some shortcomings in the analysis.

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