

AN ARTICLE

**EXAMINING THE STYLISTIC DEVICES OF BARACK OBAMA'S
VICTORY SPEECH IN THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**



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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING THE STYLISTIC DEVICES OF BARACK OBAMA'S VICTORY SPEECH IN THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memeriksa gaya bahasa yang digunakan dalam pidato kemenangan Barack Obama pada tahun 2012. Pidato ini berdurasi selama 21 menit 1 detik yang terdiri dari 163 baris. Terdapat dua masalah yang dikemukakan dalam penelitian ini yaitu jenis-jenis dari *stylistic devices* beserta fungsinya. Data untuk menjawab kedua masalah tersebut diambil dari blog CNN dan Youtube. Analisis data menunjukkan 3 bentuk dari *stylistic devices* yang diperiksa yaitu fonologi (aliterasi, konsonan dan asonan), semantic (simile dan metaphor) dan struktural (anaphora, parallel, triple atau tricolon, klimaks serta antiklimaks). Ketiga *stylistic devices* ini berfungsi untuk menciptakan irama dan rima (sajak), untuk meningkatkan dan menguatkan makna dari ucapan serta untuk menciptakan struktur parallel. Kesimpulannya, pembubuhan ketiga fitur ini beserta penggunaan bahasa tubuh yang efektif dapat membuat pidato ini menjadi lebih *stylish* dan lebih hidup karena mereka dapat membuat takjub para audiens. Penelitian ini juga menyarankan analisis yang lebih mendalam pada pidato - pidato Obama yang perlu untuk dilakukan agar lebih memahami ciri khas yang terdapat dalam pidato - pidatonya.

Kata kunci: wacana lisan, *stylistic devices*, pidato kemenangan.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the language style used in Barack Obama's 2012 Victory Speech. The length of this victory speech is 21 minutes and 1 second consisting of 163 lines. The problems examined are types of stylistic devices and their functions. The data to answer the problems were taken from CNN Blog containing the transcript of the victory speech and also Youtube on the night of speech delivery. The analysis of the data shows there are three features of stylistic devices which are being examined i.e. phonological features (alliteration, consonance and assonance), semantic features (simile and metaphor), and structural features (anaphora, parallelism, triple or tricolon, climax

and anticlimax). These stylistic devices serve functions as they are used to create rhythm and rhyme, to augment and strengthen the meaning of utterances as well as to create parallel construction. In conclusion, the embellishment of these three features along with the effective use of body language makes the victory speech more stylish and lively as they can attract the audience from being passive into admiration. This study also recommends a deeper analysis on other Obama's speeches need to be conducted in order to understand more comprehensive features of his speeches.

Keywords: Spoken Discourse, Stylistic Devices, and Victory speech.

Background of Study

People communicate their feelings, wishes and intentions to interlocutors or audiences by using language, which is the main topic in Discourse Analysis. Discourse is often defined in two ways: a particular unit of language above the sentence and a particular focus on language use, Schiffirin (1994).

There are two types of discourse according to its channel namely written and spoken discourse. The latter type becomes the writer's interest in writing this paper. In spoken discourse, there are several fields that can be analyzed such as conversation and speech, and speech is the main topic in writing this paper. One of the most popular speeches to be analyzed is political speech.

The language used in political speech has its own characteristic features which differentiates it from other varieties of language use. Politicians convey their speech by using unique linguistic features in order to persuade the listeners and make them become attentive to join their speech thoroughly.

In relation to this discussion, Leech (1983: 15) mentions the point of term

rhetoric as the focus on a goal-oriented speech situation, in which speaker uses language in order to produce a particular effect in the hearers' minds. Thus, the term *rhetoric* can also be used as a synonym of speech.

Barack Hussein Obama, the current President of the USA, is undoubtedly one of the best orators in this generation who can make his audiences become mesmerized all the time he conveys his speech. He is the 44th President of the U.S.A from Democratic Party who was elected at two consecutive periods. He was elected to the U.S. Presidency in 2008 as the first African – American President in America's history, and won re-election in 2012 against Republican Party candidate Mitt Romney. He won against his rival by a total of 52 percent votes. He delivered his victory speech in Chicago, Illinois in front of thousand people of America and million spectators all over the world. One of his ways in delivering amazing speeches is by the effective use of stylistic devices. Pearson defines stylistic devices as figures of speech and tropes that are used to shape the style of a message. Bilal et.al. (2012) states that there are five features composing the stylistic devices; phonological, semantic, structural, lexical and morphological features. However, this study only

focuses on the first three features mentioned earlier. In order to provide more information about the typical features of political speech for those who are interested in public speaking and for those who want to understand more about language used in political speeches, so the writer decides to carry out an analysis of these features in a study entitled *Examining the Stylistic Devices in Barack Obama's Victory Speech at the 2012 Presidential Election of the USA*

Based on the description above, the problems stated are as follows: (1) What are the stylistic devices used in Barack Obama's victory speech? and (2) what are the functions of those devices?

1.Review of Related Literature

1.1 Discourse Analysis

In the preceding chapter, the definitions of discourse analysis have been presented; they are 'the language above sentence' and 'the language in use'. The latter definition is supported by Brown and Yule's (1983) view who state that the analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use. The term *discourse analysis* covers the study of spoken and written interaction, McCarthy (1991). This paper is written with the concern on the spoken discourse.

The origin of spoken language can be traced from the ancient Greek age, in which it is firstly used in the oratory or the art of skillful and effective public speaking, Keraf (2008). It was because publications could not be conducted thoroughly because the publishing machine has not been discovered. As what have been stated previously that the term 'speech' can be used interchangeably with the rhetoric,

thus Leech (1983: 15) also states that rhetoric can be understood as the art of using language skillfully for persuasion,

1.1.1 Characteristic of Spoken Discourse according to Brown and Yule (1983: 17):

- a. the syntax of spoken language is much less structured than of the written one.
- b. the use of conjunction to mark between sentences is rare.
- c. it is rare to find more than two premodifying adjectives.
- d. it is generally structured with what is called theme-rheme.
- e. the speaker may rely on gaze direction while speaking.
- f. the speaker may replace or refine the utterances as s/he goes along.
- g. the use of generalized vocabulary.
- h. the speaker frequently repeats the same syntactic structure.
- i. The speaker may produce a large number of 'fillers' such as *well, erm, I think, you know, of course and so forth*.

1.1.2 Macrostructures and Microstructures

van Dijk (1977) cites two approaches to study the text they are the so-called macrostructures and microstructures. According to van Dijk's view, macrostructures highlight several strands:

- a. topic as 'global' meaning
- b. the participants
- c. the predicates

Meanwhile, the microstructures highlight:

- a. topic as 'local' meaning

b. coherence and cohesion

c. manipulation of syntactic style like the use of pronouns, variations of word orders, passive and active forms, nominalization, etcetcetc.

etc. whose functions are to build alliances, solidarity, sociopolitical position of the speaker, as well as to draw special attention.

1.2 Types of Speech

Speech is a familiar feature of everyday life. Speech can be defined as a formal talk given usually to a large number of people on a special occasion (Cambridge Dictionary). Speech is one type of monologues, which is one of spoken discourse types alongside interviews, service encounters, casual conversation and so forth, McCarthy (1991). Brydon and Scott (2008) divide 4 types of speech: informative, persuasive, critical thinking and speaking and speaking on special occasion.

a. Informative Speaking

Informative speaking is the process by which the audience gains new information or a new perspective on old information from a speaker. Informative speaking covers a wide range of settings such as in a classrooms, workplace and community.

There are 4 ways to inform an audience; explanation, instruction, demonstration and description.

Explaining a process is one of the primary functions a person needs to accomplish. A *process* can be defined as a series of actions that are taken in order to achieve a result. The key to explaining a process is to discover the right complement of language and visual media for the

audience, Brydon and Scott (2008). For example, *Photosynthesis* process requires speaker's creativity because of its complexity in the real process. Moreover, explaining a concept is also a way to give informative speaking. *Concept* is a symbolic abstraction that pulls together a class of objects that share common attributes. The key to explaining a concept is to describe the essential attributes that distinguish it from another concept. Like explaining a process, the use of visual media is a big help for the speaker to make an abstract concept concrete. Informative speech can also be used to instruct audience by providing new and relevant information or at least new perspective on such information. Furthermore, an informative speech can also be used to demonstrate how to do something and to describe something by effectively using the social media.

b. Persuasive Speaking

Persuasive speaking is often found in advertisement and campaign. Persuasion is the process by which a speaker influences what audience members think or do, Brydon and Scott (2008).

Persuasive speeches can serve different purposes namely branding, adoption, reinforcement, inoculation and change. Branding is the process of creating a lasting impression about a name, company or product. Once people have a concrete impression, then the adoption occurs. Adoption is consumer's decision to commit to a product, practice or idea. The third purpose of persuasive speeches is the reinforcement. Reinforcement can be defined as rewards given to strengthen attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors. The fourth purpose of persuasive speeches is inoculation,

which is closely linked to the reinforcement, whose definition is techniques used to make people's belief systems resistant to counter persuasion. The most difficult purpose of persuasive speech is to change people's attitude, belief and behavior, Brydon and Scott (2008). To conduct a good persuasive speech, a speaker needs credibility consisting of two components; competence and character. These two components complement each other that a speaker is not only a knowledgeable person but also must be a person of good character that can be trusted.

c. Critical Thinking and Speaking

Understanding how to think critically about arguments is the first step to construct and communicate those arguments to the audience, Brydon and Scott (2008). Critical thinking is the process of making sound inferences based on accurate evidence and valid reasoning (Brydon and Scott, 2008: 405). During the speech, the speaker communicates his/her ideas by providing the evidence taken from personal experience, statistical data and so forth to support the claims made. If the listener does not agree with the claims made, s/he will give a rebuttal that is a refutation or an exception to the argument.

d. Speaking on Special Occasion

This type of speech explains several types of speeches that one may face in in the near and distant future. When speaking on special occasions, mostly people have time to prepare and practice before giving the speech. Other times, they may be asked in impromptu fashion. Brydon and Scott (2008) added that there are several speeches which are considered to be held in special occasions namely speech of acceptance,

speech of introduction, speech of recognition, speech of commemoration, speeches to entertain, and speaking on television.

Speech of acceptance is a speech expressing thanks for an award or honor. Speech of introduction is a speech that briefly sets the stage for an upcoming speaker and is designed to meet two objectives; to enlist the audience's attention and interest and to reinforce audience perception of credibility. Speech of recognition is a speech presenting an award or honor to an individual. Moreover, speech of commemoration is a speech that calls attention to the stature of the person or people being honored, or emphasizes the significance of an occasion, including speeches to celebrate and speech to memorialize a specific person associated with special and solemn occasion. Furthermore, speech to entertain is a speech that makes its point through the use of humor. Like all speeches, a speech to entertain should have a clear focus. Its primary purpose is to bring laughter to the audience. The last but not least is speaking on television which is a rare event reserved for newsmakers and icons in the popular culture.

1.3 Aspects of Speech Situation

Leech (1983) writes the five aspects composing speech situation:

- a. Addresser or addressee
- b. The context of an utterance
- c. The goal(s) of an utterance
- d. The utterance as a form of verbal act
- e. The utterance as a product of a verbal act.

1.4 Style, Stylistics and Stylistic Devices

Stylistics deals with a whole range of human discourses: medical, religious, political, legal, social, group, interpersonal communication, and so on. Furthermore, the term ‘stylistics’ is occasionally used in a very broad sense to include all situationally distinctive language including the variation of regional, social and historical dialects, Crystal (2008). Meanwhile, Richards and Schmidt (2010) define stylistics as the study of language variation (style) which is dependent on the situation in which the language is used and also the effect the writer or speaker wishes to create on reader and hearer. The term is usually associated with the study of written language but sometimes it also can include investigation of spoken language. In short, stylistics is the study of style in a language.

This study applies Cook’s view in literary stylistics. Cook (2003) explains that literary stylistics is an important resource for the analysis of powerful and persuasive uses of language in general. He also adds that stylistic analyses tend to highlight three related aspects of literary language: its frequent deviation from the norms of more everyday language use; its patterning of linguistic units to create rhythms, rhymes, and parallel construction; and the ways in which the form of the words chosen seems to augment or intensify the meaning.

Generally, style is the way for self-expression by language, behavior, dressing and so on. Linguistically, language style is the way to use language. Style enables people to measure a speaker’s character and skill who uses the language. Richards and Schmidt (2010: 566) state that *style* is variation in a person’s speech or writing and it can also refer to a particular person’s use of speech or writing at all times or to a way of speaking or writing at a particular period of time. It usually

varies from casual to formal according to the type of situation, the people addressed, the location, the topic discussed, etc.

In the early chapter, it has been stated that this study will only focus on three features; phonological, semantic and structural features. The reason why it only focuses on these three features is because they are in line with the definition of stylistic devices proposed by Pearson in the early chapter ‘*figures of speech and tropes that are used to shape the style of a message*’, and it is obvious that these features contain the figures of speech:

1.4.1 Phonological Features

Fromkin and Rodman (1978) mention that Phonology is the study of sound patterns found in human language. Here are several phonological features that can be found in speech:

- a. Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of words, Luders (2013). For examples:
 1. “Today, we affirm a new commitment to live out our nation’s promise through civility, **c**ourage, **c**ompassion and **c**haracter” — George W. Bush, the first Inaugural Address.
 2. “I could see those staggering columns of the First World War, bending under soggy packs, on many a weary march from **d**ripping **d**usk to **d**rizzling **d**awn” — General Douglas MacArthur, Duty, Honor, Country
- b. Assonance is the repetition of the vowel sound. For instance:
 1. “His **n**ame and **f**ame are the birthright of every American citizens” — General Douglas

MacArthur, Duty, Honor,
Country

The sound /ei/ is repeated in the
neighboring words.

- c. Consonance is the repetition of the
consonant sound at the end of words.

Example of consonance:

“In his youth and strength, his
love and loyalty, he gave all that
morality can give”

Sound /θ/ is repeated.

- d. Onomatopoeia is the use of words
which imitate the sound they refer to
(Luders, 2013). Below example is
taken from MacArthur’s speech:
“In my dreams I hear again the crash
of guns, the rattle of musketry..”

1.4.2 Semantic Features

*“Everyone who knows a language
can understand what is said to him
or her and can produce strings of
words which convey meaning”*

(Fromkin and Rodman, 1978: 163)

Semantics, as defined by
Fromkin and Rodman, is the study of
the linguistic meaning of words,
phrases and sentences. Moreover,
Bilal *et al.* (2012) states that there
are two components in semantics:

- a. Simile is a comparison between
two things which are basically
quite different using *like* or *as*.

For example:

“.... And we will not be
satisfied until justice rolls down
like waters, and righteousness
like a mighty stream.”—
Martin Luther King ‘I have a
dream’

- b. Metaphor is the comparison
between two things without
using the words *like* or *as*.

For instance:

“I have a dream that one day
even the state of Mississippi, a
state sweltering with the heat of
oppression, will be transformed
into an oasis of freedom and

justice.” — Martin Luther
King, Jr., I Have a Dream.

A simile says that one thing is *like*
another, a metaphor says that one thing
is another.

1.4.3 Structural Features

According to Luders (2013), there are
six components of structural features:

1. Anaphora is the repetition of a
word or several words at the beginning
of successive lines, clauses or
sentences. For instance:

“But one hundred years later, the Negro
still is not free. *One hundred years
later*, the life of the Negro is still sadly
crippled by the manacles of segregation
and the chains of discrimination. *One
hundred years later*, the Negro is still
languishing in the corners of American
society and finds himself an exile in his
own land.” — Martin Luther King, Jr., I
Have a Dream.

2. Parallelism is the similarity of
syntactical structure in neighboring
phrases, clauses, sentences of
paragraphs. For example:

“Now is the time to make real the
promises of democracy. Now is the
time to rise from the dark and desolate
valley of segregation to the sunlit path
of racial justice. Now is the time to lift
our nation from the quicksands of racial
injustice to the solid rock of
brotherhood. Now is the time to make
justice a reality for all of God’s
children.” — Martin Luther King, Jr., I
Have a Dream.

3. Triple or Tricolon is a kind of
parallelism where words, phrases or
sentences are arranged in groups of
three. Study the following example:

“... and that *government of the people,
by the people, for the people*, shall not
perish from the earth.” — Abraham
Lincoln, the Gettysburg Address.

4. Climax is a figure of speech in which a series of words or expressions rises step by step, beginning with the least important and ending with the most important. The term may also be used to refer only to the last item in the series. For example:

“The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. *We cannot walk alone.*” — Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have a Dream.

5. Anticlimax is the sudden fall from an idea of importance or dignity to something unimportant, especially in the end of the series. Study the example below:

“With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.” — Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have a Dream.

6. Enumeration is the listing of words or phrases that can stress a certain aspect e.g. by giving a number of similar or synonymous adjectives to describe something. Consider the following example:

“They are indelible part of my life, my convictions, my view of the past, and my hopes for the future” — Jhon F. Kennedy, City Upon a Hill.

2. Research Method

This study is conducted by using descriptive qualitative method since it attempts to describe the linguistic phenomenon in Barack Obama’s 2012

victory speech. Sugiyono (2010) states that “*Qualitative approach is an approach which is based on postpositivism, used to observe the natural setting in which the researcher is the key instrument...*”,

In this study, the data were collected through documentation. A Document is simply a list of past events. Document can be writing, pictures or monumental masterpiece of someone.

The primary source of data in this thesis is taken

from Youtube(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddx8t6zGWxA>) on Obama’s election remarks at the 2012 presidential election and the transcript of his victory speech is taken from CNNBlog(<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2012/11/07/transcript-obamas-victory-speech/>). Meanwhile, the secondary sources of data taken from books, journals and article. The data gathered are in form of words not numbers.

3. Data Analysis

In analyzing data, the writer used descriptive method which describes the object observed by using words. This method allows the writer to come to the deeper analysis and interpretation to answers the problems occur. When analyzing data, the writer did some steps as follows:

1. Watching and observing the video downloaded from YouTube on Obama’s 2012 victory speech.
2. Reading the transcript carefully while comparing it to the video.
3. Sorting the appropriate utterances and extracting them.
4. Analyzing the data based on the theory.
5. Describing the result of data analysis in narration.

4. Discussion

4.1 Types of Stylistic Devices

Extract 1

“Tonight, in this election, you, the American people, reminded us that while *our* road has been hard, while our journey has been long, *we* have picked ourselves up, *we* have fought *our* way back, and *we* know in our hearts that for the United States of America the best is yet to come.... “

The language use in political speeches must be **inclusive** which means that the language reduces the perception that people are psychologically distant from each other or the language that reduces the psychological distance that separates speakers and audience members, Brydon and Scott (2008). The extract above shows the inclusive language by the use of personal pronoun “we” alongside its possessive and reflexive form “our”, “ourselves”.

Extract 2

“whether you pounded the pavement or picked up the phones, whether you held an Obama sign or a Romney sign, you made your voice heard and you made a difference.”

Phonology embodies the alliteration, consonance and assonance. These three features are embedded in the speech used to beautify the language used such as by including the words that have the same last sounds. In the transcript of the speech we found the extracts showing the words that have the same beginning and last sounds as in the extract above.

Extract 3

*“A country that lives up to its legacy **as** the global leader in technology and discovery and innovation, with all the good jobs and new businesses that follow.”*

In this extract Obama explicitly portrays America as the leader among countries in the world in term of

technology, discovery and innovation by the use of word ‘as’, and this is relevant to the definition of simile as the figure of speech that compares two things explicitly, Keraf (2008). Meanwhile, in the case of metaphor the speaker compares two things without using words *like* and *as*, Luders (2013) but he directly addresses the object as in:

Extract 4

I want to thank my friend and partner of the last four years, America’s happy warrior, the best vice president anybody could ever hope for, Joe Biden.

In this sentence, Obama directly addresses Joe Biden as America’s happy warrior without using the word ‘like’ or ‘as’ indicating the use of metaphor.

Extract 5

*To the furniture worker’s child in North Carolina who wants to become a doctor or a scientist [1], an engineer or an entrepreneur[2], a diplomat or even a president [3]- that’s the future we hope for [1]. That’s the vision we share [2]. That’s where we need to go [3] - **forward**.*

This extract shows the use of structural features of stylistic devices as it embodies the triple (numbered 1, 2, 3), anaphora is underlined and climax (the bold word).

Other features found in the speech are the use of personal pronouns. Richards and Schmidt (2010) define personal pronouns as the set of pronouns that represent the grammatical category of the person. In the victory speech, the occurrence of PP “We” is more often than any other pronouns indicating that he addressed all the citizens to become part of his victory, part of America’s historical moments and also he persuade all the audience to get involved actively in the establishment of America’s future that lies ahead. More importantly, he also uses body

gestures effectively, eye contact and his powerful bright voice to move the audiences.

4.2. Functions of Stylistic Devices

According to Cook (2003) Stylistic devices serve several functions, they are to create rhythm and rhyme, and parallel construction by patterning the linguistic units as well as to augment or intensify the meaning by the special word choice. He also adds that those features of language also can comfort, strengthen and inspire, just like literature. To create rhythm and rhyme, a person need to think about words that have same or similar sounds along with its good arrangement applied in the speech. This function is served by the phonological features (alliteration, consonance and assonance) as they deal with the sound pattern found in human language, Fromkin and Rodman (1978). This is relevant to what Cook (2003) highlights as the related aspects of literary language one of them is to create rhythms and rhyme.

The use of simile and metaphor as semantic features also serve functions that they can augment or strengthen the meaning by the special words choice. The words used in the victory speech are chosen brilliantly to attract the audience and interrupted him by much applause at any time Obama finishes his sentences or story.

Moreover, the creation of parallel construction is in line with the structural features which contain anaphora, parallelism and triple or tricolon, climax and anticlimax. Obama in his 2012 victory speech often uses parallel construction by repeating words, phrases, clauses to make his speech great and memorable.

To sum up, Barack Obama delivered a formal victory speech by using

inclusive language and through the use of stylistic devices which enable him to deliver his opinion successfully. All three features of stylistic devices contain functions that can make the speech more memorable and give it more style. Vivid descriptions are crucial part of an effective speech to make the points become rich and descriptive to the audience. Obama makes use these stylistic devices to embellish his victory speech along with producing the clear voice to deliver his messages and information vividly.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing data which are taken from the primary and secondary sources, the conclusions drawn are:

1. Obama's 2012 victory speech applies the three features analyzed out of five stylistic devices i.e. phonological, semantic and structural features.
2. The functions of those three are to create rhythms and rhymes, to augment or strengthen the meaning, and to create parallel construction and to channel audience's attention.
3. The language used in the speech is inclusive as it reduces the distance between the speaker and hearers.

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