

Research on the Masculinities Construction from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis - Taking Obama's Speeches as an Example

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Abstract: This essay explores the indexing of masculinities in political discourse, centering on Obama's 2004 keynote speech, *The Audacity of Hope*, marking the first African-American presidency in U.S. history. It commences by outlining the ideal American presidency and introduces the concepts of masculinities and gender, accompanied by a theoretical framework elucidating their construction in political discourse. Emphasizing social constructionism, the essay utilizes text analysis methods to analyse Obama's masculine presentation in four aspects: modality, pronoun usage, parallelism, and repetition. Obama employs high and medium-value modal verbs to convey assertiveness and competence, while maintaining politeness with low-value ones. His frequent use of the plural pronoun 'we' fosters intimacy with the audience and garners support, while singular 'I' underscores his individuality and strength. Additionally, rhetorical devices like repetition and parallelism enhance Obama's masculine image of strength, power, and passion. The study concludes that Obama endeavours to project an idealized presidential persona, with masculinity traits evident in his discourse, highlighting the performativity inherent in political masculinity.

Keywords: Obama's Keynote Speech; CDA; Masculinities Construction

1. Introduction

Shaffner's (1997) assertion underscores the pervasive influence of language in shaping political behavior, wherein both genders of politicians harness its power to propel their politically motivated objectives. Political dialogues, be it through interviews, debates, or speeches, are instrumental in advancing political agendas, with political speeches serving as a

pivotal form of discourse that significantly contributes to persuasive endeavors. Extensive research into political speeches has been conducted to gain deeper insights into the strategies employed to achieve these political aspirations[1-2].

Upon scrutinizing these political speeches, a meticulous selection of linguistic elements, both consciously and subconsciously employed, becomes evident. This strategic choice of language plays a pivotal role in facilitating the accomplishment of political objectives. For instance, politicians strive to forge a rapport with the public while simultaneously crafting a distinctive political persona. The language they adopt inadvertently reveals their personality traits and, in the case of male politicians, their masculinity, which serves as a defining characteristic in projecting themselves as exceptional and competitive figures within the political landscape[3-4].

By delving into the political speeches of male politicians, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how they manifest their identities and embody their masculinity. Consequently, this essay endeavors to explore the essence of masculinity, the means through which male politicians express it, and the subsequent impact it has on the realization of political goals. Utilizing Barack Obama's inaugural speech as a case study, this essay will primarily investigate the manifestation of his masculinity within the text, essentially examining the function of language in constructing and reinforcing masculine identities within political discourse[5-6].

1.2 Selection of Text

The text analyzed in this essay is derived from the seminal speech *The Audacity of Hope* delivered by former American President Barack Obama, the inaugural African-American to hold the highest office in the United States. Obama's

address, which resonated deeply with the audience on July 27th, 2004, marked a pivotal moment in his political trajectory, propelling him into the public eye and setting the stage for his eventual ascension to the presidency. As such, this speech holds immense significance, serving as the catalyst for Obama's national prominence and the genuine inception of his illustrious political career. Its impact underscores the importance of the discourse in shaping political perceptions and trajectories.

2. Theoretical Background

To effectively explore the intricate relationship between language (specifically, political discourse) and gender (with a focus on masculinity), it is imperative to commence with a robust theoretical framework. This chapter endeavors to elucidate the fundamental concepts pertaining to masculinity, providing a foundational understanding that will inform our subsequent analysis. By grounding our inquiry within a well-established theoretical landscape, we aim to gain deeper insights into how language is utilized to construct and perform masculine identities within the realm of political discourse[7-8].

2.1 A Performative View of Gender / Masculinity

Regarding terminology, it is crucial to distinguish between 'sex' and 'gender.' While 'sex' denotes a biological distinction, 'gender' refers to socially constructed categories that encompass a wide range of behaviors, roles, and expectations. It is widely acknowledged that most societies operate within a binary gender framework, comprising masculine and feminine ideals[9-10].

These societal constructs shape individuals' perceptions of how men and women ought to behave and communicate. Men are often expected to embody qualities such as bravery, assertiveness, independence, and aggression, while women are perceived to possess traits like tenderness, dependency, and softness. Consequently, the terms 'masculine' or 'manly' are socially constructed labels that describe the idealized ways of being a man[11-12].

It is important to note that masculinity is not a monolithic concept but varies across cultures, though it is commonly associated with notions of force, power, and strength. Moreover, masculinity and men are distinct entities that are

intimately interconnected (Kiesling, 2007). This implies that not all male attributes are inherently masculine, and vice versa, as masculinity encompasses a set of qualities and practices that are socially constructed and shaped[13].

The distinction between 'male' (corporeal, based on biology) and 'masculine' (a quality or set of practices) underscores the importance of recognizing that gender roles and expectations are not inherent but rather learned and reinforced by society. While people may naturally or stereotypically associate masculinity with men, it is crucial to acknowledge that this association is not absolute. For instance, women or girls can also exhibit masculine traits or engage in masculine practices, challenging traditional gender norms. Ultimately, individuals perform gender roles based on societal expectations and norms, rather than innate characteristics.

2.2 The Masculine Qualities for Ideal American President

Stacey (1987) conceptualizes masculinity as a social construct that assumes the form of a hegemonic or culturally idealized masculine character. This sociological concept of hegemonic masculinity serves as a lens to comprehend intricate social relationships and the dynamics of gender hierarchies within local, national, and international contexts. In any given society and at any given moment, there exists an idealized and hegemonic form of masculinity that serves as a normative benchmark.

In American culture, for instance, the hegemonic form of masculinity is often associated with being white, belonging to the middle or upper class, adhering to Christian beliefs, and being heterosexual. This idealized masculinity is further characterized by qualities such as competitiveness, aggression, and physical strength. These traits are deemed essential for leadership, particularly in the context of political discourse.

The image of the American president is inextricably linked with masculinity, and scholars have identified several key features that constitute the ideal presidential masculinity. Physical strength, courage, toughness, and the ability to project power are paramount among these features. As Nick Trujillo (1991) notes, the desire to fight and display physical prowess is a defining characteristic of maleness and is often used by successful leaders to project an image of strength and dominance.

Political discourse plays a pivotal role in constructing and reinforcing masculinities. Presidential candidates, in particular, make concerted efforts to embody and communicate masculine qualities through their linguistic choices. This strategic use of language serves to reinforce the hegemonic masculinity that is deemed essential for political leadership and to appeal to the societal expectations surrounding masculine ideals.

3. Method

In this paper, we will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine Barack Obama's speeches, focusing specifically on the linguistic devices he employs to convey his masculinities and how these contribute to his political identity. CDA is a valuable tool for understanding how language is used to serve ideological and power dynamics within political discourse. By examining Obama's use of pronouns, modality, repetition, and parallelism, we can gain insights into how he constructs and projects his masculinities to resonate with his audience and win their support.

Drawing inspiration from Fairclough's (2000) analysis of Tony Blair's political identity, which illuminated how Blair leveraged language to establish his own masculinities as a tough and wartime leader, we will adopt similar methods to explore Obama's linguistic strategies. Fairclough's (1992) text analysis features, including topic control, modality, pronoun use, wording, and metaphor, will serve as our analytical framework. These linguistic elements, both lexical and grammatical, work in concert to promote and index masculinities within political discourse.

Firstly, we will delve into Obama's use of pronouns, examining how he positions himself and his audience in relation to each other. Pronouns can reveal power dynamics and interpersonal relationships, allowing us to understand how Obama constructs himself as a leader and how he addresses his audience. Next, we will analyze Obama's use of modality, which refers to the degree of certainty or obligation expressed in language. Modal verbs and adverbs can indicate a speaker's confidence, commitment, or authority, and thus play a crucial role in shaping a leader's image. Obama's strategic use of modality can reveal how he positions himself as a decisive and authoritative figure. Repetition and parallelism are also key linguistic devices

that Obama employs to emphasize his points and create rhetorical effects. By repeating key phrases or structuring sentences in parallel, Obama can amplify his message and reinforce his masculinities as a leader who is resolute and in control. Finally, we will examine Obama's use of metaphor, which can be particularly revealing in terms of how he constructs his masculinities. Metaphors allow speakers to compare seemingly unrelated concepts, thereby creating new meanings and associations. Obama's choice of metaphors can provide insights into how he sees himself and how he wants his audience to perceive him.

Through this detailed analysis of Obama's linguistic choices, we will gain a deeper understanding of how masculinities are indexed in political discourse and how language is used to serve ideological and power dynamics.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Modality

Halliday's (1994) understanding of modality as the speaker's stance or attitude towards the probabilities of an event provides a valuable lens through which to analyze Obama's use of modal verbs in his speeches. By examining the distribution of high-, median-, and low-value modal verbs, we can gain insights into how Obama constructs his image and communicates with his audience.

As the statistics from Table 1 indicate, Obama's use of modal verbs is predominantly characterized by median-value modals, which account for the highest frequency (0.8%). This suggests that Obama adopts a moderate and balanced approach in expressing his stance towards events, avoiding both the assertiveness and aggressiveness of high-value modals and the uncertainty or modesty of low-value modals. This strategy is likely to have been deliberate, given that Obama was not yet a well-known figure or elected president at the time of the speech. By focusing on median-value modals, he was able to build a close relationship with the public while maintaining a sense of authority and credibility.

The limited use of high-value modals (0.3%) is consistent with Obama's need to present himself as a modest and less aggressive figure. High-value modals, such as "must," "need," and "has to," can convey a sense of urgency, obligation, or compulsion that may have been

perceived as overly assertive or aggressive for a candidate seeking to build rapport with the public.

On the other hand, the use of low-value modals, primarily the modal verb "can," does not weaken Obama's masculinities but rather emphasizes the audience's ability to create a better future under his leadership. The frequent occurrence of "can" in a single paragraph serves to intensify the speaker's mood and reinforce his manhood, demonstrating his confidence in the potential of the American people to achieve great things together.

Overall, Obama's strategic use of modal verbs in his speeches reflects his ability to balance assertiveness with humility, authority with empathy, and confidence with inclusivity. This linguistic approach contributed to his ability to connect with the public and present himself as a leader who was both capable and approachable.

Table 1. Modal Verbs

Sample Speech	Total Numbers	High Modality		Median Modality		Low Modality	
	2306	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
		7	0.3	19	0.8	12	0.5

4.2 Pronoun

In the realm of political discourse, language functions as a potent instrument for conveying authority and expertise. Within the male-dominated political landscape, politicians of both genders harness language to demonstrate their qualifications and competencies. Apart from relying on modal verbs, the selection of pronouns constitutes an efficacious means of achieving political objectives. Beard's (2000) assertion underscores the fact that pronoun usage can provide valuable insights into the extent of responsibility a speaker intends to assume for a particular viewpoint. Additionally, pronouns possess the capability to convey the speaker's intended message and facilitate the establishment of a rapport with the audience. Specifically, the first-person singular pronoun 'I' unambiguously identifies the individual accountable for an action or idea. Conversely, the first-person plural pronoun 'we' can serve to obscure the specific allocation of responsibility. Charteris-Black (2005) contends that British Prime Minister Winston Churchill frequently employed the 'we' pronoun when discussing Britain's military policies, presenting them as though they were his personal convictions, thereby projecting an image of strength and

determination.

In the speech under analysis, Obama predominantly utilized the first-person plural pronoun 'we', a total of 38 times. This pronoun choice reflects Obama's strategic use of language to convey interpersonal meaning. On the one hand, the repetitive use of 'we' fosters a sense of closeness and shared experience between the speaker and the audience, thereby shortening the psychological distance. On the other hand, by employing 'we', Obama seeks to garner public support, ultimately advancing his political agenda and facilitating the achievement of his objectives. For instance:

I believe that we can give our middle class relief and provide working families with a road to opportunity. I believe we can provide jobs to the jobless, homes to the homeless, and reclaim young people in cities across America from violence and despair. I believe that we have a righteous wind at our backs and that as we stand on the crossroads of history, we can make the right choices, and meet the challenges that face us.

(from The Audacity of Hope)

From the excerpt of this speech, we can identify the high-frequency usage of the personal pronoun 'we' in one paragraph. Moreover, all of the five pronouns 'we' are followed by the first personal pronoun in singular form 'I'. The first personal pronoun in singular form 'I' referring to the speaker himself / herself, endows the addresser with the capacity of expressing his / her own views and emphasizing the individuality. Obama emphasizes his own belief that he is confident for the future of the United States, which makes the listener have a more positive attitude towards the future and the speaker as well.

In summary, by using the personal pronouns 'we' and 'I', Obama's masculine qualities are reinforced, in that he constructs a confident and responsible male image. Not only does he shows his polite and friendly attitude, but also emphasizes that he can lead American people to a bright future. Such a boldness of vision he has that more people will believe that he will be the ideal president.

4.3 Parallelism

Parallelism is the most prevalent stylistic device employed in Obama's speeches. According to Fairclough (2003), parallelism, as a rhetorical tool, significantly enhances the aesthetic appeal

of the speaker's identity. In other words, by employing parallelism, the speaker captivates the audience's attention to the speech's structure (Leech and Short, 1981), fostering a sense of 'overall cohesion' that keeps the discourse balanced and intentional throughout (McGuigan and Moliken, 2011). Obama's frequent use of parallelism imbues his speeches with vitality and power, not only showcasing his masculine strength but also instilling courage and confidence in his audience.

Table 2. Parallelism

Code	Parallelism Identification
P1	A belief in things not seen. A belief that there are better days ahead.
P2	Hope -- Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope!
P3	It's the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a mill-worker's son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too.
P4	Tonight, if you feel the same energy that I do, if you feel the same urgency that I do, if you feel the same passion that I do, if you feel the same hopefulness that I do -- if we do what we must do, then I have no doubt that all across the country,
P5	That is the true genius of America, a faith -- a faith in simple dreams, an insistence on small miracles; that we can tuck in our children at night and know that they are fed and clothed and safe from harm; that can say what we think, write what we think, without hearing a sudden knock on the door; that we can have an idea and start our own business without paying a bribe; that we can participate in the political process without fear of retribution, and that our votes will be counted

From the aforementioned examples, it becomes evident that parallelism imparts a formidable strength to Obama's speeches, reminiscent of a powerful individual unleashing their full might, vitality, fervor, and emotion. By strategically deploying parallelism, the entire discourse culminates in a thrilling climax, captivating the audience with a surge of energy and emotion

that resonates deeply. This rhetorical technique not only showcases the speaker's mastery of language but also serves to ignite the passions and inspire the hearts of those who listen.

4.4 Repetition

It can be observed that the four examples are evenly distributed in the text. The frequent and regular usage of Repetition intensifies Obama's mood, highlighting his masculine traits. R1, R2, R3 and R4 are the four typical repetition occurring in Obama's speech.

Table 3. Repetition

Code	Repetition Identification
R1	In the end -- In the end -- In the end.
R2	Now -- Now let me be clear. Let me be clear.
R3	It is that fundamental belief -- It is that fundamental belief.
R4	The pundits, the pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into red states and blue states; red states for Republicans, blue states for Democrats.

4.5 Discussion

(1) Content: Obama starts his speech with the story of his family. He narrates the early experiences of his father and grandfather, depicting his father as an independent and aspiring image. Even though his family is not better-off, his father still obtained the scholarship and bravely pursued his American dream. Furthermore, Obama tells the audience the improbable love and abiding faith between his father and mother. The depiction about his family aims at reminding the listener of the qualities his family possess so that he can pave the way for further creating his masculine image: reliable, tough, aspiring, and hard-working.

(2) Structure: we can see that both long and simple sentences are used in his speech. Short and simple sentences can make the speech full of power and force. For instance:

1) They know we can do better. And they want that choice. 2) Now let me be clear. Let me be clear. 3) Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope! 4) Now, don't get me wrong (Obama, 2004).

In summary, both the structure and the content can foster the construction of Obama's masculine image. This construction can be considered as a habitual, self-performing behaviour as people need to do his /her

masculinity/ femininity according to what the society regulates. In political arena, an idealized president should possess the masculine traits.

5. Conclusion

This essay has delved into the intricate ways in which masculinities are embedded and expressed within political discourse, particularly focusing on Barack Obama's seminal speech delivered on July 27th, 2004. Through a meticulous analysis of this speech, it becomes evident that Obama strives to craft an idealized, masculine presidential persona. The speech is replete with traits that embody masculinity, including energy, responsibility, resilience, ambition, and assertiveness, all of which are seamlessly integrated into the political narrative. Furthermore, it underscores the performative nature of Obama's construction of masculinity, emphasizing that politics inherently involves the negotiation and projection of gendered identities. In conclusion, this essay contributes to a deeper understanding of how masculinities are constructed, performed, and received in the realm of political discourse.

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