

THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG  
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**A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RHETORICAL  
DEVICES AND LINGUISTIC POLITENESS IN  
POLITICAL SPEECHES OF THE UNITED STATES  
PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA**

**Major: ENGLISHLINGUISTICS**

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into five parts. The first part is rationale of the study. The second part is aims and objectives of the study which will explain the goals of the research. The third is scope of the study. In the fourth part, the writer mentions the research questions which will be answered in this research. The fifth part is definition of terms. In next part, significance of the study will give detail on the benefits of this research. The last part is organization of the study.

#### 1.1. RATIONALE

Language is a system of sound sign that agreed and used by certain member of society to cooperate, communicate and to identify among themselves. In case of communication, besides using rhetoric devices and speakers would choose the strategies to have polite conversation. The thesis is to analyze rhetorical devices, linguistic politeness and their effects in some of his speeches to provide reference for the people who want to make a brilliant speech. How to find out the most effective method for teachers of English to help their students master stylistic devices is still a big concern at the moment. Teachers not only inspire their students with the help of interesting ideas in English political speeches but also bring the students clear examples of how good to use stylistic devices. So students of English would find it more interesting and effective.

And this is also the main reason why the thesis entitled “*A Discourse Analysis of Rhetorical Devices and Linguistic Politeness in Political Speeches of the United States President Barack Obama.*” to be conducted.

## **1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1. Aims**

This study aims at analyzing the rhetorical devices and linguistic politeness in political speeches of Barack Obama's English speeches in order to help Vietnamese learners of English understand and grasp the distinctive characteristics of this kind of language.

### **1.2.2. Objectives**

The objectives of the study are to:

- Investigate and find out some stylistic features of Barack's Obama speeches in terms of polysyndeton, hyperbole, epistrophe, diacope, and anaphora and linguistic politeness.
- Suggest some implications for teachers and learners of English, especially for who present speeches in public effectively.

## **1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This thesis focuses on some commonly used stylistic devices namely rhetoric of polysyndeton, hyperbole, epistrophe, diacope, and anaphora and linguistic politeness through two speeches of Obama which were randomly chosen on the Internet.

## **1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To fulfill the objectives mentioned above, the study tries to seek the information for the following questions:

What are some of rhetorical devices and linguistic politeness of Barack Obama's English speeches?

## **1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

One of the most important roles of public speaking is to communicate with people, influence them and persuade them to accept the speaker's way of thinking. It is a qualitative and quantitative research, the primary data is a verbal protocol, in all the aspects of meaning production that will be analyzed with the help of

such approaches as content analysis, critical theory and discourse analysis.

## **1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This study consists of 5 main chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1: The introduction of the study, which includes the rationale, aims and objectives, the research questions, definition of terms, the scope of the study and organization of the study.

- Chapter 2: The literature review, presents the previous study related to the thesis, the theoretical background of the study which focuses on linguistic features of Barack Obama's political speeches.

- Chapter 3: Research methods and procedures- presents the research methods, the procedure of implement the study.

- Chapter 4: Findings and discussion - consist of the collection, analysis and stylistic devices and linguistic politeness of Barack Obama's political speeches.

- Chapter 5: Conclusion, Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions for further study.

**Chapter Two**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL**  
**BACKGROUND**

**2. 1. REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS STUDIES**

Li Xiao (2009) made stylistic analysis on Obama's victory speech. Sabine Kowal (2010), Edward J. Sabin (2010), John F. Lamia (2010) and Margaret Dannevik (2010) investigate the start-up rhetoric employed by U.S. President Barack Obama in his speeches. Wang Dechun (2001), a Chinese rhetoric scholars also put forward language rhetoric in his *Modern Rhetoric*. Wang Dechun concluded four main categories of language rhetoric in his works, which are phonology, lexicology, syntax and text.

Fengjie, L. & Ren, J. & Zhang, Y. (2016) investigated some commonly used rhetorical devices in Obama's speeches to explore the functions of applying these rhetorical devices. Rozina and Karapetjana (2009) investigated allusion, metonymy, and metaphor.

Brown and Yule (1983) state that spoken and written discourse serve various functions. Pham Thi Minh Phuong (2017) investigated some commonly used rhetorical devices in Hillary's speeches.

In a discourse analysis of political speeches, Phạm Khắc Thu (2010) carried out an investigation into a wide range of modal expressions. Trần Thị Như Quỳnh (2013) studied the lexical devices expressing modality meaning in lectures in English.

## **2. 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.2.1. Theory of Discourse Analysis**

#### ***2.2.1.1. Concepts of Discourse***

The term of discourse is basically understood as human language in use for communication. “Discourse” is problematic since it is used in different kinds of study and is further constantly redefined.

#### ***2.2.1.2. Concepts of Discourse Analysis***

Discourse analysis is sometimes defined as the analysis of language beyond the sentence. Brown and Yule (1983) stated that “*Discourse analysis is the study of language use with the reference to the social and psychological factors that influence communication*”.

According to Richard (1985), discourse was defined as “*a general term for examples of language use*”. Brown and Yule (1983) indicates that the term “*discourse analysis*” has come to be used with a wide range of meanings covering a wide range of activities at the intersection of many disciplines from sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, philosophical linguistics and computational linguistics. They also state that “*Discourse analysis*” is the analysis of language in use (1983, p.1). Stobbs (2012) investigated the methods and lexis used by Barack Obama to foster a sense of inclusion of the American public in his inaugural speech. According to Tenorio (2011), the first obstacle encountered by new researchers in the field is the various definitions of the concept of discourse. In Brown & Yule (1983), discourse is “Language in Use.” Widdowson (1984, p. 4) claims that “Discourse is a communicative process by means of interaction. And the definition of discourse analysis is displayed in Stubbs’ textbook (p.1) as “*It follows that discourse*

*analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.”*

### **2.2.2. Definition of Rhetoric**

The word "rhetoric" which means public speaking develops from the ancient Greek word "rhetoric" (Zheng Lingling, 2014). (Huang Ren, 1999). Liu Yameng (2004) defined rhetoric as "the way of influencing ideas, judgments and actions through symbolic approaches. It is as interesting to look at the interaction of various strategies as (Charteris-Black 2005, p.11). Jones and Wareing (1999) argue that the ability to convey the message that speaker and listener want the same thing plays a decisive role in the process of establishing an ideology (Jones &Wareing 1999, p. 34). According to Charteris-Black (2005).

The most-used rhetorical devices in Barack Obama's announcement speech are polysyndeton, diacope, epistrophe, anaphora, and metaphor, which are often combined together.

This thesis can be roughly divided into two parts. The first part concentrates on rhetorical devices. The second one deals with the linguistic politeness.

### **2.2.3. Rhetorical devices**

Rhetorical device classification There are many kinds of English rhetoric devices, for example, hyperbole, metaphor, repetition, pun, rhetorical question and etc...

### **2.2.4. Rhetorical device classification**

According to Harris, there are more than 60 rhetorical devices. In this thesis, some rhetorical devices analyzed polysyndeton, hyperbole, diacope, epistrophe and anaphora could be summarized in Table 2.1.

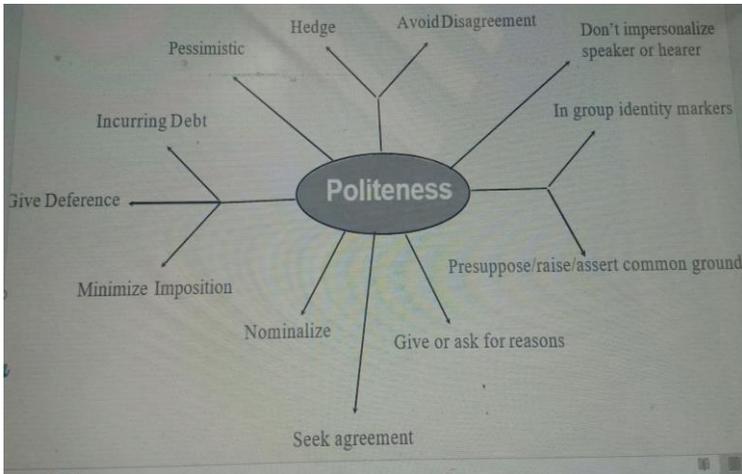
Table 2.1. Some rhetorical devices in Harris' theory

No	Device	Description
1	Polysyndeton	The use of a conjunction between each word, phrase, or clause, and is thus structurally the opposite of asyndeton.
2	Hyperbole	The counterpart of understatement, deliberately exaggerates conditions for emphasis or effect.
3	Diacope	The repetition of a word or phrase after an intervening word or phrase as a method of emphasis
4	Epistrophe	The repetition of the same word or words comes at the end of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences
5	Anaphora	The repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences, commonly in conjunction with climax and with parallelism.

### 2.2.5. Politeness

The term '**politeness**' has been approached from a variety of perspectives. Politeness is basic to the production of social order, and a precondition of human cooperation, so that any theory which provides an understanding of this phenomenon at the same time goes to the foundations of human social life. Politeness is understood as polite behaviour such as greeting others or holding the door open for someone.

Diagram: Brown and Levinson Strategies, 1987



The following examples to show some of politeness Strategies by Brown and Levinson 1987.

#### **2.2.5.1. Politeness strategies**

Brown and Levinson (1987) then focus especially on acts threatening the addressee providing us with a taxonomy of strategies that the writer can follow. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the perspective of “face” is central of their theory. A set of five strategies to minimize risk of losing face is suggested by these two authors.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p.61) also connect politeness with *face* as “something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction”. The two types of face presented in the theory are: “negative face” - that is the interactor’s desire to protect the freedom to act and being unimpeded by others; and “positive face”.

Politeness strategies of study, Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory is applied in this thesis, as it is the most influential and comprehensive model of politeness. Special attention is given to

the choice between positive and negative strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that there are “super-strategies” of politeness including positive politeness, negative politeness and strategies. Such actions, as Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish are *positive politeness* and *negative politeness* redressing the hearer’s *positive face* and *negative face*, respectively.

#### **2.2.5.2. Positive Politeness**

Positive politeness as Brown and Levinson (1987, p.70) state:

*[...] is oriented towards the positive face of the hearer, the positive self-image that he claims for himself. Positive politeness is approach-based; it “anoints” the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, the speaker wants the hearer’s wants. (1987, p.70)*

Positive politeness can be interpreted as the strategies in which the speaker takes the hearer’s wants into account, gets closer to hearers, and creates solidarity with hearers.

*[...] Positive face is the positive consistent self-image or personality claimed by interactions (in other words, the desire to be approved of in certain respects). Negative face is the ‘basic claim to territorial personal preserves and rights to non-distraction’ (in other words, the desire to be unimpeded by others).*

#### **2.2.5.3. Negative Politeness**

Negative politeness involves respecting the privacy of other people and leaving a “back door” open; that is, showing some reservation. The use of distance-creating linguistic devices (e.g. passive forms), irony, or general vagueness is characteristic for this kind of linguistic politeness.

Negative politeness as claimed by Brown and Levinson's  
(1987, p. 70)

*[...]Negative politeness, thus, is essentially avoidance-based, and realizations of negative politeness strategies consist in assurances that the speaker recognizes and respects the addressee's negative-face wants and will not (or will only minimally) interfere with the addressee's freedom of action.*

#### **2.2.5.4. Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies**

Politeness is one of the central features of human communication. It is a human phenomenon, yet expressed differently in different cultures linguistically a connection to other people. Positive politeness as Brown and Levinson (1987, p.70) state:

*[...] is oriented towards the positive face of the hearer, the positive self-image that he claims for himself. Positive politeness is approach-based; it "anoints" the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, the speaker wants the hearer's wants. (1987, p.70)*

Positive politeness can be interpreted as the strategies in which the speaker takes the hearer's wants into account, gets closer to hearers, and creates solidarity with hearers.

### **2.3. SUMMARY**

This part presents an overview of the rhetorical devices and linguistic politeness. According to Harris (2013, p.3), rhetorical devices are aids for writing or speaking. And linguistic politeness based on Brown and Levinson's theory. In case of communication, speakers will choose the strategies to have polite conversation. People use politeness strategies in order to get their conversation run well.

## **Chapter Three**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This chapter describes the methodology employed in the study. It also presents the sources from which data were collected, the data collection procedure, data analysis process. Besides, the reliability and validity of the research are also discussed in this chapter.

#### **3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study makes use of both qualitative and quantitative research design employing descriptive and analytical method.

Firstly, the quantitative approach is used to find out the occurrence and frequency of using rhetorical devices and linguistic politeness in Barack Obama's speeches. These quantitative data serve the purpose for answering the question of how frequently the resources are used. Secondly, this study is qualitative as it explores linguistic information such as rhetorical devices and linguistic politeness in terms of pragmatics categories from the qualitative data.

#### **3.2. DATA COLLECTION**

##### **3.2.1. Sampling of the Study**

To address the sampling bias, the speeches were carefully selected from a large number of Obama's speeches on Whitehouse website. All sources of data I used in this study were downloaded from websites on the Internet. Actually, Obama's speeches were downloaded without any fee. I decided to select speeches from the following websites of Whitehouse.

##### **3.2.2. Data analysis**

The expressions of rhetorical devices were analyzed in terms of these following aspects: polysyndeton, hyperbole, epistrophe,

diacope, and anaphora as well as positive and negative politeness strategies in Obama's speeches – the two victories of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. This research focus on two speeches of the President Barack Obama, those are Speech 1: Barack Obama spoke at a rally in Chicago, Illinois, after winning the presidency, on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and Speech 2: Barack Obama's Victory Speech in Chicago after decisively winning a second term, on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The reason why for choosing two speeches is these speeches marked a milestone in the life of a politician.

### **3.3. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

Reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative. They are important to the research result. The researcher should strive to present the methods clearly by precisely identifying and thoroughly describing her strategies used to collect data, which could be gained thanks to tally sheets which was designed strictly basing on the comprehensive literature review relating the rhetorical devices theory.

### **3.4. SUMMARY**

This chapter dealt with the methods and procedures employed in the study. To be precise, the research methodologies, data collection and analysis for implementing the thesis were discussed in details with reference to the aims and objectives of the study and in the light of the theoretical background which has been discussed in the previous chapter. Accordingly, this chapter provided the framework for generating the result in the subsequent chapter.

## Chapter Four

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is devoted to present the finding and the discussion of the study. This part talks about the analysis of Rhetorical Devices and Politeness Strategies in Barrack Obama Speeches.

#### 4.1. RHETORICAL DEVICES IN SPEECHES BY BARACK OBAMA

All these types of repetition lay emphasis on a particular idea. Analysis of frequently used rhetorical devices in Obama's speeches. Two speeches consist of 3999 words. In order to arrive at a more quantitative based result of this analysis.

*Table 4.1. Rhetorical devices used in President Obama's speeches.*

No	Types of rhetorical devices	Times of Repeat	Percent (%)
1	Polysyndeton	161	4,03 (%)
2	Hyperbole	03	0,075 (%)
3	Diacope	11	0,30 (%)
4	Epistrophe	2	0,05 (%)
5	Anaphora	18	0,45 (%)

##### 4.1.1. Polysyndeton

Polysyndeton is the use of a conjunction between each word, phrase, or clause; structurally the opposite of asyndeton. The rhetorical effect of polysyndeton is one of multiplicity, energetic enumeration, and building up. The effect of using polysyndeton here supported in both SP1 and SP2 by Obama .

Table 4.2. Polysyndeton in two speeches of Barack Obama:

*Extract 1: “And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change: Yes we can.”*

#### **4.1.2. Hyperbole**

Hyperbole, derived from a Greek word meaning “over-casting,” is a figure of speech that involves an exaggeration of ideas for the sake of emphasis. It is a device that we employ in our day-to-day speech. For instance, when you meet a friend after a long time, you say, “It’s been ages since I last saw you.” You may not have met him for three or four hours, or a day, but the use of the word “ages” exaggerates this statement to add emphasis to your wait. Therefore, a hyperbole is an unreal exaggeration to emphasize the real situation

#### **4.1.3. Epistrophe**

Epistrophe (also called antistrophe) forms the counterpart to anaphora, because the repetition of the same word or words comes at the end of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences:

*Extract 3: And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America -- the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes we can. [SP 1\_67]*

#### **4.1.4. Diacope**

Diacope is an emphasis by repetition rhetorical devices. And it is a method of emphasis by means of repeating a word or phrase with an intervening word or phrase in between (Harris, p.44). It repeats a preceding word or words. As diacope is a repetition of one or more words after the interval of one or more words. It is used as a method

for emphasis.

#### **4.1.5. Anaphora**

The term “anaphora” literally means —carrying back. It refers to the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences, commonly in conjunction with climax and with parallelism. This rhetorical device creates especially strong emphasis and sense of continuity between rhetorical points.

## **4.2. LINGUISTIC POLITENESS IN SPEECHES BY BARACK OBAMA**

### **4.2.1 Positive Politeness Strategies in Obama’s Speeches**

Positive politeness strategies seek to minimize the threat to the hearer’s positive face and they are used to make the hearer feel good about himself, his interests or possessions.

#### ***4.2.1.1. Expressing Solidarity With Hearers***

Positive politeness has been characterized as the politeness of solidarity showing the speaker’s agreement, co-operation and attendance to hearers.

#### ***4.2.1.2. Expressing Strong Commitment***

Observations of instances of *I will* and *We will* in this research reveal that they are frequently used to show the speaker’s strong commitment to the proposition.

#### ***4.2.1.3. Address hearers’ Positive Face***

As observed in the research corpora, hedges serve both positive and negative politeness strategies. As a positive politeness strategy, to indicate that the speaker knows what hearers want and is willing to take their wants into account.

This strategy also preserves the speaker’s positive face in that although what is uttered is known to hearers, the utterance is

central to the speaker's attention to hearers rather than his repetition of the information.

#### **4.2.2. Negative Politeness Strategies in Political Speeches**

Negative politeness strategies are normally used to reflect the desire for independence in action and freedom from imposition. To express these strategies in speech delivery, the speaker normally emphasized on the negative force presented in the utterance in order not to influence hearers' interests

##### ***4.2.2.1. Attenuating the Force of an Assertion***

As negative politeness strategies are mainly used when the speakers have to address sensitive issues in their speech delivery. They are combined with the proposition to mitigate the imposition on hearers.

##### ***4.2.2.2. Expressing Humility***

Observations of samples of political speeches reveal that another negative politeness strategy identified is in the use of expressing the speaker's humility.

*Table: 4.6. The frequencies of patterns "let us" and "let's"*

### **4.3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RHETORICAL DEVICE AND LINGUISTIC POLITENESS**

The use of rhetorical device markers expressing politeness strategies in Barack Obama's political speeches. Markers of positive and negative politeness strategies used in his speeches were collected for an analysis. Linguistic markers expressing positive politeness strategies occurred in one of the famous slogans of Barack Obama is "**Yes we can**", we can see in SP1, "**Yes we can**" repeated up to **six times**.



## **Chapter Five**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter is the final part providing the conclusions of the study based on the main findings of the study, then suggesting implications in teaching and learning English, especially practicing oratorical skills.

#### **5.1. CONCLUSION**

After analyzing Obama's political speeches from the theoretical basis of pragmatics and language rhetoric with politeness strategies. From that you can improve your ability to process and convey information while also strengthening your persuasive skills.

#### **5.2. IMPLICATIONS**

To some extent, this thesis is expected to be a valuable contribution to the teaching and learning of English stylistics in general and of stylistic devices in political language in particular.

##### **5.2.1. For Teaching of English**

This study would give a suggestion on teaching stylistic devices and linguistic politeness. How to find out the most effective method for teachers of English to help their students master stylistic devices with politeness strategies are still a big concern at the moment.

##### **5.2.2. For Learning of English**

From the findings of this paper, it is hoped that students would grasp some necessary information which helps them with the study of stylistic devices and linguistic politeness.

#### **5.3. LIMITATION**

Like any other research, this study is not without limitations.

Firstly, no matter how much effort was put into this research, it seems difficult to identify all types of lexical choices or stylistic devices used in confessions. Secondly, the chosen confession pages are just limited; other confessions pages may show different language usage. Finally, because of the limited time, knowledge and references, the study can only show some linguistic features as well as a little linguistic politeness of Obama's speeches.

#### **5.4. SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

As we found out in the graduation paper, metaphor is the most frequently used stylistic device in English newspaper headlines, with the topic "An investigation into the use stylistic devices and politeness in political speeches by the US presidents" in which metaphor will be more thoroughly analyzed and categorized.