Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)
Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2023, 240-258

Rhetoric and Ideology at Work in Political Discourse: Persuasion Strategies of the US. Democrat Party

Parvaneh Shayestefar*
PhD, English Language Teaching Department, Farhangian Teacher Education University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

This study posits that an important key component of political discourse derives from its heavy reliance on persuasion strategies to support the ideological bases. Throughout the argument, the study positions an emphasis on the US. Democratic Party's (DP) success in receiving the public consent and acceptance. Their victory is more likely the result of the power of their democratic ideologies that are constructed through the strategic use of rhetorical devices and linguistic structures. In an attempt to investigate which particular discursive strategies and rhetorical devices are instrumental in constructing a particular type of ideology, we adopted a CDA approach and analyzed Barak Obama's public speeches to the US nation. The analytic categories found in his speech are: rhythmic paralleled structures and repetition; nominalization; and metaphorical framing. Moreover, in our macro-analysis of Obama's discourse, special attention is paid to the effective role of devices such as topoi, or fallacies in his political argumentations and positive representation of DP.

Key words: Persuasion Strategy; Political Discourse; Rhetoric; Strategic Use of Language

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

1. Introduction

The electoral success of Democrat Party (DP) in the US. presidential election was much influential throughout the State. The strengthening of DP electorate outside its traditional bases of influence is

*Corresponding author: English Language Teaching Department, Farhangian Teacher Education University, Tehran, Iran. Email: parishayeste@cfu.ac.ir

indicative of ideological processes and practices through which the official voice of 'change', 'hope', and 'peace' is repeatedly represented and imagined. DP political actors' and institutions' efforts to lead the US public to a particular view of political reality and to act consistently with this bring more into the light a close association between the political discourse and crafting of persuasive linguistic techniques. At a general level, through establishing socio-cognitive frames, dominant political discourse can project the ideological root and the required persuasion strategy. Such a persuasive gravity draws on synthesis of ideologies and rhetoric to establish the notion of the future policies "as the site through which political change can be imagined, and ultimately, realized" (Dunmire, 2005, p. 482).

Given the ideological establishment, the persuasive intent with respect to the political action represents a contested rhetoric domain through which DP attempted to project a different representation of future 'changes' and to realize the future 'challenges' (e.g., financial crisis, education, war in Afghanistan and Iraq, health insurance, etc.,). With reference to this, Barak Obama's differences in political policies can be boiled down not only to manage public perceptions of political issues, but to strive to be 'on-message' in both the content and the style of his language, compared to the political discourse and campaign speeches of Republican Party (RP). By virtue of his rhetoric, declaring his ability to use persuasive speech, the '*New Spirit of Responsibility' 'Services', and 'Sacrifice'* ideological power contributed significantly to his political success.

Evidently, it is hard to conceive of America's political discourse being free from any ideological imposition. In this sense, what emerged as the fundamental and main persuasion strategy of 'change', 'peace', and 'hope' ideological bases is ultimately a political construct that "undoubtedly warrants a detailed and critical examination all of its own" (Woods, 2006, p. 50). Concerning this critical approach, the aim here is to present an analytical perspective of political discourse with particular reference to Obama's public speeches to his nation, which will show his official argumentative voice of 'change', 'peace', 'hope', as well as 'security', 'safety', 'services', 'justice' and 'equal rights". Taken into account such loci of democracy, the study, more specifically, will delve into both micro-, and macro-analysis of texts to investigate which discursive strategies and rhetorical devices are preferred by Barak Hossein Obama to crystallize his presidential discourses. For such a purpose, factual evidence from different occasions, proposals, and premises concerning his future policies and actions were gathered and closely scrutinized (of years 2007, 2008, and 2009).

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

1.1.'A Call for Change': The first black in White House

The presidential election of 2008 notes that a considerable percentage of the US public approved the position of Obama on important political issues. His stream of thought seems to characterize him perhaps as an inspirational example of 'heroic politics" (Ferrari, 2007) at time with weighty decisions and dramatic influence. Of note, his acceptance by public opinion seems to rely largely on his strategic use of emotions words, expressions, and statements such as "lets' justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a might stream", "the most sweeping ethic reforms", "hope around the globe", "power in hope", "loyalty", "patriotism" "liberty", "new birth of freedom", etc., that prevail in his speech to justify and promote his political actions. Contrary to this, McCain's proclaimed policies particularly his insistence on 'war' in Iraq as the prime enemy had almost implications for 'fear', and 'threat'. 'Preventive war" in Iraq was interpreted by Obama as a sole "tragic mistake", while notably, as an international terrorist, Osama Bin Laden, is placed in the "gallery of the anti-western horror's" (Ferrari, 2007, p. 605) by him. More clearly, in contrast to RP's ideology, Obama's electoral and presidential speeches provoke 'pride', 'power', 'patriotism', 'safety', 'security', 'success', 'love', 'peace' and 'justice' rather than sense of 'fear", extreme 'insecurity', and 'horror' to the U.S. nation. It was in the light of his promised subsequent and future political decisions, realized by his socially-constructed emotion-provoking speech, that Obama's political discourse enjoyed the consent of his campaign audience.

As to the importance of such political persuasions, phrasing of language to influence and color public's cognition and perceptions of the political events and actions, represent "an eventual or potential reality that functions in the present as a rationale for a more immediate course of action" (Dunmire, 2005, p. 484). This makes it evident that features of rhetoric and key ideological components of political discourse elevate the persuasive power to its top (see e.g., Gonzalez-Ramos, 2023). It is for such potentials that the function of rhetoric to shape the ideological implications has long been recognized by political and cultural studies. Such studies date back to history, to classical Greece, where students were taught the art of persuasion and argument in schools of rhetoric (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). Although Isocrates designated political speeches in Athens Chios, the most important Greek rhetorician was Aristotle whose treatise on classical rhetoric showed a link between his vision of politics and rhetoric. Aristotle strongly believed that politicians are in a need to understand virtue, social value, justice and criminality, nobility, revenue, war and peace, and a number of other crucial aspects of social conditions.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

Successful establishment of such ideological values, therefore, necessitates orators and politicians to acquire a profound rhetorical strategic knowledge.

Political discourse, thus, like the advertizing discourse is designed to lead the public in direction of particular beliefs, thoughts, and ideologies (Woods, 2006). Therefore, this particular type of discourse needs to be examined with reference to political realities and functions in the contexts of communicative setting to better understand political intentions. Such examination lies at the heart of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that seeks to combine linguistic and socially grounded approaches, introducing a socio-cognitive level (Tekin, 2008; Van Dijk, 2008). In fact, CDA takes text analysis as an allotted priority and a fundamental task (Ferrari, 2007) and realizes text as sites of struggle and contestation through which one particular ideology will come to be privileged over other competing ones.

In the light of the CDA orientation of this study, the main focus is on the forms of *persuasions* which *rhetorically* and *ideologically* contributed to Obama's political success and gravity. The intention is not to interpret in details the US electoral speeches, or candidate's oppositions. When conducting the investigation, the present study concentrated upon different discursive strategies, levels of language, and language manipulation that constituted the political discourse of the first black president in the White House. Focusing on these, the study aimed to provide the answers to the following research questions:

1. What linguistic qualities, figures, and traits are attributed to Obama's Democratic speeches? And how these different devices do rhetorically contribute to Obama's success in persuasion of the US public?

2. Which arguments or argumentation schemes does he exploit to legitimate and justify his future policies as well as to represent his DP glorifications?

2. Theoretical and methodological framework for data analysis

The discourse-analytic perspective of this study examines the linguistic means by which particular discursive strategies open up or close down particular lines of ideology and persuasion. The empirical source material of the study includes US electoral and presidential discourses with certain positions of power. This type of discourse has been defined as the speeches of politicians, parliamentary debates, political manifesto, campaign brochures and posters, and academic papers which discuss political beliefs, ideals or practices (Tekin, 2008). To evaluate the potentials of Obama's persuasive techniques, with

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

respect to his strategic prerogatives of political communication, the media coverage of his discourse and commentaries discussions was targeted by the present study.

After surveying a series of Obama's public speeches, we selected several representative critical speeches including his campaign speech of Feb, 10th, 2007, presidential oath speech in 2009, victory speech in 2008, and his speech on the Father's Day on June, 15th, 2008. Such a dataset clearly presents Obama's rationale for his possible future policies as opposed to what he called the *past malaise decisions*. The targeted speeches, delivered on different occasions, are significant for several reasons. First, they represent Obama's formalized attempt to gain the American public support. Second, they have been circulating in media to document the claims about DP's policies of 'change', 'new services', and 'new responsibilities'. Finally, they declared the end of war in Iraq pointing to the U.S. future plans to combat Afghan terrorist.

3. Results and Discussion

What comes below will first provide those remarkable occurring linguistic devices and their rhetorical contributions to persuade US public by Barak Obama. Then, the findings for the second research question will be presented under the section of Argumentation Schemes.

3.1.Rhetorical devices and discursive strategies employed by Obama

3.1.1. Metaphor and metaphorical framing

The use of metaphor, as a shift or carrying over of a word from its normal use to a new one, is so common in human communication. Metaphor being as a tool for representing one entity in terms of some other related entities, operates primarily at semantic level and adds interest, complexity (Bazyar, 2022), or in some occasions humor to meaning. This extra source of meaning manipulation is operative in political discourse, and constructs social and political reality. Analyses show that Obama's discourses mostly employed metaphors with the intention to attract public's attention. The following metaphors were identified to be the most prominent ones in Obama's electoral and presidential discourses:

(a) Metaphors of war and aggression

(b) Container metaphors: body; people/ nation metaphors

Most of the metaphors identified in this study are already well-documented in a number of related studies (see Drulak, 2006; Tekin, 2006).

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

(a) Metaphor of war and aggression

Metaphors of war, aggression or invasion are mostly employed in the opposition discourse to accentuate better on the risk and danger of the outside enemy world. The persuasion, indeed, centers upon the emotive component as a crucial aspect in the strategic use of metaphors. Following Ferrari's (2007) and Walton's (1992) frameworks, the present analysis considers both cognitive perspectives (referring to emotion as grounded on metaphor), and discourse perspectives within a political persuasion strategy.

For Barak Obama calling for safety and peace is crucial to legitimate America's position. In his discourse, accordingly, he used metaphorical framing to represent the current situation as a crucial ideological basis for enacting a 'conflict' argumentation. Similar results were found by Ferrari's (2007) study investigating George W. Bush's insistence on making a negative identity for his prime enemies within the 'conflict frame'. By means of making 'conflict frame' in his electoral speech (on Feb. 10th, 2007), Obama attempts to search for an agent of the present conflict in his country and throughout the world and conveys America's or worldwide's 'anger' for initiating this conflict frame. As one consistent view,

> "…most of all, let's be the generation that never forgets what happened on that September day and *confront the terrorists* with everything we've got. Politics doesn't have to divide us on this anymore - we can work together to keep our *country safe*. I've worked with Republican Senator Dick Lugar to pass a law that *will secure and destroy some of the world's deadliest, unguarded weapons*. We can work together *to track terrorists down with a stronger military,* we can tighten the net around their finances, and we can improve our intelligence capabilities. But let us also understand that ultimate victory against our enemies will come only *by rebuilding our alliances* and exporting those ideals *that bring hope and opportunity to millions around the globe"*.

As shown by this excerpt, the representation of external 'peril' and 'threat' is crucial to provoking 'anger' and 'contempt', and to construe a positive identity for America through *pride, faith, and confidence*. This space of tranquility is inferred when looking at his discourse on global offensive against the globe. As a result of establishing 'conflict frame' with its contingent anger, the 'insecurity frame' is also at stake for America and the whole world. However, his conflict frame as a discourse ideological room is not so extremely linked to the Iraq war 'fear metaphor' made by Bush and RP discourses.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

> "But all of this cannot come to pass until we bring an end to this war in Iraq. *Most of you know I opposed this war from the start*. I thought it was a *tragic mistake*. Today we grieve for the families who have lost loved ones, the hearts that have been broken, and the young lives that could have been. America, it's time to start bringing our troops home. It's time to admit that no amount of American lives can resolve the political disagreement that lies at *the heart of someone else's civil war*. That's why I have a plan that will bring our combat troops home by March of 2008. Letting the Iraqis know that we will not be there forever is our last, *best hope to pressure the Sunni and Shia to come to the table and find peace*"**.** (Obama: Feb. 10th, 2007)

Of note, in addition to the *'war against terrorism',* another war is at the stake, not a military war but this time an economic crisis. Our critical discourse analysis considered how the horrors of war can appear less serious than they really are, instead, how metaphorically a problem with economy becomes a battle, as follows

> "…you did it because you understand the enormity of the task that lies ahead. For even as we celebrate tonight, we know the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime… *two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century***"**. (Obama, victory speech, 2008)

Obviously, this war is not an outside wound to harm the Americans, rather the locus of threat is 'inside' that calls for 'a new down of American leadership at hand'. As a whole, rather than reinforcing the idea of 'extreme fears', the figurative strategy at work insists on the need to recall *reassurance, warmth, determination, participations,* and to inspire *confidence, faith, and pride* as part of the whole Americans' honors. In political discourse, these metaphorically rooted concepts are more effective than their non-metaphorical realizations. Additionally, such conceptual implications and ideological positions are effective especially when the adjectives such as 'long' or 'steep' are inserted in discourse. As a consistent view

> "The road ahead will be *long*. Our climb will be *steep*. We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight *that we will get there"*. (Obama, victory speech, 2008)

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

The excerpt shows that this type of frame renders the conflict big in quality, also in duration, which correlates to the internal and external 'conflict' construction.

(b) Container metaphor: body and people/ nation metaphors

Container metaphors are a group of metaphors which are used for the conceptualization of belongingness. Through these constructions, the politicians demarcate the borders of in- and out-group. Of different container metaphors (for example, family metaphor, marriage metaphor, body metaphor, and house metaphor), the body, and people/nation were more frequently found in Obama's speeches than the other types. People/nation metaphors have been documented in political discourse of their description as a common set of beliefs or mutual political interest, for example, *a demonstration of political solidarity, unity, and integration.* People/nation metaphors characterize America as a body whose members are different people or states in that body. A main example of nation metaphorical framing is 'Nation as Person' metaphor (Lakoff, 199; p.1) which serves to persuade public act in self-defense against any external invasion. The innocent hero (the Nation) has no choice but to rescue himself from evil (the enemy). Although such metaphorical focus constitutes a very small percent (almost 5%) of the total metaphor tried by Obama, it was well documented by Ferrari's (2007) analyses of Bush's speeches on Iraq war. The following excerpts taken from Obama's media speeches show how America as a self-contained group of respecting and mutually supportive members is united against the external worlds.

- "In this country, we rise or fall as *one nation,* as *one people"*. (victory speech, 2008)
- "… That beneath all the differences of race and region, faith and station, we are *one people…* we can work together *to keep our country safe*…to pass a law that *will secure and destroy some of the world's deadliest, unguarded weapons"*. (campaign speech, 2007)
- "That's the true genius of America…, *our nation* can be perfected". (victory speech, 2008)

In a similar vein, Obama's preference to use body metaphors construct America as a body. This particular metaphor attributes organic characteristics to America. In fact, at another level of categorization, there is another metaphorical process being evoked which responds to personification, that a personified America not only conquers fear itself, but breathes and bends the arc of history towards the hope of a better day.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

"…we are *one*, that while we *breath*, we *hope"*. (victory speech, 2008)

3.1.2. Nominalization

By means of nominalization, as the process whereby a linguistic entity such as verbs are transformed into nouns (Cominetti, 2023), the speakers make the expression sounds more impersonal and remote than its verb form. Fairclough (2000) refers to nominalization as a backgrounded process and foregrounded effect. We can mostly see the systematic use of nominalization devices in opening statement, and their subsequent development and elaboration. The systematic use of nominalization is at work in Obama's 2007, 2008, and 2009 public speeches, particularly when he speaks about his 'reform ideology' reflected by 'change', and "reform' both in his pre- and post-election speeches. The 'change' that is represented as inevitable, is a 'growth', and moves at 'pace' with struggle and progress.

The significant of 'change' does not derive from the quantity of its frequency as it might account for a very small proportion of the total words in speech. In total, all the speeches contain 23 nominalized forms and the verbal constructions. Rather, the significance of 'change' comes from its implication for subsequent actions being taken by the DP. The use of 'change' has several important consequences. First, regarding Obama's goals, it establishes the propositions that "*it is the time for his generation to stop the failure of the past leadership"* and *"the time for chronic avoidance of tough decisions to make a better America"* as background information. This strategic use of nominalization creates a consensus concerning meeting US 'challenges'. Moreover, it privileges the interpretation of challenges and changes as description of 'rolling up their sleeves' to transform their nation, and reach the America's prosperity. Of note, the verb 'o change' asserts a specific consequence in future that is realized in exploitation of nominalizations which render transform as imminent. As to the possible merits of nominalization, Dunmore (2005) explains nominalized forms are located in specific temporal moments and assert a degree of likelihood, certainty, volition, and so forth. Given this, not only the nominalization process can be targeted to obscure agency when needed, but it can do credit for agency as well. Consider the following excerpts, for instance:

- "At this defining moment, *change* has come to America". (Obama: victory speech, 2008)
- "By ourselves, this *change* will not happen. Divided, *we* are bound to fail". (Obama: Campaign speech: Feb. 10th, 2007)

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

- "This victory alone is not the *change we* seek. It is the only chance for *us* to make that *change*. And that cannot happen if *we* go back to the way things were". (Obama: Victory speech, 2008)
- "… for that is *our* unyielding faith-that in the face of impossible odds, people who love their country can *change* it". (Obama: Campaign speech: Feb.10th, 2007).

As these example and others in the texts show, it is through the reliance on nominalizations that 'change' or 'reform' function to justify Obama's future actions: apparently, from military to non-military actions. Moreover, different shades of meaning 'we' could be distinguished by the nominalization strategy too. In this discourse of politics, 'we' functions to create a relationship between Obama and the public, i.e., 'me and you' (second excerpt), it also refers to the agency of the change (first excerpt) implying 'his election'. In the third excerpt, however, the reference is not clear. Given his dominant position in the Cabinet, 'we' can refer to Obama alone, or to the government. Therefore, the use of pronouns in nominalization process supports the argument made about the ideas of agency or remarks on its ambiguity in some cases.

3.1.3. Sentence Structures: Parallel Lines, and Repetitions

A core rhetorical strategy in Obama's discourse is strengthened by the abundance of parallel lines enriched with *overlexicalization,* serving as means to represent his new paradigm for American policy. Of particular interest is the pattern found in all selected speeches that they are widely characterized by the prolific use of structural repetitions. This device is familiar to us as it is a specific characteristic of the advertizing discourse. Of the total texts, almost 80% has enjoyed the structural repetitions, with each paragraph following its peculiar unifying repeated structures. This, in turn, has added a rhythmic pattern throughout each single speech. To point out the different benefits that DP might be perceived to hold, the following structures were found as the most frequent ones: 'It was here +clause'; 'That's why +clause'; 'In the face of +N, clause'; 'What has stopped us +be+ clause'; 'It's the time/It is the answer/It must be+ clause'; 'We have been told+ clause'; 'There is/are +N+ clause'; 'How many+ N+ clause'; 'Yes, we need' and a number of other structures with a less frequency of occurrence compared to abovementioned. Specifically, the data revels that a majority of Obama's metrical sentences starts with 'Let's + clause'.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

By means of these repeated and parallel structures, Obama appears to be saying the things that happened in the past, in present, and about his policies in future in a meaningful and emphatic discourse. Obama's victory speech of year 2008, is based on five particular verbal formulations, as abovementioned, including: 'It is the answer+ clause" to show the power of Democracy and his own election as the US president; 'It was+ clause/ It + past tense Vs + clause' to refer to those actions taken place in his electoral campaign; 'There is/are + clause' to refer to future initiations; 'Let's + clause and We will + clause' to call for cooperation and determination of each individual around America; and finally, his inspiration of hope, further energy, and incentives is reflected by proliferation of 'Yes, we can'**.**

In addition, to reinforce his ideology, Obama often uses the interrogative mood in place of declarative or imperative statements. Such a rhetorical effective question/answer structure provides a space for all the participants in the interaction. Dunmire (2005) found similar rhetorical function (question/answer) in Bush's discourse, and explained that participants are engaged in 'sharing insider discussions' (p. 499). Consider the following examples taken from his speech in Father's Day on June 15th, 2008.

> "…*How many times* in the last year has this city lost a child at the hands of another child? *How many times* have our hearts stopped in the middle of the night with the sound of a gunshot or a siren? *How many teenagers* have we seen hanging around on street corners when they should be sitting in a classroom? *How many* are sitting in prison when they should be working, or at least looking for a job? *How many* in this generation are we willing to lose to poverty or violence or addiction? *How many*?
>
> *Yes, we need* more cops on the street. *Yes, we need* fewer guns in the hands of people who shouldn't have them. *Yes, we need* more money for our schools, and more outstanding teachers in the classroom, and more afterschool programs for our children. *Yes, we need* more jobs and more job training and more opportunity in our communities."

Related to repetition, is the power of three words or three-part listing which is of the most eye-catching linguistic devices in politicians' discourse. This beneficial device, well-known to orators and poets, falls in parallelism categorization to the benefits of both form and substance. Followings are some instances of the three-part listing.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

- "…an ill-conceived war can replace *diplomacy, strategy, and foresight*." (campaign speech, 2007)
- "…by so many to be *cynical, fearful, and doubtful"*. (victory speech, 2008)
- "…*block by block, brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand*". (Victory speech, 2008)
- "…the enduring power of our ideals: *democracy, liberty, and unyielding hope*". (victory speech, 2008).

As these excerpts show, the device is more or less irresistible to Obama's speech-writers like any other political writers. The three-word listing has been drawn across sentences, inside sentences or even inside clauses and phrases. Grouping these items has the effect of denying any incongruity between them and in some ways to convey that they are related (Fairclough, 2000).

3.2. Argumentation Schemes

As to the second aim of the present study, it becomes apparent that another relevantly useful issue of a cognitive critical approach to discourse analysis is 'argumentation scheme'. It will be rather illuminating to identify the type of ideological conceptualization which is constitutive of discourse argumentative foundations. The emphasis is on identifying different argumentative schemes which are characterized by various *topoi*. Drawing on this, the study therefore aimed at identifying the rhetorical devices employed by Obama to justify and enhance the persuasiveness of his political discourse. The theoretical and methodological framework for such an aim followed what Tekin (2008) used for the analysis of argumentation strategies. The argumentative devices that were examined in the present scrutiny were, therefore, *topoi*, and *fallacy.*

3.2.1. Topoi

Using Goyet's (1993) terms, Tekin (2007) defined 'topos', 'loci', or French *lieux communs* as a concept in discourse, which means 'place' or 'seat of arguments' in the words of Erasmus. Topoi or loci represent a discourse resource which provides arguments to support a conclusion. They are parts of argumentation which belongs to the obligatory premises (Wodak, 2001). For instance, Tekin (2007) pointed out that French political discourse about Turkey's possible EU membership is characterized by a frequent use of topoi. He provided a list of the most frequently found topoi in French debate, for instance, topos of

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

burden, topos of finance, topos of advantage or usefulness, topos of opportunities, topos of abuse, topos of numbers, etc.

The results of the present data analysis evidenced that the following topoi were employed by Obama for his purpose of argumentations: Topos of *advantage* or *usefulness,* Topos of *disadvantage* or *uselessness,* Topos of *responsibilities,* Topos of *democracy*, *justice,* and *equal rights, and* Topos of *culture.*

The 'topos of advantage' or 'usefulness' has been defined by as conditional, implying 'if an action or decision is useful or bears advantages, then one should permit it' (see Tekin, 2007). Likewise, in an earlier study, Wodak (2001) distinguished between several subtypes of topoi including the topos of *"pro bono public"* (to the advantage of all), *the topos of "pro bono nobis"* (to the advantage of us), and the topos of "*pro bono eorum*" (to the advantage of them) (p. 74). According to Forchtner and Wodak (2018), these topoi help speakers to design the argumentation based on a point of view or an idea such as self-positive and negative-other presentation. On such a basis, the present results showed Obama frequently used topos of usefulness of his DP policies to the benefit of his nation, trying to sustain his position. As a consistent view,

- "That is why this campaign *can't only be about me*. It must be *about us* - it must be about what *we can do together*. This campaign must be the occasion, the vehicle, of *your hopes*, and *your dreams*". (campaign, 2007)

- "…on the part of every American, that we have duties to *ourselves, our nation and the world*…" (oath speech, 2009)
- "…if *you* feel destiny calling, and see as *I* see, a future of endless possibility stretching before *us*…".
- "…*I want to win that next battle* - for better schools, and better jobs, and health care *for all***".** (campaign speech, 2007)

The topos of disadvantage can be often supported by other casual topoi, or topoi of consequence (Tekin, 2008). Within Obama's discourse, the particular disadvantage position is taken to emphasize the existing social and economic problems that US has faced, such as the problems associated with health care crisis, unemployment, tax system, bureaucracy, finance war, etc.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

> "For the last six years we've been told that our mounting debts don't matter, we've been told that the anxiety Americans feel about rising health care costs and stagnant wages are an illusion, we've been told that climate change is a hoax, and that tough talk and an ill-conceived war can replace diplomacy, and strategy, and foresight. And when all else fails, when Katrina happens, or the death toll in Iraq mounts, we've been told that our crises are somebody else's fault. We're distracted from our real failures, and told to blame the other party, or gay people, or immigrants." (campaign speech, 2007).

The two closely interrelated topoi of consequence (disadvantage) are topoi of 'danger' and 'threat'. These two particular topoi are employed when some actions or decisions potentially result into the threatening consequences.

> "… we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort, even greater cooperation and understanding between nations…and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you." (oath speech, 2009)

Here, the important topoi found in Obama's discourse are the topos of 'democracy', 'responsibility', 'justice or equal opportunities', and 'liberty'. The most obvious topos in his discourses confirms to the value of human rights or democratic values and ends. The topos of democracy is related to the presumption of US responsibility to promote human rights and democracy in America and throughout the world. Of particular relation to this, is the topos of *responsibilities, justice, and equal opportunities* that underlay Obama's democratic argumentation scheme.

- "…but from the enduring power of *our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope***.** (victory speech, 2008)
- "…cherished *rights of liberty and equality* depend on the active participation of an awakened electorate". (campaign speech, 2007)

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

Another noticeable topos of Obama's political discourse is the topos of 'culture'. The implied conclusion of the topos of culture is to deny the cultural segregation, and to make decisions that lead to cultural unity as the following excerpt reveals.

> "For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus -- and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace." (oath speech, 2009)

3.2.2. The fallacy of extreme case formulation

Extreme case fallacy is a very instrumental fallacy in political argumentation scheme. It is one of the most widely employed devices that, according to Van Dijk, (2000) and Tekin (2008), serves the speakers in a debate to denounce a policy or action by means of starkly exaggerated terms. In Obama's discourse, the consequence of following 'the past raging storms' or 'collective failures' are more highlighted, and the RP's proposals which are, in his sense, the replications of the past condemned malaise policy and childish decisions, are distorted, making the criticism much easier.

> "On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the *petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations* and *worn-out dogmas,* that for far too long *have strangled* our politics." (oath speech)

Thus, in an attempt to draw positive implications and attributions of his new paradigm (i.e., positive self-representation, and negative representation of the opponent party- whether internal or external), Obama's discourse spectrum including the abovementioned topoi is at the service of demarcating his campaign as a DP, a more *tolerant, rational, moderate, peaceful,* and *a self-reliant one.*

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

4. Conclusion

Using a discourse-analytic approach, the argument produced by the present study shows how political discourse leans heavily on the persuasion strategies to support the governmental parties' ideologies. Throughout the argument, the emphasis is placed on positioning the ideological roots with a look on meaning reinventing and reinterpreting which color perceptions and cognitions of public and political trends. The article posits that a key ideological component of political discourse is constructed through the strategic use of rhetorical devices, and linguistic structures.

To understand the ideological underpinnings of Obama's political discourse, a CDA orientation was applied to the analysis of the collected speeches. The results revealed the means by which Barak Obama and his electoral campaign projected future domestic and foreign policies, persuaded public, and received their consents. Specifically, the results indicated that several discursive strategies, namely, nominalization, conceptual metaphors, parallel structures and repetitions, and argumentation strategies were intentionally used by Obama. In each of these analytic categories the focus is paid on the rhetorical tools and linguistic resources exploited for addressing persuasion as a macro-textual strategy which rolls back to the ideological bases. Through the use of nominalization, in particular, the nominalized 'change', Obama's discourse conflates the present and the future political actions and sketches the imminent success to his future decisions regarding *economy, education, equality, security, health care quality, and a worldwide peace.*

The analysis also proved that metaphorical framing is a promising tool for persuasive purposes. Widening our perspective beyond the specific cases, metaphors function as a macro-textual strategy to provoke intended emotions in the US public. The pivotal role of emotions, Ferrari (2007) argues, "emerges for the politicians as to construct as well for us to detect persuasion strategies in discourse" (p. 621). As to the emotion-provoking means, the most fundamental and useful rhetorical devices are identified to be metric or rhythmic harmony of paralleled structures with the poetic inclusion of repeated words. Selective use of lexical items as well as pronouns within the sentence structures has been influential in the discursive formation of the DP's nobility, positive identity, power, and dignity, to build a better America with the active participation of 'awakened electorate' in the US. (see Obama's oath speech, 2008).

From a macro-textual point of view, the ideological basis underpinning the analyzed discourse is that of a 'conflict frame' with its connection with 'anger', 'contempt' and 'fear' emotive states. Compared to RP's 'threat frame' and its extreme 'fear', Obama's discourses revealed that his ideological

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

basis was more that of a 'nuclear threat' and 'anger' of a 'terrorist' Osama Bin Laden against which 'nation as a person' should struggle for safety, rather than 'peril' from war in Iraq. The 'conflict frame' seems also to include the state of badly weakened economy as a consequence of 'greed and irresponsibility on the part of some' as well as the 'collective failure to make hard choices. Obama's campaign success to win the public support for change in America and even in the world is understood in declaring his *agency* as a *savior* in future, and in his demonstration of America as a body (a dignified SELF) that can be sealed or penetrated by other nations (OTHER) and by those who have the spirit of responsibility, sacrifice, and hope, and seek future of dignity and peace by joining the US.

On the basis of the evident potential power the discourse has, special attention was paid to undeniable role of linguistic devices (such as topoi or fallacies) in establishing political argumentation. The analysis showed that several topoi (e.g., topos of advantages, topos of disadvantage, topos of responsibility, topos of danger, topos of culture, and topos of democracy and justice) and an argumentative fallacy (fallacy of extreme case formulation) helped Obama in presenting his argumentation schemes and moves more influentially and persuasively. In general, the study shows that macro-, and micro-analysis through the rhetoric and ideology-based method can affect understanding of political actions and persuasion, and some hidden meanings. It is in the light of these analyses that one can get an awareness of how the political world employs persuasive devices to acquire and retain the power of certain parties or individuals (Rahimi, et al., 2010), and how the words of powerful sites are taken as truth, and others' as irrelevant. It is in this hierarchy of power and binary oppositions that the parties are demonstrated through 'positive frames' and demarcated as 'rational' and 'self-reliant rescuers'.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

References

Bazyar, M. (2022). Persian body metaphors in light of metaphoric competence. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)*, *25*(1), 31-60. http://ijal.khu.ac.ir/article-1-3190-fa.html

Bloor, M., & Bloor, T. (2007). *The Practice of Critical Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*. UK: Hodder Publication.

Cominetti, F. (2023). Nominalization as an enhancer of linguistic implicitness in political discourse. *Lingue e Linguaggi*, *56*, 69–88. http://10.1285/i22390359v56p69

Drulak, P. (2006). Motion, container and equilibrium: Metaphors in discourse about European integration. *European Journal of International Relation*, *12*, 499-531.

Dunmire, P. (2005). Preempting the future: Rhetoric and ideology of future in political discourse. *Discourse and Society, 16* (4), 481-513.

Fairclough, N. (2000). *New Labour, New Language?* London: Routledge.

Ferrari. F. (2007). Metaphor at work in the analysis of political discourse: investigating a "preventive war" persuasion strategy. *Discourse and Society, 18* (50), 603-625.

Forchtner, B., & Wodak, R. (2018). Critical Discourse Studies: A critical approach to the study of language and communication. In Wodak, R. & Forchtner, B. (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics* (pp. 135-149). New York: Routledge.

Gonzalez-Ramos, K., (2023). *Times of Crisis: A Comparative Discourse Analysis of U.S. and Mexican Presidential Rhetoric.* LSU Master's Theses. Louisiana State University. https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/5771

Lakoff, G. (1991). Metaphor and War: The metaphor system used to justify war in the Gulf, in B. Hallet (ed.) *Engulfed in war: just war and the Persian Gulf*. Honolulu, HI: Matsunage Institute for peace. Retrieved from http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_doc/Texts/Scholarly/Lakoff_Gulf_Metaphor_1.html

Obama, B. H. (2007, 10 Feb.). Barak Obama's Campaign Speech. Available: http://www.barackobama.com/2007/02/10/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_11.php

Obama, B. H. (2007, 11 December). Victory Speech in Chicago. Available: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/11/04/obama-victory-speech_n_141194.html.

Obama, B. H. (2008, 15 June). Father's Day. Available: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj1hCDjwG6M

Obama, B. H. (2009, 20 Jan.). Oath and Inauguration Speech. Available: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tECPBYmXcqE.

Rahimi, M., Amal Saleh, E., & Deghat, S. (2010). The CDA of 2008 presidential campaign speeches of democratic candidates with respect to their gender and race. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL), 13* (2), 75-99. http://ijal.khu.ac.ir/article-1-39-fa.html

Tekin, B. (2008). The construction of Turkey's possible EU membership in French political discourse. *Discourse and Society, 19*(6), 727-763.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]

Van Dijk, T. A. (2000). The reality of racism: On analyzing parliamentary debates on immigration. In M. Reisigl and R. Wodak (eds). *The Semiotics of Racism. Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis*, pp. 85-103. Veinna: Passagen Verlag.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2008). Critical discourse analysis and nominalization: Problem or pseudo-problem? *Discourse and Society*, 19(6), 821-828.

Walton, D. (1992). *The place of emotion in argument*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In M. Meyer and R. Wodak (eds), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, pp. 63-95. London: SAGE.

Woods, N. (2006). *Describing discourse: A practical guide to discourse analysis*. UK: Hodder Publication.

[Downloaded from ijal2.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-24]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2023.26.1.11.6]