

Bases of Power and Influence Tactics in Obama's Political Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Farah Abdul-Jabbar Al-Mnaseer

(Corresponding Author)

English Department, University of Wassit

Iraq, Wassit- 00964

E-mail: farah_fa78@yahoo.com

Anne A. Christopher

School of Education & Modern Languages

College of Arts and Sciences

University Utara Malaysia

06010 Sintok, Kedah

Malaysia

E-mail: althea@uum.edu.my

(Received: 3-5-13 / Accepted: 17-6-13)

Abstract

This paper presents an investigation to determine the bases of power in Obama's political discourse and the forms of identifying them in relation to power influence tactics. It attempts to describe the relations between these two variables and the benefits of determining such relations. This paper focuses on Obama's political discourse in American late night talk shows. The study draws a comparison between his style and use of linguistic structures and gestural aspects to present his values, attitudes and experiences before and after elections and particularly the 2008 presidential elections. Dealing with power and ideological perspectives required a critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) to be carried out to analyze Obama's interviews in the American late night talk show: *The Late Show with David Letterman*. Accordingly, this paper presents a qualitative content analysis of Obama's interviews to identify the bases of power and their influence tactics.

Keywords: Bases of power, critical discourse analysis, influence tactics, political discourse, systemic functional linguistics.

1. Introduction

Typically, there are two capacities of effective power in the interactional process including access to resources of power (bases of power) and the ability to obtain cooperation (the exercise of power, i-e influence) [1]. While power stands for the ability of an agent to alter a target's behavior, intention, and attitude; *influence* refers to the actual use of power [2].

The actual exercise of the bases of power can be carried out through different influence tactics. In other words, in [3] influence stands for the process by which power is exercised and at the same time authority is legitimated. Having dealt with the different sources of power, means there must be influence tactics to represent these different sources of power. According to [2] bases of power have wide applications in organizations and institutions and have been the focus of many researchers in different disciplines such as organizations, leadership, management, education, medical fields; yet in the field of political discourse still more investigation needs to be done to identify the bases of power and their influence tactics.

2. Aims of the Study

The aims of this paper involve basically identifying Obama's bases of power through analyzing his interviews on *the Late Show with David Letterman*. Further, it involves the analysis of the data through the CDA approach to determine the forms of influence tactics. Another objective is to identify the linguistic and gestural structures in the data in order to explore the relations between the bases of power and their influence tactics. This paper provides a new conceptual framework for the analysis of political discourse in non-institutional contexts such as comedy late night talk shows of political content.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Bases of Power and Influence Tactics

Literally speaking, the meaning of power conveys the capacity to influence and, in turn, influences itself results from exercising power. Accordingly, almost all the definitions of power share common aspects including "influence", "power", "decision making", "authority" [4, p.34]. In reference [2, p.150] the relationship between power and influence was described as involving, "a dyadic relation between two agents which may be viewed from two points of view: (a) What determines the behavior of the agent who exerts power? (b) What determines the reactions of the recipient of this behavior?"

Due to the multidimensional construct of power, the taxonomy of the bases of power proposed in reference [2, p.156-163] involves *legitimate power*, *referent power*, *expert power*, *reward power*, and *coercive power*. These are considered as the most usable model for understanding power relations in social, industrial, organizational, and interactional disciplines [5, 6, 7 & 8]. However, the first basis of power is the *legitimate power* which refers to the relative position and duties of the holder of the position within an organization. In fact, it stands for the formal authority delegated to the holder of the position [9].

The second basis of power is the *reward power* which refers to the degree to which a person can give others a reward of some kind [10]. The third basis of power is the *coercive power* which stands for the applications of the negative influences on people and it is considered as the least effective form of power [9]. These three bases of power are related to position power according to [11, p.8] who defines it as, "the power a person derives from a particular office or rank in a formal organizational system". It stands for the formal position and authority a person gets from his/her position in an organization or society, often backed by policy or law. Further, it exists when one person is higher than another in an organization.

As far as the *expert power* is concerned, a person can possess power if he/she has special knowledge and experience in a specific field [2]. Concerning the *referent power*, a person can influence others' feelings due to personal acceptance, approval and self-esteem [5]. This means that referent power emerges from one's personality being liked and respected by others, as for instance, when celebrities can influence people. Typically, it is associated with personal charisma, charm and admiration. These two bases of power are related to *personal power* which refers to the influence capacity a person derives from being seen by followers as likable and knowledgeable [11].

According to [12] 10 influence tactics are provided and divided into primary and secondary influence tactics. The primary influence tactics involve: *Rational persuasion* (use of logical argument and evidence), *Institutional appeal* (arouses enthusiasm), *Consultation* (involves the target in the planning of the strategies, activities, etc.) [12, p.249-253]; while the secondary influence tactics involve *pressure* (demands, threats, intimidation, etc.), *legitimizing* (legitimacy), *exchange (sharing benefits)*, *coalition* (the aid and support of others to persuade the target to do something), *ingratiation*, *personal appeal* (loyalty and friendship) and *upward appeal* (involvement of third party to create influence).

3.2 Politics in Critical Discourse Analysis

A CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of text and talk, which views language as "a form of social practice" and attempts "to unpack the ideological underpinnings of discourse that have become so naturalized over time that we begin to treat them as communicative, acceptable and natural features of discourse" [13, p.20]. The CDA can be united by its critical focus on the ways in which knowledge, subjects, and power relations are produced, reproduced, and transformed within discourse. The CDA approach is associated with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth, SFL) due to its solid analytical foundation which focuses on the point that language shapes and is shaped by society [14]. A very important point concerning CDA is that it gives a considerable account for multimodal phenomena. In fact, closely associated with Halliday's SFL is multimodality which involves "the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as (spoken and written) language, gestures, dress, architecture, proximity (and in film, for example, lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle, etc.)" [15, p.2]. Typically, SFL is considered as a useful tool for a CDA because it includes a fusion of syntactic, semantic, and semiotic approaches. SFL includes three meta functions which include the ideational, interpersonal and textual.

3.2.1 Ideational Function

With regard to the ideational function, the speaker or writer embodies his experience of the phenomena in the real world including his reactions, cognition, and perceptions [16]. Basically, the ideational function is represented by the transitivity system in grammar which considers the clause as the meaningful grammatical unit since it stands for the transmission of ideas [17]. This system has six processes including: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential processes. These processes perform different functions involving doing, being, sensing, behaving or existing [16, p.33].

3.2.2 Interpersonal Function

According to [18, 19], the speaker uses language to perform different communicative roles such as to inform, question, greet, persuade, and the like. The interpersonal function identifies with expressing social and personal relations [16]. It is expressed through "mood" and "modality".

3.2.3 Textual Function

Even though there might be two sentences which can be identical in their ideational and interpersonal functions, they will most certainly be different in the textual function [18, 19]. Basically, without the textual function, it is difficult to make any use of language at all [16, 17]. Halliday [19, 20 & 21] indicates that textual metafunction is mainly concerned with the creation of the text.

3.3 Multimodality: Linguistic and Gestural Aspects

Non-verbal behavior plays a very important role in social life in which people within the interactional process send a large portion of signals to each other consciously or unconsciously accompanied by their actual talk [22]. In [23], understanding messages requires more than listening to spoken words in which non-verbal cues play an important and

powerful role in the interpretation of the messages sent. Non-verbal aspects involve all unwritten and unspoken messages and specifically, according to [24], body language cues are the most influential aspects of non-verbal behavior in everyday interaction. Body language includes facial expressions, gestures and postures.

The most important point concerning facial expressions is their universality. Accordingly, there is strong evidence for the universality of seven facial expressions including anger, contempt, disgust, joy, sadness, and surprise [25]. [26] refers to gestures as the movements made with the head, shoulders, legs, feet, hands, arms and fingers. Commonly, the head, trunk and shoulders when used together with the hands and arms relate to feelings and ideas. Most importantly, there is a direct relationship between the status, power, and prestige a person possesses and the number of gestures or body movements he/she uses [27].

According to [28, p. 49-98], there are five major types of body movements including: *emblems, illustrators, affect, displays, regulators* and *adaptors*. First, emblems refer to direct hand gestures that replace words. Second, illustrators are small movements that punctuate ideas, as for instance, when referring to something on the left side, this can be done either through referring to it by hand or turning the head or the whole body. Third, affect stands for the unconscious movement which communicates emotional meaning such as smiling or frowning in addition to the body relaxing or showing tension. Fourth, regulators tend to control, monitor and coordinate the other person speaking, as, for example, when someone nods the head as a sign to let the speaker continue what he/she is saying. Fifth, adaptors refer to gestures that are of personal needs such as scratching to relieve or rubbing the nose [29]. In the front page of their book, "Body language: How to read others' thoughts by their gestures", [30] clarify that, "It is a significant fact that people's gestures give away their true intentions".

4. Methodology and Analysis

This study involved a qualitative research that attempted to accumulate existing information and data following the content analysis approach using a critical lens. Reference [31, p.272] defines content analysis as "a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text such as "words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated". This study was carried out through a CDA in which the theoretical framework was adopted from [14], relying on the SFL approach from [19, 20 & 21] to analyze the linguistic aspects and a combination of non-verbal models involving [29, 30, 32, 33 & 34] for the interpretation of the gestural aspects. The study tackled the interviews of Barack Obama on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. The sample included two interviews in which Obama was interviewed once as a presidential candidate and another as a President of the United States.

The data collection involved videos as well as the transcript of the interviews. The transcribed copies were modified following the transcription conventions of [35] in which the non-verbal behavior, timing of the consequence of the verbal and non-verbal aspects, interruptions and pauses were added. The *EUDICO linguistic annotator* (Henceforth, ELAN) (4.3.2) software was used to reproduce the transcription since reference [36] points out that ELAN is designed for the analysis of not only verbal language but also for the analysis of sign language and gestures. The three-dimensional analytical framework from [14] was adopted including the description, explanation and interpretation of the text.

4.1 Analysis of David Letterman's 2008 Interview

Extract (1) Obama: "The economy is not working for middle class families, incomes (4:50) *((both palms curled facing each other, wagging into the center))* have gone down, people don't (4:52) *((both hands spread open))* have healthcare, you've got foreclosures all across (4:53) *((right hand moves horizontally))* the country...".

In this extract Obama uses a negative sentence formed of a material process including the actor "the economy", the process "working" and the recipient "for middle class families".

Obama uses a declarative sentence with a material process including the actor "incomes", and the process "gone down" confirmed through the non-verbal behavior which is both palms wagging into the center. Obama uses a negative sentence formed of an identifying relational process in which the token is "people", the identifying verb phrase is "don't have", and the value is "health care". The hand gesture used in association with this sentence is "both hands spread open". In the same extract, Obama uses a declarative statement formed of a relational process in which the token is the third person pronoun "you", the identifying verb "have got", the value "foreclosures", and the circumstance "all across the country". In association with the circumstance, Obama moves his right hand horizontally. In this extract, Obama is using expert power. This basis of power is used practically through the relational persuasion influence tactics because Obama is trying to present argumentation and factual evidence concerning the situation in the United States. The gestural aspects involve the hands spread open to confirm the relational influence tactic. This gesture confirms the fact that people don't have healthcare. Another hand gesture is when the right hand moves horizontally in relation to the circumstance "all across the country", to generalize the whole issue and reinforce Obama's knowledge concerning the situation in the United States in different regions.

4.2 Analysis of David Letterman's 2009 Interview

Extract (2) Obama: "My central (5:01) (*left palm index finger tip and thumb touching each other, rising straight up and wagging into the center*) objective (.) is making sure that we take those folks out. They cannot cause harm (5:05) (*left palm index finger tip and thumb touching each other, rising straight up and wagging into the center*) to the United States (5:09) (*serious face*)."

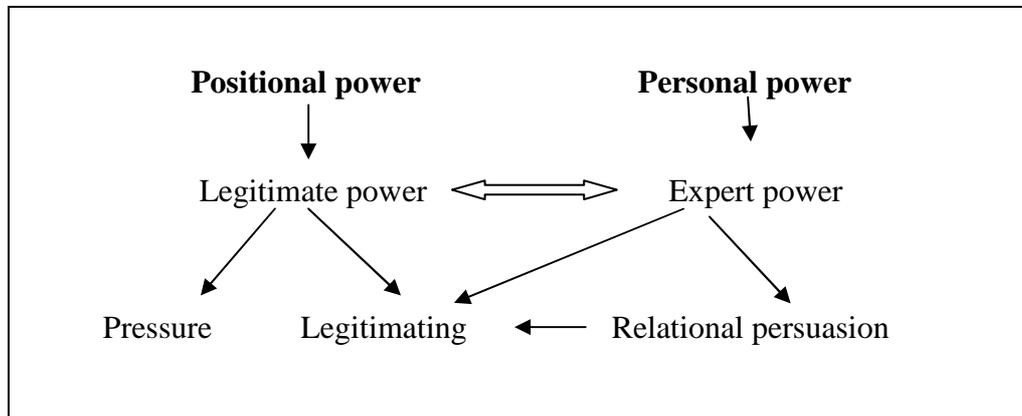
In this extract, Obama uses a declarative sentence emphasizing the expression, "My central objective" and using the process "making sure", the relative clause "that we take those folks out". The word "central" is portrayed through using the left palm index finger tip and thumb touching each other, rising straight up and wagging into the center to refer specifically to his concern. Obama uses a negative sentence formed of a material process including the actor "they", referring to the folks Obama talked about earlier. The process verb is "cause" and it is used with the ability modal auxiliary "can", the goal "harm" and the recipient "to the United States". Obama uses his left palm index finger tip and thumb touching each other, rising straight up and wagging into the center in association with the word "harm" to confirm the threat facing the United States. Further, he expresses a serious face in association with this sentence in order to indicate that he is angry about this critical issue and is looking forward to facing it. Clearly, in this extract, Obama uses a legitimate basis of power exercised through the legitimating influence tactics. Consequently, he is verifying certain evidence concerning the war in Afghanistan, presenting prior precedents concerning what is going on, and providing details of the policies that he wants to implement there to protect the United States.

5. Conclusions

Generally, Obama as a presidential candidate and as a President of the United States formulated his political discourse relying on his legitimate and expert bases of power. These can imply new persuasive ways of convincing the population about his policies. From a critical point of view, both positions implied a criticism to the previous policies and authoritative rules. His legitimate power, from originally being a Senator of States, indicated that he could decide on the different political issues and had the authority to bring certain changes to the different policies which he criticized. Being powerful, even though as a presidential candidate, Obama, on the other hand, did not rely on the reward, referent or the coercive bases of power indicating that authority and knowledge could help him to achieve his goals and rally the population around him. On the other hand, being interviewed on a comedy late night talk show, Obama realized that all he needed was to present his personality combining his authority and knowledge to present political information to the average people. The findings of this paper indicate that there is a reciprocal relation between the legitimate and expert bases of power according to their forms of influence tactics. Legitimate and expert bases of power are reciprocal in that both accumulate each other in relation to political

identity. Accordingly, both are linked together through the same influence tactics. Showing consistency with organizational or professional roles, verifying policies and documents and presenting prior precedents can stand for both types of power and, most importantly, one accumulates the other. This gives the politician a more powerful position and ability to control the interactional process.

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework of Bases of Power and Influence Tactics in Political Discourse



The above mentioned findings lead to the formulation of a conceptual framework to describe the relations between the bases of power and their influence tactics for the discursive construction of political discourse in non-institutional contexts. This model fits into the three-dimensional model of reference [24] in which the bases of power stand for the social practice level, the influence tactics represent the discursive practice level and, finally, the structural forms of these influence tactics resemble the text level of the approach.

At the social practice and discursive practice levels of the CDA approach, the model states that a person can be more powerful through associating his authority with his knowledge to be inter-located with each other. This model illustrates an inter-located relation between positional power (legitimate) and personal power (expert).

Linguistically, when legitimate power is used to present policies and future plans, they are presented through declarative statements formed of the material process to refer to actions that are to be performed. However, when both expert and legitimate bases of power are used together, they are presented through negative statements formed of material, mental and relational processes.

The gestural aspects indicated that in order to confirm the negative mode, Obama used both the negative mode through "not" and the different gestural forms and facial expressions. Moreover, the same hand gestures can be used to perform different linguistic functions in which they can be used as a form of negation, description or confirmation. This implies multi-function gestures which are used unintentionally or intentionally to convey different meanings according to the context of situation in which they take place.

Politically, Obama focused on his political discourse in performing the speech act which is criticism of the previous policies through using the negative mode. Additionally, the paper concludes that expert power can play a major role in transmitting political knowledge to the population. This study has proven that expert power presented in the relational persuasion influence tactics is a convincing means of ideologies in which argumentation and factual evidence are key notes for changing peoples' perceptions about politicians.

References

- [1] R.M. Kanter, Power failure in management circuits, *Harvard Business Review*, 57(1979), 65-75.
- [2] J. French and B.H. Raven, The bases of social power, In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in Social Power*, (1959), Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.
- [3] M.A. Faeth, Power, authority and influence: A comparative study of the behavioural influence tactics used by lay and ordained leaders in the Episcopal church, In: *Faulty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*, (2004), Falls Church, Virginia: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- [4] J.L. Swasy, Measuring the bases of social power, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 6(1979), 340-346.
- [5] P.H. Kim, R.L. Pinkley and A.R. Fragale, Power dynamics in negotiation, *Academy of Management Review*, 30(2005), 799-822.
- [6] L. Munduate and K.M.B. Gravenhorst, Power dynamics and organisational change: An introduction, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 52(1) (2003), 1-13.
- [7] C. Stott and J. Drury, The importance of social structure and social interaction in stereotype consensus and content: Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 34(2004), 11-23.
- [8] J. Thornborrow, *Power Talk: Language and Interaction in Institutional Discourse*, (2002), London: Longman.
- [9] J.A. Wagner, *Organizational Behavior: Securing Competitive Advantage (5th ed.)*, London: Prentice Hall.
- [10] H. Aguinis, M.M. Simonsen and C.A. Pierce, Effects of nonverbal behavior on perceptions of power bases, *Journal of Social Psychology*, 138(4) (1998), 445-469.
- [11] P.G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice (5th ed.)*, (2010), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- [12] G. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations (6th ed.)*, (2006), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [13] N. Fairclough, *Language and Power (1st ed.)*, (1989), London: Longman.
- [14] N. Fairclough, *Language and Power (2nd ed.)*, (2001), London: Longman.
- [15] K.L. O'Halloran, S. Tan, B.A. Smith and A. Podlasov, Multimodal analysis within an interactive software environment: Critical discourse perspectives, *Critical Discourse Studies*, 8(2) (2011), 109-125.
- [16] J. Wang, A critical discourse analysis of Barak Obama's speeches, *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(3) (2010), 254-261.
- [17] N. Iwamoto, Stylistics and linguistics analysis of a literary text using systematic functional grammar, *Edinburgh Working Papers in Applied Linguistics*, 7(2001), 56-71.
- [18] M.A.K. Halliday, Linguistic function and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding's the inheritors, In S. Chatman (Ed.), *Literary Style: A Symposium*, (1971), London: Oxford University Press.
- [19] M.A.K. Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar (1st ed.)*, (1994), London: Edward Arnold.

- [20] M.A.K. Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar (2nd ed.)*, (1994), London: Edward Arnold.
- [21] M.A.K. Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar (3rd ed.)*, (2004), London: Edward Arnold.
- [22] B. Korte, *Body Language in Literature*, (1997), London, University of Toronto Press.
- [23] M. Guffey, R. Kathleen and P. Rogin, *Business Communication, Process and Product*, (2010), Toronto: Nelson.
- [24] D. Simmons, *Speaking without Words*, (2007), Retrieved from http://ezinearticles.com/?expert=Dalli_Simmons.
- [25] M. Argyle, *Social Interaction*, (1969), Oxford: Atherton Press.
- [26] R. Krauss and U. Hadar, The role of speech-related arm/hand gesture in word retrieval, In L.S. Messing and R. Campbell (Eds.), *Gesture, Speech and Sign*, (1999), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [27] A.S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th ed.)*, In S. Wehmeier (Ed), *English Language Dictionaries*, (2002), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [28] P. Ekman and W.V. Friesen, The repertoire or nonverbal behavior: Categories, origins, usage and coding, *Semiotics*, 1(1969), 49-98.
- [29] L. Dimitrus and W.P. Mazzerlla, *Reading People: How to Understand People and Predict their Behavior Anytime, Anyplace*, (1998), New York, New York Times.
- [30] A. Pease and B. Pease, *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, (2004), London: Orion Books.
- [31] W.L. Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (3rd Ed.)*, (1997), Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- [32] K.A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, (2002), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- [33] P. Ekman, *Emotions Revealed (2nd ed.)*, (2003), New York: Times Books.
- [34] D. McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought*, (1992), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [35] G. Jefferson, Transcript annotation, In J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, (1984), Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- [36] B. Hellwig, EUDICO Linguistic Annotator (ELAN version 1.4 Manual), (2003).