

## Rhetorical Practices In Political Discourse: A Comparative Analysis Of Joe Biden And Boris Johnson's Election Speeches

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### ABSTRACT

*This research article is about discourses used by two politicians Boris Johnson and Joe Biden in their selected pre-election speeches. Both politicians have presented themselves to win general elections in their respective countries, Boris Johnson the UK in 2019 and Joe Biden in the USA in 2020. In this research article, the researchers have included one speech from each politician. Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model (1989) of Critical Discourse Analysis has been used in this study. This model is based on three stages, which are based on text, discursive practices, and social practices, also known as the description, interpretation, and explanation<sup>1</sup> stages. The analysis of the speeches has been carried out based on three main themes, i.e., the requirement of the election, the importance of the election, and future of the nations after the election. Findings of the study revealed that Joe Biden emphasized the third theme, i.e., future of the nation after the election which shows his importance regarding the election. However, Boris Johnson emphasized the first theme, i.e., requirement of the election, over the other two themes, which shows his priority for the election.*

**Keywords:** rhetorical practices, masses, pre-election speeches, critical discourse analysis (CDA), Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA.

### Introduction

Communication takes place in a social setting which makes language a social practice (Fairclough, 1989). People's identity is shaped and constructed through language (Halliday, 1978; Anbreen, 2015). Language is frequently used to express someone's mandate in front of the public (Fairclough, 1989). Furthermore, Nusrat (2020) emphasized that language is used in political discourse to represent the ideas and background motives of politicians, especially ideological positions which are generated through language. Language for the sake of politics is also called political discourse. Van Dijk (1997) holds that political discourse is mainly used for persuading the masses about political hidden agendas.

Election speeches are generally a manifestation of the political will of leaders and their parties (Schaffner, 1996). Political actions are planned, controlled, and executed through language (Schaffner, 1996). According to Nusrat (2020), political speech is more often used to perform politics. Political speech is delivered by politicians to convey and pass on their

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messages. Van Dijk (1997) mentions that it is used to express politicians' views in order to gain the trust of the audience. Through political speeches, opinions, beliefs, and ideologies are presented (Wodak, 2004).

Discourse is based on formal speech, discussion, or a piece of writing (Tahsin, 2019). Discourse covers a large part of language from different fields such as philosophy, sociology, etc., which incorporates its whole palette of meanings (Titscher et al., 2000). Fairclough (1989) explains that discourse is a whole process of interaction; however, text is only its part. However, Tistcher (2000) mentioned that discourse analysis is a broader field in language use. It is specifically the use of language in context. Different theoretical and methodological approaches, such as discourse analysis, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, are used. On the one hand, discourse analysis is used to closely monitor the functions as well as nature in which language is served (Halliday, 1978). These functions, in very concrete terms, are specifically used for culture. Moreover, on the second hand, discourse analysis is related to personal and social needs where language is required to be served; hence, texts should serve in both personal and social processes (Halliday, 1978).

Schaffner (1996) mentions that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used with social problems (i.e., reproduction of political power and power abuse); moreover, Dijk (2009) describes that CDA is helpful to explore how it is produced and reproduced in historical, social, and political contexts. Saeed and Aslam (2020) explained in their study that rhetoric is the skill of urging societies with language. The present research attempted to find out the similarities and differences in the discourses used by two well-known politicians in their selected pre-election speeches by drawing upon Fairclough's 3D model of CDA.

### **Literature Review**

Language is an effective tool of communication used among people (Ondondo, 2015). Ondondo (2015) says that it cannot be said that language is only used in both formal and informal circumstances. Politicians use it most effectively to express their stances in front of the masses (Wareing, 2004). Nusrat, Khan, and Shehzadi (2020) argued that political or election speeches are presented to perform politics. Through the delivery of election speeches, politicians construct, reconstruct, as well as produce and reproduce beliefs, ideologies, and opinions to change people's perspectives (Van Dijk, 1997).

Cook (1992) mentions that discourse is a practical use of communication; it can be in spoken or written form. Furthermore, CDA is a term that is ahead of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis was only based on the analysis of text or discourse. It is based on its link to social processes (Bajri & Mariesel, 2021). Naeem (2022) has mentioned that ideological perspectives are reflected through every linguistic usage; hence, speech is considered a type of social practice. Woods (2006) explains that discourse analysis is used to know about the concealed meanings, ideas, and connections between script and people.

CDA also explains the process of power within discourse and power behind discourse. CDA is a form of analysis in the social background of the speaker's context where the discourse occurred and was presented in front of the audience (Fairclough, 2006). Talib and Fitzgerald (2018) present that the core objection of CDA is to discover the diverse use of language in a social setting. Apart from this, Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) specifically encompasses the political text with the connection of context (Martin, 2014). PDA is a process that is based on the analysis of options, framing of choices, and making of decisions (Bhatia, 2006).

### **Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Norman Fairclough (1989) has presented the three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis based on (1) text, (2) discursive practices, and (3) social practices. The first dimension is based on grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and sentence coherence (Fairclough, 1989). The

second stage places emphasis on the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. The third stage is considered the explanatory segment because it allows researchers to draw conclusions about this stage.

Political speeches have been a focus of attention for a long time. In this context, several researchers have conducted their research. Two studies were conducted on the basis of similarities and differences between two politicians. One study was based on Donald Trump and Joe Biden's language in use in the 2020 US presidential debates (Sartika, 2021). The study's objectives were to focus on personal pronouns, three-part lists, fillers, and interruptions. The study's findings revealed that Trump made many interruptions; however, Biden expressed his opinion very lightly and technically. Both politicians used personal pronouns "I and we" for expressing positivity; however, "you and he" showed others a negative presentation.

The second research was based on the similarities and differences between Trump and Wang Yi's speeches delivered in the 72nd Session of the UN Assembly (Zhu & Wang, 2020). The objectives of the study were to examine ideology and sociology through the interplay of all three dimensions (i.e., text, discursive practice, and social practices) of Fairclough's 3D model. The findings of the study revealed that both politicians used a number of intertextuality references, i.e., quotes of ancient Chinese sages by Chinese politicians, whereas the American politician mentioned laws, legal texts, and government documents in his speech very consciously. In the concluding part, it is said that the researchers focused too much on the intertextuality pattern rather than all parts of the 3D model, which are required to be researched in the future by other researchers. Therefore, this research study also remained lacking in the use of content words (adjectives and adverbs) and collocations by the speakers. They only covered personal pronoun identification and intertextuality patterns.

Similarly, Sipra (2013) analysed the speeches of Martin Luther King from a socio-political perspective. He analysed the first part of King Martin Luther's speech based on "When I Have a Dream" in a socio-political context. The objectives of the study were to examine the textual and stylistic strategies used in the speech of Martin Luther King and how the stylistic feature was used as the core term to represent the relationship between black and white communities through socio-cultural and political points of view. The study's findings revealed that Martin Luther King delivered his speeches in an impressive way while using metaphors and clarified the difference between influential and overloaded. He used language very persuasively without degrading his opponent, and he easily paid attention to the social inequalities of institutions. The researchers mentioned that they have analysed the chunk of the speech (only the first part) in a limited way; therefore, future researchers could work on other factors like social cognition of the speech. Therefore, the researchers themselves pointed out that the other models of critical discourse analysis could be used for future research.

Kadhim (2020) conducted his research on manipulative ideological discursive strategies in Boris Johnson's speeches. The objectives of the research were to identify the impact of the ideologies delivered by the politician in a discursive way to hide and change facts and information for the masses, to figure out the ideological discursive strategies used by the members of parliament, and to pinpoint the changing role of the polarised ideology in the social representation of us and them, or what is referred to as inner and outer group membership. Findings of the research showed that manipulation is ideologically oriented and that the strategies of hyperbole, lexicalization, and positive self-presentation with the percentage and number game with the percentage are utilised in the representation of us and their categorization in manipulating a political speech.

### **Research Design**

This article is based on a qualitative study. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis (1989) has been used for the analysis of data. This model is based on three

dimensions, which are called text, discursive, and social practice. A text is based on written, spoken, and symbolic and visual elements. The second dimension is based on the production of text, its distribution, and its consumption. Moreover, the third dimension is based on the activities that take place in society and how social practices are represented, reflected, and shaped.

This research article is based on the speeches of two politicians—Boris Johnson and Joe Biden. This study is limited to the pre-election speeches of both the politicians in their countries to win the general election held in 2019 and 2020. The researchers have selected two speeches of both the politicians, one speech of each politician. The speech of Boris Johnson was delivered on December 12, 2019 whereas Joe Biden delivered his speech on August 20, 2020.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis was conducted on two levels: (i) identification of themes in both speeches so that further analysis could be done within the identified themes that reflect the discourse patterns; (ii) applying Fairclough's 3D model to the language of the chosen themes adopted the framework of the thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke (2006) with these steps, i.e., transcribing the speeches, finding the themes within the speeches, applying Fairclough's 3D model to each theme, to re-analyse how far Fairclough's model is directly connected to RQ, and presentation of the findings and discussion. The following themes were identified in both speeches:

1. Requirements of the election
2. Importance of the election
3. The nation's future after the election
- 4.

### **Themes Identified in Joe Biden's Speech**

#### **1. Requirements of the election**

The first theme, the requirement of the election, has been repeated eight times in the text through different sub-themes. It remained the second-most frequent occurrence in the whole text.

"The current president has cloaked America in darkness for much too long. Too much anger. Too much fear. Too much division."

Mr. Joe Biden expressed the negative role of his opponent politician (Donald Trump), saying that he has pushed America into much darkness. He also explains that he has caused division and spread anger and fear throughout the country. Joe Biden has shown his role will be different from his.

It shows the first theme of why this election is required.

"...takes no responsibility, refuses to lead, blames others, cosies up to dictators, and fans the flames of hate and division."

Furthermore, in another place, he says that Donald Trump does not take any responsibility and only has the habit of blaming others. Here he also explained the negative behaviour and attitude of his opponent politician. Through these words, he shows how the need for the next election is required.

#### **1. The importance of the election**

The second theme, the importance of the election, has occurred six times in the speech through the use of different sub-themes. This main theme emphasised the speakers' priorities regarding the importance of the elections for the people of their respective countries. It remained third in the occurrence of the themes in the whole speech. Here, the researcher has only mentioned the most important lines of his speech for cognizing the effect.

“This is a life-changing election; this will turn over what America looks like for a long, long time.”

Here, under the heading of importance of the election, Mr. Joe Biden has mentioned through his line that the current election is a life-changing election for the whole nation. He also emphasised paying special attention to the future perspective of the country. He gave the details of how this election will change the history of America.

“..... I will draw on the best of us, not the worst. I will be an ally of the light, not of the darkness.”

Furthermore, here Mr. Joe Biden mentioned his personality in very detail, saying that he will make this country the best and will flourish as a light for this country too. It reveals that he wants to show his positive face to the masses. He also used words in comparison, like best and worst and light and darkness, which emphasised the binary opposition element.

### **1. The nation’s future after the election**

However, the last theme, the nation’s future after the election, has occurred ten times through different sub-themes. This main theme emphasised speakers’ priorities regarding the nation's future after the election. It remained the first occurrence in the whole speech.

“With a health care system that lowers premiums, deductibles, and drug prices by building on the Affordable Care Act, he's trying to rip it away.”

Here, under the heading of the third theme (the nation’s future after the election), he mentioned that he will also make some changes in management departments through health care, building infrastructure, etc.

“The immigration system that powers our economy reflects our values.”

Moreover, Joe Biden used a different strategy to mould the masses' minds by emphasising immigration as an economic booster for a nation. He mentioned more significant things for the betterment of the country.

## **Themes Identified in Boris Johnson’s Speech**

### **1. Requirements of the election**

The first theme, the requirement of the election, has been repeated ten times in the speech through different sub-themes. It remained the first number in the occurrence throughout the whole speech.

“It would be an economic disaster for this country he covered last. Look at that. There will be a responsibility.”

Boris Johnson mentioned in his speech that it’s the nation's responsibility to save this country from economic disaster. He also used the word ‘would’ for future perspective and emphasised the requirement of the election for the UK.

“He would refuse to do something that we can do.”

Furthermore, he mentioned that if they do not opt for this chance, i.e., the contest of the election, then they will not get things as per their will. Therefore, he favored this election as a catalyst for change within his nation.

### **1. The importance of the election**

The second theme, the importance of the election, has occurred five times in the speech by using different sub-themes. This theme emphasised the speaker’s priority regarding the importance of the election for the people. This theme maintained its position as the second most frequently occurring theme throughout the entire speech. However, the last theme, the nation's future after the election, has been repeated four times while using different sub-themes. Through the use of this theme, the politician puts his stance in front of the masses about how this election will be a better choice for the country.

"Our incredible country has the fifth biggest economy in the world."

Boris Johnson mentioned that their country has the fifth-biggest economy in the world. He also emphasised that

"That is the opportunity, my friends. That is before us tomorrow. "That's all we can do...."

### 1. **The nation's future after the election**

He also emphasised the nation's future after the election. Here, the politician is totally focused on his hidden agenda: if his party is selected, he will make the country more prosperous. It remained third in occurrence in the whole speech. To compare and contrast the discourses in both speeches, the current study uses Fairclough's (1989) third dimension, i.e., social practice. "And let's make sure that we give our children and our grandchildren the future they deserve in this country."

Here in this line, the politician emphasises the theme 'Nation's future after the election', and uses words like 'our children' and 'our grandchildren'. Through these words, he says how important their election is. This is not important for them in the present time; however, it is important for their coming generations as well.

"In fact, we can do it; we've got a deal; it's ready to go for every single one."

Boris Johnson mentioned that we have confidence that we will be succeeded soon, and this election will make their country more prosperous. Hence, he remains too determined for the purpose of making the masses ready to elect him as a successful candidate.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The researcher examined the selected pre-election speeches of Mr. Boris Johnson and Mr. Joe Biden. The pre-election speeches are based on the three identified themes: the requirements of the election, the importance of the election, and the nation's future after the election. Furthermore, these are based on the three stages of Fairclough's 3D model (1989) of CDA: text, discursive practices, and social practices.

The findings of the study, as per themes identified, revealed that three main themes were identified in the speeches of both politicians, i.e., the requirement of the election, the importance of the election, and the future of the nation after the election. The difference between both politicians revealed that Mr. Joe Biden has used the first theme (requirement of the election) six times (occurrence) in different contexts, which shows his importance for said theme. However, Mr. Boris Johnson has used it nine times at different levels, which shows his importance of said theme in front of the masses. The second main theme (importance of the election) was used in Joe Biden's speech six times and in Boris Johnson's speech only four times. The third main theme (the future of the country after the election) was used in Joe Biden's speech ten times and in Boris Johnson's speech only four times.

The above-mentioned findings showed that Joe Biden has emphasised equally on the first two main themes, i.e., six times occurrence for each theme; however, he emphasised too much on the third theme, which is 'future of the nation after the election'. It was indicated through his speech that neither the requirement of the election is much mandatory nor the importance of the election for the USA and Joe Biden, but the future of the nation has too much significance after the election. It can be justified by the reference to the US Constitution, which is rigid and cannot be easily amended, as in the comparison of the whole world. So, for Joe Biden, the third theme was important to win the election in opposition to Donald Trump, then President of the USA. Apart from this, Boris Johnson has paid attention to the first theme, i.e., the requirements of the election. This theme occurred nine times; however, the remaining two themes (second and third) only occurred four times each in different places in the text. It revealed that Boris Johnson was too concerned about the requirements of the election for the masses of the UK, and he had not much emphasised the importance of the election and the

future of the nation after the election. It can be justified through the reference to monarchy in the laws of England, where the Queen was only the ruler of all states, and that was the first election in the UK region.

The findings of the study revealed that the first stage of Fairclough's 3D model is only emphasised in the description of the text. However, the second stage, i.e., discursive practice, also known as the interpretation stage, suggests that Joe Biden intentionally focused on the third theme (i.e., the future of the nation after the election), as he knew that neither the first theme (requirement of the election) was mandatory nor the second theme (importance of the election). Meanwhile, Boris Johnson focused much on the first theme (i.e., the requirement of the election) instead of the second and third themes, which are 'importance of the election' and 'future of the nation after the election', respectively.

The second stage of 'interpretation' suggested he showed priority for the future of the nation after the election. However, the second stage 'interpretation' here suggested that Boris Johnson emphasised the requirement of the election for the nation more than the remaining two themes (i.e., 'importance of the election' and 'future of the nation after the election'). Finally, the third stage suggested that both politicians remained very focused on winning the general election and had remained successful in front of their nations.

### Conclusion

This article is based on a comparative analysis of two speeches by two politicians before the general election in their respective countries. The research model for analysis has been based on Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model. The said model is based on three levels, i.e., text, discursive practices, and social practices. Every discourse (whether written or verbal) is analyzed through the lens of these three levels. This study focuses on three main themes: the requirements of the election, the importance of the election, and the future of the nation after the election. The study showed that Joe Biden has paid much attention to the last theme (i.e., the future of the nation after the election) instead of giving importance to the remaining first two themes. However, Boris Johnson uses the first theme (i.e., the requirement of the election) too much with different times and different references and does not pay huge importance to the remaining two themes. It concludes that Joe Biden remains concerned with the future of the nation; however, Boris Johnson remains concerned with the requirement of the election for the UK. Moreover, this research has shown that both politicians have linked with the social problems of the people and created harmony with them. Both were elected as state heads in their respective countries as prime ministers and presidents.

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