

## A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S 9/11 MEMORIAL ADDRESS

Nguyen Duong Ha\*, Tran Thi Phuong

TNU - School of Foreign Languages

ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b>	<b>16/3/2022</b>	Recently, the world has witnessed the fighting between Russia and Ukraine. For whatever reason, every attack has always caused a great loss for innocent people. Looking back further in the past, we still can't forget the day when even the most supreme power of the world was attacked on September 11th, 2001, and the United States of America has still carried painful memories. To celebrate this mournful day, Barack Obama - the 44th President of the United States delivered a memorial address which was extremely touching and inspiring. To provide an in-depth understanding of this speech, the study was carried out with the help of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. In the analysis of this political address, the author mainly focused on identifying the power of language by the way of analyzing vocabulary and grammatical features. Then, the macrostructure of the text was examined to help reveal the implications and ideology embedded in the linguistic elements. This discourse could be treated as the message to all Americans particularly and the whole world generally about fighting and peace.
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Ideology

## PHÂN TÍCH DIỄN NGÔN PHÊ BÌNH VỀ BÀI PHÁT BIỂU TƯỞNG NIỆM NGÀY 11 THÁNG 9 CỦA TỔNG THỐNG BARACK OBAMA

Nguyễn Dương Hà\*, Trần Thị Phương

Trường Ngoại ngữ - ĐH Thái Nguyên

THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
<b>Ngày nhận bài:</b>	<b>16/3/2022</b>	Gần đây, thế giới đã và đang chứng kiến cuộc giao tranh giữa Nga và Ukraine. Vì bất cứ lý do gì, mọi cuộc tấn công luôn gây ra tổn thất lớn cho những người dân vô tội. Nhìn lại quá khứ xa hơn, chắc chắn chúng ta không thể quên được ngày mà ngay cả một cường quốc lớn nhất thế giới cũng bị tấn công vào ngày 11 tháng 9 năm 2001, và Hợp chúng quốc Hoa Kỳ từ đó vẫn mang những ký ức đau thương. Để kỷ niệm ngày thảm kịch này, Barack Obama – tổng thống thứ 44 của Hoa Kỳ đã có bài phát biểu tưởng niệm vô cùng xúc động và truyền cảm hứng. Để hiểu sâu hơn về bài phát biểu này, nghiên cứu đã được thực hiện với phương pháp phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán (CDA). Trong quá trình phân tích về bài phát biểu chính trị này, tác giả chủ yếu tập trung nghiên cứu sức mạnh của ngôn ngữ bằng cách phân tích đặc điểm từ vựng và ngữ pháp. Sau đó, cấu trúc vĩ mô của văn bản được tìm hiểu sâu hơn để nhằm thể hiện hàm ý và hệ tư tưởng được truyền tải qua các yếu tố ngôn ngữ. Bài diễn văn này có thể được coi là thông điệp gửi đến tất cả người dân Mỹ nói riêng và toàn thế giới nói chung về vấn đề giao tranh quân sự và hòa bình.
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### TỪ KHÓA

Phát biểu tưởng niệm  
Phân tích diễn ngôn phê bình  
Sức mạnh ngôn ngữ  
Cấu trúc vĩ mô  
Hệ tư tưởng

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\* Corresponding author. Email: [duongha.sfl@tnu.edu.vn](mailto:duongha.sfl@tnu.edu.vn)

## 1. Introduction

Years ago, the whole world was shaken by the news of the most frightening terrorist attack: the falling of the “Tower of voices” leading to a huge number of unexpected deaths. The people over the world were all shocked, terrified and deeply hurt by this great loss. Many people not only in America but also from “far corners of the world” have still carried the “scars of tragedy” [1]. On the day of the tenth September 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Barack Obama - the 44th President of the United States delivered a memorial address at the “Concert for Hope” at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. In this memorial speech, President Obama briefly reported the tragic day and then paid tributes to those serving the nation in the military, and those who lost their lives that day. Despite the unavoidable loss and change, he emphasized that his nation still stayed strong in the face of threat, and that they would strengthen their homeland security and enhance their partnerships. As looking towards the future, he believed the American would continue to prove that the terrorists were no match for their courage, resilience, and endurance [2].

At the current time when there is another fighting between Russia and Ukraine, this address can be considered to raise the voice to bring peace back to the innocent people and once again confirmed the brutality of wars. That prompted the author to research and delve deeper into this speech and help the others recognize the former-president’s implications and ideology about hope for peace. In order to reach this aim, the study is supposed to answer the following questions:

- *How are power and ideology realized lexically and grammatically?*
- *How are power and ideology realized in terms of macrostructure?*

Before getting into the deeper theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its method, such terms as discourse, text, and discourse analysis should be revised.

Discourse can be defined as “a continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit, such as a sermon, argument, joke or narrative or as “stretches of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive” [3]. Meanwhile, text is defined as “a piece of naturally occurring spoken, written or signed language identified for purposes of analysis. It is often a language unit with a definable communicative function, such as a conversation, a poster” [4] or “a stretch of language interpreted formally, without context” [5]. From the above quotes, it can be seen that text and discourse are considered sometimes the same subject matter, sometimes different things according to different linguists. However, many linguists agree that we do not need to distinguish between text and discourse, because text or discourse is an instance of language in use. With this idea, the definition of discourse by Halliday [6] is the one favored: “We can define text (discourse) in the simplest way, perhaps, by saying that it is language that is functional. By functional, we simply mean language that is doing some job in some context as opposed to isolated words or sentences that I might put on the blackboard”.

“Discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social, and political condition” [7]. There are a number of approaches in analyzing a discourse. Some outstanding methods are Critical Analysis, Grammatical Analysis, Interactional Socio-Linguistics, Pragmatic Approach, and Conversational Analysis [8].

According to John FlowerDew [9], CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that is concerned with studying and analyzing written texts and spoken words to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced, and transformed within specific social, economic, political, and historical contexts. CDA addresses social problems and seeks to solve these problems through the analysis and accompanying social and political action. In CDA arguments occur within a social context. They are produced by writers or speakers who are addressing an audience. Therefore, CDA seems to be a good approach to analyze a political speech.

Furthermore, CDA helps to unite and determine the relationship between three levels of analysis: (a) the actual text, (b) the discursive practices (that is the process involved in creating, writing, speaking, reading and hearing), and (c) the larger social context that bears upon the text and the discursive practices [10]. In other words, a critical approach to discourse seeks to link the text (micro level) with the underlying power structures in society (macro sociocultural practice level) through discursive practices upon which the text was drawn [11]. To put it simply, doing discourse analysis involves the relationship between texts, interactions, and contexts.

## 2. Methodology

In fact, there are many frameworks used in CDA. This article followed the framework presented by Fairclough [4] with a list of main questions as following:

1. What experiential values do words have?
2. What relational values do words have?
3. What expressive values do words have?
4. What metaphors are used?
5. What experiential values do grammatical features have?
6. What relational values do grammatical features have?
7. What expressive values do grammatical features have?
8. How are (simple) sentences linked together?
9. What interactional conventions are used?
10. What larger scale structures does the text have?

This approach is conducted with the help of the Systematic Functional Grammar addressed by Halliday because “a discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all, but simply a running commentary on a text” [6]. According to Halliday, language has three functions: ideational (including experiential and logical), interpersonal and textual. These three functions are expressed in the structure of the clause. In systemic functional grammar, there are three meanings of clause and their lexico-grammar realizations: the experiential meaning and its realization through the system of transitivity (clause as representation); the interpersonal meaning and its realization through the system of mood and modality (clause as exchange); and the textual meaning and its realization through the system of theme and rheme (clause as message).

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Vocabulary analysis

Following the framework mentioned above, the vocabulary will be explored in terms of experiential, relational, and expressive values.

President Obama delivered this speech in front of a lot of officers in the government body in the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 9/11 attack. Furthermore, this event was broadcast live on television, so all Americans and people all over the world may watch it. Thus, formality of word use is one prominent property of vocabulary used in the address in terms of relational value. Easily seen are some formal words which were chosen instead of informal ones.

Line 10	<i>ultimate sacrifice</i>
Line 28	<i>ultimate rebuke</i>
Line 52	<i>our souls are still enriched in our churches and temples</i>
Line 54	<i>underscore the bonds between all Americans</i>
Line 55	<i>not succumbed to suspicion and mistrust</i>

The employment of formal language shows the proper manner of a politician leader as well the appropriate politeness of an important meeting and then reveals speaker’s concern about the face of participants. The formality also emphasizes the importance of the speech and thus attracts the attention of listeners. And all of these influences of formality are not beyond President Obama’s ideological intention.

To add more formal atmosphere to the speech, words and quotations related to religion were also employed. At the very first beginning of the address, the normal greeting of the President was replaced by the quotation from the Bible “*weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*” Again, this one once more appeared at the closing of the speech with the President’s implied encouragement that the American would soon overcome the sorrow and the difficulties of this tragedy to reach happiness in their life.

As mentioned above, experiential values show the speaker’s view of the world or his negative or positive attitude towards an issue while the expressive values show how the speaker’s evaluation is expressed.

The first as well as the most prominent classification scheme is the description of President Obama’s negative attitudes towards war and terrorism. Strongly negative words towards war and terrorism were used repeatedly in his address as follow:

- Line 6 *evil was closer at hand*
- Line 28 *the hateful killers*
- Line 33 *those who do us harm cannot hide from the reach of justice*
- Line 41 *war itself is never glorious*
- Line 46 *we are more vigilant against those who threaten us*
- Line 56 *the United States will never wage war against Islam or any religion*

It is clear to recognize the implication in President Obama’s speech that war and terrorism bring nothing good for the people involved. Especially, he emphasized that the American had never had intention of starting the war with any Islam countries or any religion. All what America did is just to “*defend its citizens*”, and “*way of life*” (line 28).

Another classification scheme should be noted here is the system of words describing the President’s positive attitudes towards the American citizens and others who never come back since the fatal day. To praise and honor who had been lost and alive, he used such numerous beautiful words and phrases as the following:

- Line 10 *the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars*
- Line 18 *these patriots defined the very nature of courage*
- Line 19 *quiet form of heroism*
- Line 41 *their service to our nation is full of glory*
- Line 62 *patriots working in common purpose*
- Line 63 *loved ones*

By using such words, the President raised the position of American citizens to higher rank; they were not the victim of the tragedy (“victim” was used once in the address) but the heroes, the sacrificed, the patriots, the honorable and glorious people. Moreover, what they did, their duty and their deed will be honored forever by the alive.

Importantly, the President’s attitude towards the will, the strength and the future of America is also worth being analyzed to see the experiential and expressive values of the vocabulary. In his speech, he showed a complete optimism in the strength and the power of the great nation by using such words and phrases as follow:

- Line 11 *Our character as a nation has not changed. Our faith – in God and each other – that has not changed.*
- Line 14 *that belief, through test and trials, has only been strengthened*
- Line 16 *America does not give in to fear*
- Line 30 *America’s resolve to defend its citizens, and our way of life*
- Line 45 *our desire to move from a decade of war to a future of peace*
- Line 46 *we hold fast to our freedoms*
- Line 49 *our ability to resolve them in a way that honors our values*

In terms of the synonymy, it can be said that synonyms are useful in conveying President Obama's ideology. Synonymy can be seen as a tool to underscore the properties of the subjects described, show areas of intense preoccupation with some aspect of reality. For example: *our faith* (line 12) – *our belief* (line 12) (has not changed); *courage* (line 18) – *resolve* (line 30) – *strength* (line 43) – *resilience* (line 61); *the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars* (line 10) – *these patriots* (line 18) – *citizens who choose to serve* (line 34). Talking about the inconveniences of the war, the President used such words as *recession* (line 10) – *passionate debates* (line 11) – *political divides* (line 11). These words were used flexibly in the speech, so they create the variety in the way of expressing the President's ideas but still remain and reflect his ideology.

Another meaning relation, that is antonymy, is also found in the President Obama's speech. In many places, antonymous phrases and clauses were used and put in parallel structures.

our darkest nights	line 2	<>	the hopeful future	line 28
Mighty towers crumbled.	line 2	<>	Our people still work in skyscrapers.	line 65
Black smoke billowed up from the Pentagon	line 3	<>	The Pentagon is repaired, and filled with patriots working in common purpose.	line 61

Antonymous pairs are a special textual feature which is often used in rhetoric speeches. When giving a contrastive sense, the speaker adds one more emphatic level to the ideas in focus and creates very strong effects on the 'taking-in' of the audience. This feature helps form the impressive tune of the speech, attract the attention of the listeners. The speech becomes more persuasive and the messages conveyed can be easily got across. Thus, it can be said that the use of antonyms has more to do with expressive values than experiential values. It is clearly more concerned with the effects of the text on the audience than with the speaker's view of the world. And surely, the use of this textual feature is also within the ideological basis.

In brief, vocabulary truly carries the values that help people convey their ideology as Fairclough says [4] "*what is ideologically significant about a text is its vocabulary items*". President choices of words contributed greatly to making explicit his ideology.

### 3.2. Grammatical feature analysis

#### 3.2.1. The use of personal pronouns and possessives

In the discussion of relational values of grammatical features, Fairclough mentioned the use of pronouns. Personal pronouns and possessives "we", "our", "us" and "they", "their", "them" were used most in the President Obama's speech. By using "we" with high frequency, President Obama identified him as member of a large group (the whole nation with the same will) and wanted people to think that they belonged to the same side. They shared the same sorrow, took the same will and belief, and especially they were all determined to move forward as one people to strengthen their nation. This use of words coincides with his ideology expressed in his speech "*all of them pledging allegiance to one flag, all of them reaching for the same American dream – e pluribus unum, out of many, we are one.*" It can be said that the use of *we* becomes the premise connecting people when the call for action would be given.

Likewise, with a plentiful appearance of possessive adjective – "our" throughout the President Obama's speech (30 times), he might desire to give out the message that they all own the right of possessing the properties belonging to America and no one can change or break that right and this right can be reached only when people have freedom.

Another pronoun which is used frequently in the speech is "they". This pronoun and the possessives "their" denote all Americans. They are put in the same context with the pronoun "you". This time, the President's voice was raised from an objective angle. He wanted to announce the American spirit with people all over the world that they would make a perfect

union. The use of this pronoun and its possessives makes the President's voice widespread to other nations, including those of "in-groups" and "out-groups" with America.

In summary, these above pronouns and their possessives definitely convey President Obama's ideas, thoughts and implications.

### 3.2.2. *The use of voice*

Among 66 sentences of the text, 9 sentences (13.6%) are in passive form. The active clauses in the text obviously outnumber the passive ones. That means in most cases, the agent is clear. The audience can easily see who did what and to whom. In terms of message conveyed, the President created the clarity to the audience of what he wanted them to know. The active sentence would make the meaning of the speech easily access the mind of the audience, and thus, well communicate with them while avoiding misunderstanding and ambiguity. This can be a good explanation for the high percentage of active sentence use.

However, the passive sentences with its own values do contribute much to conveying the President's ideology and implications. In almost all cases, the agent is left out. Although there is no agent, the clause doesn't puzzle the audience as from the context and their own knowledge they can infer the doer, or the agent is not important. Behind the omission of the agent is the ideology. The audience will pay more attention to the message. In other words, the ideology is in the emphasis on the patient and action. The following sentences are some examples.

Line 5     ...they were taken from us with heartbreaking swiftness and cruelty.

Line 14    ...belief, through test and trials, has only been strengthened.

Line 52    ...our souls are still enriched in our churches and temples, our synagogues and mosques.

Line 61    The Pentagon is repaired, and filled with patriots working in common purpose.

In line 5, the agent (the terrorist) is so clear that it is unnecessary to mention it again. In lines 14, 52, the action of strengthening and enriching should be paid more focus. In lines 61, 71 and 72, the President wanted the audience to pay attention to the patient of the attack.

In conclusion, using the passive voice, the speaker did not obscure the meaning of the message, but created the emphatic effects. Moreover, the passive voice may form additional meaning to the sentence when its focal point is the patient and the process. The experiential values of the passive voice are obvious.

### 3.2.3. *Modes of the sentence*

According to Fairclough [4], mode of sentence is one of grammatical features of text that have relational values. There are three major modes: declarative, grammatical question and imperative.

In President Obama's speech, there is no grammatical question and only one sentence having imperative mode which is introduced by "let us". "Let us" is a formal way of expressing instead of using *let's*. In general, in the case of imperative, the subject is not specified since it can only be the addressee 'you'. But with *Let us*, the understood subject is not 'you' but 'you and me' and the President implied both the audience and he were on the same boat and all of them had the duty to act.

In the rest of the speech, the sentences have declarative mode with the focus of giving information. President Obama took on the subject position as a giver of information and the addressees' position was that of a receiver. From his own experience, he gave out the information that he thought the audience lacked but they wanted or ought to have. Likewise, he had the right to leave out information that was redundant or ambiguous to the taking-in of listeners. This is the relational values of declarative mode as it also concerns the part of the information receivers.

In details, using different modes of the sentences gives the speaker the power and ideology.

### 3.2.4. Modality

In the President's speech, the modality marker "will" is worth being paid attention. 'Will' is found in ten places. "Will" has some traits in its meaning, e.g. to show the possibility of an action in the future or the intention of doing something, but it is different from modal auxiliary verbs. To modals, the possibility comes from the speaker's evaluation while the possibility of "will" arises from the reality. The speaker considered the event of "will" came as a matter of fact except for being interfered.

Next, modal "should" appears just one time in the discourse: "Our belief in America, born of a timeless ideal that men and women should govern themselves... has only been strengthened." It is another way of stating the duty of the American and helps lessen the President's imposing position by giving the option to the audience.

### 3.3. Analysis in terms of macrostructure of the text

Macrostructure of the text is one that discourse analyzers cannot ignore for it plays a fundamental role in communication and interaction. Macrostructures of discourse are distinguished from its microstructures, that is, the local structures of words, clauses, sentences or favorable strategies to demonstrate the ideologies and power. The presupposition behind the search for macrostructures is that, for any given well-structured discourse, there exists an overall idea that the author of the text had in mind as he produced it.

Unlike other speeches made by the President, he created the solemn atmosphere by using quotation from the Bible instead of greeting the citizens at the beginning of his address. "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*" This is not only a greeting but also an encouragement to the whole group of Americans: those who have lost their "*friends and neighbors; sisters and brothers; mothers and fathers; sons and daughters*" and those who are luckily alive after such a tragedy.

Then, like other memorials, the President turned back the hand of time to years ago when the tragedy happened with the highest level of evil. Since then, much has happened for the Americans with war and recession, debates and other inconveniences. However, what he emphasized in the discourse is what has not changed. This is the main content of the speech. It is easy to follow this part because it is marked by the frequently used phrases "these (past) ten years" and "over (the) years" in which the President reflected the unchanged character, faith, belief and right of freedom of the American. All of the events gradually appeared as in a slow motion film with the images of heroes, patriots and intelligent people who make a solid unity of the United States.

Finally, the President like an optimism activist drew the future vision in decades from the time of speech. This future will be built by hearts full of hope. Finally, he again employed the quotation used at the beginning of the speech as a message to his citizens: joy will come to them in the morning.

In short, the communicative aim of this discourse is easily accessible to the audience thanks to the logical sequence of events put in a clear time linear. Moreover, with the help of some strategies employed by President Obama, the discourse is made more noticeable and wins the audience's consent. The following strategies should be noted:

- The inclusive technique:

In the speech, President Obama uses similar phrases by which he addresses the American public. He employs such phrases as "the American people", "(the) Americans", "our character as a nation", "the American family", "America's resolve", "two million Americans", "many Americans", "all Americans", "American dream". And in such vast unity, he is an integrated element. Obama employs a lot of words "our" and "we", "us" to turn him into a member of people community and at the same time drawing the people on the same boat with him.

- The technique of using preference patterns

During the speech there are some noticeable patterns which are used often to present Obama's ideology. The first pattern is time adverbial phrase: The past ten years to remind people of the passing time since the attack on September 11<sup>th</sup>. This is not a long process but is a remarkable and worth remembering.

Another pattern used a lot in his speech is parallel phrases. For example:  
 friends and neighbors      guardsmen and reservists      war and recession  
 sisters and brothers      workers and business-people      passionate debates and political divides

These phrases can be similar or contrastive in their meanings, but in general, they all create the comparison effect in the discourse.

- The technique of citing

In the speech, President Obama cited some famous phrases or words from others' speeches. For example: "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*" (Quotation from the Bible); "*e pluribus unum*, out of many, we are one" (a motto on the Seal of the United States); "*all people are created equal*" (the paraphrase of the famous saying "all men are created equal" in the American Declaration of Independence).

In short, at this point, the president's ideology is expressed macrostructurally.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the techniques together with the choice of vocabulary and grammar used in President Obama's speech have created a successful discourse in the solemn anniversary.

Under the viewpoint of critical discourse analysis, the features of Barack Obama's speech can be summarized as follow. First, he used more formal words and solemn sentences instead of informal ones to show his respect for the fallen and the alive. Second, the use of personal pronouns and possessives, the use of voice, modes of the sentence and modality also helped reveal the ex-president's ideology, desire and feelings embedded in the discourse. Above all, not only he but also the American and all people around the world always want to live a peaceful life.

It is not only an address but also an encouragement and even a message to the American and the other nations about patriotism, the national security, and condemnation of terrorism in particular and military fighting in general.

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