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## A Stylistic Analysis of Overstatement in Kamala Harris's Selected Speeches

### A B S T R A C T

This paper studies the notion of overstatement in the American political speeches particularly those which are delivered by the vice president of united states kamala Harris. The study aims to examine the overstatement stylistic tools employed in political discourse to investigate their effect on the audience. To meet these two objectives, Leech and Short (2007) has been used in qualitative data analysis. The study has concluded that politicians like Harris in their speeches stylistically deploy linguistic tools such as, metaphor, persuasion, hyperbole, repetition, simile, personification, tone, assertion, and parallelism modality to represent overstatement in national issues. Moreover, overstatement in political context serves as a persuasive tool that shapes the perception of the public. This has been achieved by emotionally charging the language with stylistic tools that help portray the political ambition in an idealistic form, and with highlighting their political and national accomplishments, achieving as a result their political aims.

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## تحليل أسلوبية للمبالغة في خطابات مختارة من كامالا هاريس

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## المستخلص

تدرس هذه الورقة البحثية مفهوم المبالغة في الخطب السياسية الأمريكية، وخاصة تلك التي تلقيها نائبة رئيس الولايات المتحدة، كامالا هاريس. تهدف الدراسة إلى دراسة أدوات المبالغة الأسلوبية المستخدمة في الخطاب السياسي لمعرفة تأثيرها على الجمهور. ولتحقيق هذين الهدفين، تم استخدام نموذج ليچ وشورت (٢٠٠٧) في تحليل البيانات النوعية. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن السياسيين مثل هاريس يستخدمون في خطاباتهم أدوات لغوية أسلوبية مثل الاستعارة والإقناع والمبالغة والتكرار والتشبيه والتشخيص والنبذة والتأكيد والتوازي لتمثيل المبالغة في القضايا الوطنية. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن المبالغة في السياق السياسي تعمل كأداة إقناع تعمل على تشكيل تصور الجمهور. وقد تم ذلك من خلال شحن اللغة عاطفياً بأدوات أسلوبية تساعد على تصوير الطموح السياسي في شكل مثالي، مع تسليط الضوء على إنجازاتهم السياسية والوطنية، وبالتالي تحقيق أهدافهم السياسية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأسلوبية، المبالغة، الاستعارة، التكرار، النبذة.

## 1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication; it is an effective tool for expressions, persuasion, and influence. Stylistics is concerned with how language is used to achieve specific goals in different contexts. Leech and Short (2007) defined stylistics as "the linguistic study of style." It emphasizes the connection between language decisions and their communication purposes. This area of study bridges the gap between the literary or rhetorical effect and linguistic form by providing instruments for examining the ways in which particular the linguistic characteristics influence meaning. Stylistic devices are deliberately used in political discourse to evoke feelings and influence public opinion. Overstatement is a technique used to highlight a particular point or influence an audience. In political speech, overstatement is used to emphasize the importance of topics, rally support, and highlight their urgency. Some researchers have observed that figures of speech like anaphora and hyperbole help highlight the speaker's feelings or viewpoints and strengthen the persuasiveness of the message. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate how exaggeration is employed stylistically in political speeches and examine how stylistic tools are used to accomplish particular objectives.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Stylistics and its dimensions

Stylistics is the study of language style and how linguistic choices such as vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and figurative language convey meaning, emotion, and intention in texts. It helps bridges literary criticism and linguistic theory (Leech & Short, 2007). It analyzes figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, and hyperbole in order to understand how language shapes reader or listener reactions. According to Fowler (1996), stylistics

examines how language operates in various contexts, from everyday speech to complex literature, including discourse and pragmatics. It finds out how context influences meaning, how speakers express certainty or obligation (modality), and how language shapes worldviews (Simpson, 2004). Stylistics also investigates how language varies in social contexts, such as politics or advertising, and how it is used to persuade or influence (Kress & Hodge, 1979). It applies to both literary and non-literary texts to reveal how language constructs meaning.

## **2.2 Overstatement as a stylistic device in political speech**

Leech and Short (2007) mentioned that overstatement is a stylistic and rhetorical strategy, which uses exaggeration purposefully to highlight and emphasize a particular point or to gain a strong emotional reaction. It is frequently used in various communicative contexts, such as political speech, journalism, literature, and media to strengthen ideological viewpoints, engage audiences in situation, and amplify meaning (Simpson, 2004; Wales, 2011). It is a key persuasive tool in political discourse; it enables politicians to represent the problems as urgent, serious, or unparalleled in history (Charteris-Black, 2011). Speakers use this technique in an attempt to rally public support, defend policies, or paint opponents in a bad light (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In addition, it can be used as an emotive appeal to sway the public opinion and the decision made by intensifying the feelings of fear, hope, or rage (Fairclough, 2003). In a political context, this technique instills a sense of urgency and significance that makes some political ideas more psychologically compelling to the audience (Aristotle, 2007). Politicians often employ overstatements in their speeches, especially in crisis situations, such as times of war, discussions about economic policy, and the election campaigns, framing issues in extreme terms to demonstrate their leadership, establish their legitimacy, and justify policy interventions by exaggerating security problems, economic difficulties, or dangers (Chilton, 2004; Lakoff, 1996; Fowler, 1991). For instance, politicians may portray a slump in the economy as "the worst in history" or characterize the acts of a political rival as "a complete disaster" with the aim of influencing public opinion (van Dijk, 2006). Consequently, overstatement is still a potent rhetorical device, but its effects depend on the audience's reaction, the context, and the level of exaggeration used in political contexts.

## **2.3 Model of analysis**

Leech and Short's (2007) framework focuses on stylistic analysis of texts. It concentrates on the linguistic elements that contribute to meaning. This framework aids in analyzing how overstatement is shaped by combining of textual structure, figurative language, grammar, and vocabulary choices. It has a significant effect on showing the more fundamental effects of language. This model further provides a useful and practical tool for analyzing how linguistic elements, including repetition, metaphor, simile, personification, modality, tone, and assertion, are used to construct political overstatements. These stylistic tools are illustrated as follows:

1. **Metaphor:** It emphasizes particular qualities and amplifies a message by comparing between two distinct items. This linguistic technique gives more nuance and emotional resonance.

2. **Repetition:** Repetition entails the purposeful use of repeated words or phrases to mark important ideas. Recurring particular components could strengthen the impact of the message and help make them remembered.

3. **Parallelism:** It is a repetition of grammatical structures within sentences in the aim of establishing emphasis and rhythm. It amplifies and strengthens the effect and the significance of the message.

4. **Simile:** It is a comparison of two things through using uses the words "like" or "as" to highlight a particular characteristic of the circumstance. It is frequently employed in a dramatic or exaggerated way.

5. **Hyperbole:** It is an exaggerated remark that is used to accentuate a certain point. It enhances the emotional power and relevance of this point.

6. **Personification:** it attributes human characteristics to inanimate objects or abstract ideas to highlight their significance in the conversation.

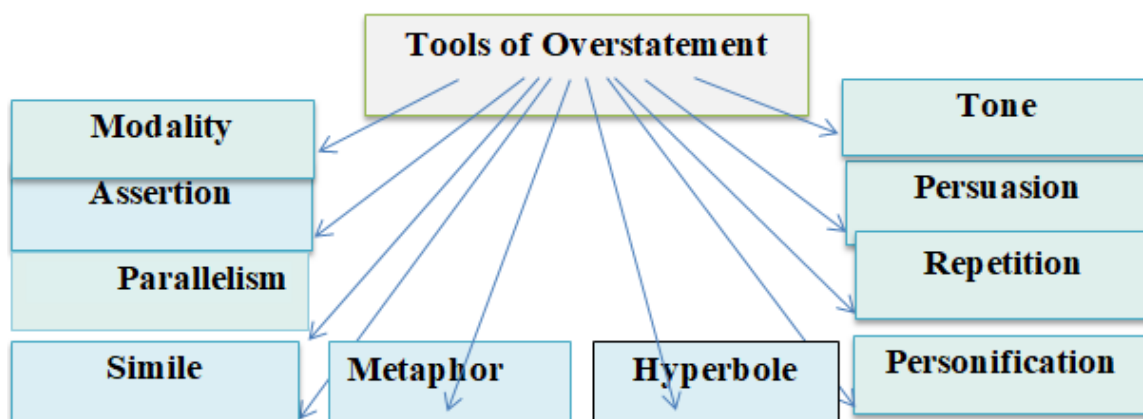
7. **Tone:** It refers to the mood and emotional attitudes that the speaker tries to convey. It influences the audience's perception of the message and determines whether it is urgent, angry, or hopeful.

8. **Modality:** It uses modal verbs to convey importance or urgency to show the speaker's certainty, necessity, or obligation .

9. **Assertion:** It presents something as a fact or truth and creates authority or urgency in the discourse.

10. **Persuasion:** It affects the audiences' attitudes by using emotional appeals and exaggeration to elicit the intended response.

**These stylistic tools are represented in Figure (1)**



**Figure (1) Model of Analysis based Leech and Short's (2007)**

### 3. Methodology of the study

#### 3.1 Data collection and Description

Regarding data collection, the researcher has selected six extracts from two of Harris's political speeches. These speeches have been taken from authentic web sources (see references list). Her first concession speech was delivered on November 6, 2024, at Howard University. Vice President Kamala Harris reaffirmed her dedication to the democratic principles and to the continuous struggle for equality and justice. Concerning the second speech, it was inaugural speech delivered in Washington on January 20, 2021. She focused on the ability of the country to overcome obstacles and on unity and perseverance. Overstatement was employed in these two speeches through the use of exaggerated statements, as illustrated in the abovementioned stylistic devices.

#### 4. Data Analysis:

##### 4.1 Meeting the First Objective

To meet the first objective, which reads "examine the overstatement stylistic tools employed in political discourse, the researcher is to identify with reference example the various stylistic tools employed in her selected speeches, as shown below:

##### Speech 1. Extract 1

**"On the campaign, I would often say when we fight, we win. But here's the thing, here's the thing, sometimes the fight takes a while. That doesn't mean we won't win. That doesn't mean we won't win. The important thing is don't ever give up. Don't ever give up. Don't ever stop trying to make the world a better place. You have power. You have power. And don't you ever listen when anyone tells you something is impossible because it has never been done before."**

In this extract, Kamala Harris employed various stylistic strategies; repetition, parallelism, exaggeration, assertion, tone, modality, and persuasion to make the message emotionally charged and motivational. Repetition appeared in the phrases "here's the thing" and "don't ever give up"; it reinforced the theme of perseverance and emphasized emotional impact. Parallelism was revealed in statements such as, "don't ever give up" and "don't ever stop trying to make the world a better place". Such a tool adds rhythm and connects a personal resilience to the social change. Exaggeration or hyperbole appeared in declarations, like: "you have power," aiming to empower listeners and enhance their sense of agency. Assertion was exemplified in the phrase "we will win"; it conveyed confidence and gave an idealized vision of success. The tone was marked by a deliberate overstatement of what persistence can achieve. Modality was shown in the modal verb "will"; it gave a strong determination and framed success as inevitable. These combined elements created a narrative of hope and progress, and inspired the audience to believe in the transformative power of continuous effort.

**Speech 1. Extract 2**

**"We will never give up the fight to protect our schools and our streets from gun violence. And America we will never give up the fight for our democracy, for the rule of law, for equal justice, and for the sacred idea that every one of us, no matter who we are or where we start out, has certain fundamental rights and freedoms that must be respected and upheld"**

Kamala Harris used a range of stylistic devices, as repetition, parallelism, hyperbole, assertion, tone, and modality to craft a powerful message that underscored her dedication to democratic principles. The repeated and exaggerated phrase "we will never give up the fight" highlighted both the persistence and emotional gravity of her stance. Parallel structures, such as "the fight to protect our schools and our streets" and "the fight for our democracy, for the rule of law, for equal justice," emphasized the equal importance of various causes and strengthen their collective rhetorical impact. In using assertions like the claim that certain rights "must be respected and upheld," Harris presented her views as moral imperatives. Her passionate tone was integrated with high-modality verbs like "will," projecting as a result certainty and determination. Altogether, these devices created an emotionally persuasive appeal to affirm the ideological foundation of her political message.

**Speech1. Extract 3**

**"Let me say my heart is full today. My heart is full today, full of gratitude for the trust you have placed in me, full of love for our country, and full of resolve. The outcome of this election is not what we wanted, not what we fought for, not what we voted for. But hear me when I say, hear me when I say, the light of America's promise will always burn bright as long as we never give up and as long as we keep fighting. To my beloved Doug and our family, I love you so very much."**

In this extract, Harris skillfully employed a blend of stylistic tools like metaphor, repetition, parallelism, hyperbole, assertion, tone, and modality to construct an overstatement that reinforced an emotionally resonant and ideologically strong message. Metaphorical use in the phrase "the light of America's promise will always burn bright," likened the American ideals to a perpetual light, overstated the endurance and purity of these values and invoked a spiritual sense of hope. The repetition of phrases like: "My heart is full today" and "hear me when I say," highlighted sincerity and heightened Harris's emotional state. The repeated word "full" expressed a feeling of overflowing thankfulness, affection, and determination. Parallelism was shown in her sequence "full of gratitude... full of love... full of resolve," which enhanced Harris's emotions by overlaying them evenly. The repeated assertions that the speaker's heart was "full," implied an emotional overflow that heightened the dramatic impact of the speech. They are considered blatant examples of hyperbole. Through assertion, such as: the confident claimed that America's promise "will always burn bright," the speaker elevated the national ideals to an unquestionable status, overstating their permanence. The tone in this extract was resolute and hopeful to uplift and motivate the audience in the difficult times. Finally, modality was expressed through using the modal verb "will," which signaled certainty and inevitability, and reinforced the idea that America's core values were

indestructible. Altogether, these devices magnified the emotional and ideological message, and allowed Harris to portray resilience and unity in the face of political adversity.

#### **Speech1. Extract 4**

**"And we will continue to wage this fight in the voting booth, in the courts and in the public square. And we will also wage it in quieter ways: in how we live our lives by treating one another with kindness and respect, by looking in the face of a stranger and seeing a neighbor, by always using our strength to lift people up, to fight for the dignity that all people deserve"**

Several stylistic tools, such as repetition, hyperbole parallelism, personification, tone, modality, and persuasion were used in the above mentioned extract to convey a sense of perseverance in the pursuit of justice, unity and commitment through overstatement. The repeated the phrase "we will," which occurred multiple times emphasized an unyielding determination and portrayed the fight for justice as relentless and inevitable. Hyperbole presented the idea that the everyday activities, such as kindness or recognizing a neighbor in a stranger could advance justice, thus it overstated their actual societal impact. Parallelism was evident in the structured phrases like "in the voting booth, in the courts and in the public square," and "by treating one another with kindness and respect, by looking in the face of a stranger and seeing a neighbor," which amplified the reach of the struggle .This was done by manifesting it in all domains of life. Personification presented values such as kindness and respect as agents in the fight, suggesting these abstract qualities had tangible power, which inflated their role in systemic change. The tone was uplifting; it magnified the importance of the individual acts by framing them as part of a broader and were almost sacred mission. Modality was expressed in the repeated use of "we will," which gave a sense of certainty and inevitability; it further enhanced overstatement by portraying justice as a guaranteed outcome. Finally, through using persuasion, Harris convinced her audience with the idea that even the simplest personal actions are integral to the collective effort. This overstated the direct influence of individual behavior on large-scale transformation. Through these stylistic tools, the extract idealized the pursuit of justice and infused it with emotional and rhetorical force.

#### **Speech2. Extract 5**

**"It demonstrates who we are, even in dark times. We not only dream, we do. We not only see what has been, we see what can be. We shoot for the moon, and then we plant our flag on it. We are bold, fearless, and ambitious. We are undaunted in our belief that we shall overcome, that we will rise up."**

In the aim of creating an assertive and optimistic tone and reinforcing the idea collective action, Harris used various linguistic tools such as repetition, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, tone, modality, and assertion in this extract. These devices contributed to a deliberate overstatement of the group's potential. The repetition of phrases such as:"we not only" in lines like "We not only dream, we do. We not only see what has been, we see what can be" , a rhythmic emphasis was created and the contrast between current realities and future possibilities is dramatized. Moreover, It heightened the sense of agency, and suggested

that dreaming was always accompanied by doing action. Thus overstated the ease with which transformation occurred. Metaphor played a crucial role, particularly in the phrase "We shoot for the moon, and then we plant our flag on it," by which Harris conveyed a sense of audacious ambition. By evoking the iconic image of conquering the moon, she overstated the group's capacity to achieve seemingly impossible feats. Hyperbole was evident in the cosmic imagery, it inflated achievements to mythic proportions and created an idealized view of collective power. Personification was used to imbue the collective "we" with human traits like boldness, fearlessness, ambition, which made the group feel animated, self-determined, and unstoppable. This in turn elevated the collective identity to one of heroic stature. The tone was an unwaveringly confident and triumphant, it reinforced the message that nothing stood in the group's way. It exaggerated the effect of the message by portraying success as something inevitable. This idea was enhanced by using modality which was exemplified in declarative phrases like "we shall overcome" and "we will rise up," which expressed certainty. The use of these modal constructions overstated the possibility of overcoming by implying that positive outcomes were guaranteed. Lastly, assertion was seen in the unequivocal claim, "We are bold, fearless, and ambitious" which presented these characteristics as essential truths rather than aspirational traits. The use of these tools bolstered the audience's morale and contributed to the overall overstatement of the group's capabilities; a matter which suggested a nearly infallible path to victory.

### Speech 2. Extract 6

**"This too is American aspiration. This is what President Joe Biden has called upon us to summon now, the courage to see beyond crisis. To do what is hard, to do what is good. To unite, to believe in ourselves, believe in our country, believe in what we can do together."**

In this extract, multiple linguistic strategies, like repetition, metaphor, parallelism, hyperbole, personification, assertion, modality, and tone were utilized to construct an uplifting and assertive message that centered on aspiration, unity, and belief. Repetition of the phrase "believe in" emphasized the sense of belief as a transformative force and its effectiveness by simplifying a complex societal change. The phrase "This too is American aspiration" was metaphorically used to elevate courage and unity to national ideals and to exaggerate their universality. Parallelism was evident in the phrase "to do what is hard, to do what is good"; it presented moral and difficult tasks as equally attainable, downplaying the real challenges they entailed. Hyperbole arose in the phrases "doing what is hard" and "what is good," which exaggerated the effectiveness of moral resolve crises. Through personification, America was framed as something that can be "summoned." It implied a unified will that might not truly exist. The tone was motivational; it overstated that the idea of belief and unity would lead to a national progress. Assertive modality was shown in phrases like "to unite" and "to believe," helping to construct these actions as both essential and readily achievable, masking the complexity of real-world implementation. The final assertion, attributing the call to President Biden, framed the message as a collective imperative, overstating the influence of presidential rhetoric on a diverse populace. Collectively, these strategies built a compelling but idealized portrayal of the American resilience and unity.

## 4.2 Results and Discussion

The analysis of the six extracts illustrates the employment of stylistic and rhetorical devices for the purpose of intensifying exaggeration, thereby reinforcing the politician's assertions of unbending determination, the unlimited potential, and exaggerated sense of urgency. Metaphorical language has been employed to dramatize such abstract concepts as ambition and hope as unlimited energies with the capacity to surmount adversity. Through repetition, the key messages have been reinforced by hardening the resolve of the speaker and the importance of the messages. It has aided in creating an urgency and determination and elevated the concept of perseverance to a new level. The effect of the speech has been emphasized and highlighted by the utilization of parallelism reinforcing ultimately the notion that the realization of justice, freedom, and democracy is a never-ending process, thereby granting the utterances a firmer and more equitable form. The seriousness of the battle has been intensified through employing hyperbole. Harris depicted the battle as expansive and gigantic, and possibility of defeat was simply unacceptable. Personification enhanced the hyperbole by giving human qualities to abstract ideas like freedom and justice. It made these ideals seem more relevant and critical to the effort. The modality supported the guarantee of triumph; it helped in declaring that winning the war was certain no matter what obstacles were encountered. The tone was both declarative and even celebratory; it increased the emotive appeal of the message. Exaggeration was consistently employed to overestimate the prospects for success and the ethical high ground of the cause, thereby minimizing space for cynicism or doubt. Moreover, the persuasive appeal was strongly rooted, summoning the audience to action, which seems both inevitable and essential. Combined, these stylistic tools intensified overstatement by advancing an idealized image that rendered the politician's case seem nearly certain, definite, and positive.

## Conclusions

This study finds that political leaders employ a range of rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, persuasion, hyperbole, repetition, simile, personification, tone, assertion, parallelism, and modality, purposefully to highlight their key points and achieve specific purposes. These rhetorical and stylistic devices have been employed for intensifying perceived significance of issues. Politicians have heightened the urgency and importance of their causes by elevating the stakes, the prospects for success, or the adversity involved. In addition, exaggeration has found to function as a means to enhance the emotional commitment to action and to develop a collective faith in the enterprise, which often works to reinforce resolve in the face of adversity. Politicians' use of rhetorical strategies have revealed to control public emotion and facilitate social or political transformation.

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