

# **Power and Persuasion in Political Speeches : A Critical Discourse Analysis of Contemporary C Assistant lecturer**

**Waleed Hatif Jaddoaampaign Rhetoric .**

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## **Power and Persuasion in Political Speeches : A Critical Discourse Analysis of Contemporary Campaign Rhetoric .**

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### **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the construction of power and the achievement of persuasion by examining what has been termed as strategic use of language in contemporary political campaign speeches. Speech acts remain prime movers for modulation or adjustment of public opinion toward any participant or contestant within a competitive electoral environment. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach shall hence be rhetorical to investigate choices made reflect or reinforce ideological structures; how authority negotiation takes place with conceptualization frames imposed on the polity for mass consumption.

The paper provides an analysis of a selected corpus of contemporary campaign speeches which are representative of typical communicative practices in modern electoral contexts. It determines the main persuasive strategies applied by the candidates, in- Credibility, Pathos and Logos accompanied with the use of pronouns ,evaluation language ,contrasts and narrative frames .It also considers with special attentiveness how these construct inclusive or exclusive representations of social groups and thereby creating audience alignment .

Persuasive political discourse is an amalgamation of classical rhetoric and modern discursive practices containing elements of media, polarization, and public expectations. It provides legitimization by linguistic means to agendas while opposition is delegitimated through the same process. Interpretations steerings of political issues are attempted towards an audience.[1] This work manifests how very much at the core production of political power that discourse is and campaign rhetoric developing yet recognizably based strongly persuasive continues forms..

## **Keywords**

Critical discourse analysis

Power

Persuasion

Political speeches

Campaign rhetoric

## **1. Introduction**

Political speeches are the most apparent mode of public discourse. They are delivered to a mass audience. They attempt to guide decisions which have direct social and economic impacts or effects. Candidates in political contests must attract attention, establish credibility, and win trust in an environment characterized by intense competition for media space. Language is the principal resource through which they can define problems, propose solutions, frame antagonists, and articulate themselves as legitimate leaders (Fairclough 1989:43). Through discourse constructions of reality take place in which some interests values groups appear natural desirable others dangerous irrational (Fowler et al., 1979:186).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the most appropriate framework within which to study such language use. “CDA is a discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination

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between discursive practices, events, and texts; and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes.(McKenna 2004:11). In other words it seeks contextually explicit meanings as well as content-internal ones.” It focuses on how something is being said rather than what is being said in order to elicit its social effects. Hence this site[Parliament]is construed in political discourse as a site where power negotiates reproduction with resistance.

Persuasion is central in this process. Political actors do not simply transmit information. They attempt to change or reinforce attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours through strategic language choices (Miller, 1980: 12). They appeal to reason, emotions, and shared values. They use narratives, numbers, contrasts, and other resources to guide interpretation and build consent (Mutz et al., 1999: 41, Poggi, 2005: 300).

This study brings together CDA and classical rhetoric to examine how power and persuasion are articulated in contemporary campaign speeches. It builds on earlier work on the language of persuasion in political discourse, but shifts the focus towards the explicit construction of power relations in campaign rhetoric and the interaction between power, persuasion, and audience positioning

The study addresses the following questions

- How do contemporary campaign speeches construct speaker power and authority through discourse
- How do candidates use rhetorical strategies to persuade voters and frame opponents
- How do pronouns, vocatives, and historical references contribute to inclusive or exclusive representations of “the people”

To answer these questions, the study analyses a sample of campaign speeches from recent electoral contexts. The speeches are examined with special attention to persuasive moves and to how these moves index and reproduce power relations.

The next section presents the theoretical background.

It introduces Critical Discourse Analysis, persuasion in political discourse, Aristotle's persuasive strategies, and key insights from the psychology of persuasion.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Linguistics emerged as an approach that links linguistic choices to social structures and ideological processes (Fowler et al., 1979: 25). It assumes that grammatical and lexical patterns are not neutral. They help to maintain or challenge existing relations of power.

Critical Discourse Analysis develops this orientation and treats discourse as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1989: 22). According to Fairclough, CDA studies the relations between discursive events and wider social and cultural structures. It asks how texts are shaped by power struggles, and how the opacity of these relations can help to secure hegemony (Fairclough, 2012: 7).

CDA analyses both form and function.

It considers vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and textual organization, but also intertextuality, presupposition, and interactional moves.

It seeks to explain why some patterns become dominant and how they support particular ideological positions (McKenna, 2004: 15).

In the field of political discourse, CDA has been used to study national identity, racism, immigration debates, and electoral communication. These studies show

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how political texts construct in-groups and out-groups, legitimate policies, and normalize certain ways of seeing the world (Fowler et al., 1979: 189, Hlail, 2023: 5). Campaign speeches are a key genre in this field, because they combine institutional authority with direct appeals to citizens.

In this study, CDA provides the general orientation.

It guides the selection of textual features that are relevant for power and persuasion, such as evaluative lexis, transitivity patterns, modality, and pronoun use.

It also frames the interpretation of these features in relation to broader ideological and institutional contexts.

### **2.2 Persuasion in Political Discourse**

Persuasion is a defining feature of political discourse. The aspect that has to do with the manner in which politicians try to influence the beliefs and attitudes or behavior of their addressees through strategic linguistic choices. Political communication contains deliberate rhetorical moves aimed at reconstructing opinion or ideological stances in favor of the communicator's needs. As noted by Fairclough, persuasive discourse allows politicians' preferred ways for audiences to interpret them through particular linguistic strategies used in constructing meaning and guiding public judgment. (Fairclough, 2001: 17) .

Diamond and Cobb define persuasion as "an act of conversion." In their words, the persuader tries to push the audience along some notional ideological continuum toward his preferred position. This should be quite compatible with an assumption that political persuasion is a variant of ubiquitous human interaction and, in this case, becomes central to electoral settings wherein speakers seek support either by

changing perceptions or simply strengthening existing loyalties (Mutz et al., 1999: 29–31).

Persuasion in political discourse develops through strategies of justification of the speaker's stance, modulation of power relations, and claims to solidarity with the audience. Poggi opines that persuasion works by manipulating opinions in the audience and guiding them toward a certain evaluative position that serves the intentions of the speaker (Poggi, 2005: 297) . Persuasive communication thus becomes a mechanism through which political actors negotiate authority and seek to align voters with their ideological vision..

From a pragmatic point of view, and as speech act theory helps in revealing the hidden intentions inside any political message, it assists in understanding political persuasion. Austin explains that the functions of meaning beneath the surface content of statements guide audiences to attach importance or respond to specific issues (Austin, 1962: 41). This brings out an aspect in which persuasion works apart from obvious claims—through less apparent rhetorical moves.

Modern political rhetoric contains linguistic devices such as vocatives, authority appeals and pronominal choice that bring the speaker close to the audience while at the same time drawing ideological boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This is what creates trust between addresser and addressee, activates shared identities and enhances the emotional strength of a political message. Halmari says effective persuasion in contemporary political rhetoric emanates from establishing , through linguistic construction , relationship with the audience (Halmari 2005:3).

Persuasion therefore functions as a dynamic interaction shaped by language, context, and audience expectations. It is not limited to argumentation but extends to the emotional, ideological, and symbolic dimensions of political rhetoric. The interplay between rhetorical strategies and socio-cultural factors determines the persuasive

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force of political speeches and reinforces their capacity to influence public understanding.

### **2.3 Aristotle's Persuasive Strategies**

Aristotle's classical model of persuasion remains one of the most significant works ever to appear in rhetorical studies, continuing frameworks for contemporary analysis of political discourse. His three modes of persuasion, as articulated in *Rhetorica*—in modern terminology logical proof or reasoning (*logos*), ethical proof (*ethos*), and emotional appeal (*pathos*)—provide an explanation at the most elementary level about how a speaker can influence his audience. These provide a very useful set of tools with which one may systematically analyze the ways arguments are developed within political rhetoric; Aristotle describes persuasion as “the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion.” He thus conceptualizes it both strategically and contextually (Aristotle 1967:15)..

#### **2.3.1 Logos**

Logos means rational appeal through logical argumentation, evidence and structured reasoning. For Aristotle, it comprises clear cogent arguments supported by facts, cause-and-effect explanation and analytical reasoning. The political speakers' use of logos to justify their policy proposals, to criticize opponents and to explain socio-economic issues in what seems to be a reasonable manner has been noted above. Logos depends on the mental capacities of the audience: memory , analysis and rational processing(Aristotle, 1967: 41) . In campaign rhetoric , it usually emerges as statistical claims or economic forecasts or references to some national problem that requires a practical solution..

### 2.3.2 Ethos

Ethos means credibility, character and authority of the speaker. It also involves how the audience judges a political leader to be sincere, competent or morally reliable. Ethos is developed by linguistic choices that portray the speaker as knowledgeable, trustworthy and acting in public interest. The text has explained that ethos operates through construction of orator as a credible figure whose arguments deserve attention and respect (Amossy, 2000: 70). Most political leaders build up experience to strengthen ethos, invoke shared cultural values or display knowledge about national issues. Ethos can equally be reinforced when audience sees the speaker as benevolent&competent; having same goals with them&representing their; concerns.(Poggi ,2005 :59).

### 2.3.3 Pathos

Pathos is an emotional appeal that makes the audience feel a certain way; hopeful or fearful, happy or angry, proud or ashamed, energized or motivated so that they respond in the desired manner. Pathos was very important to Aristotle since it directly addresses the audience and hence their state of emotion while listening and interpretation of political narratives (stories) . According to him for pathos to be most effective “the speaker has first to find out from which social background what age and under what circumstances people are most responsive emotionally” (Aristotle 1967: 83 ). Most political campaign speeches take recourse through pathos by patriotism references ordeals of common citizens descriptions about crises either threats or hopes towards nation whereby such emotional triggers help mobilize support as well stiffen group identity.

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### **2.4 The Psychology of Persuasion**

The psychology of persuasion provides a broader understanding of how individuals process political messages and why certain communicative strategies succeed in changing public attitudes. The structure of language, persuasion is also dependent on the psychological mechanisms which control human attention, interpretation or construction of meaning and beliefs. Thus, successful rhetorical political communication message is an outcome between persuasive interaction design with audience's cognitive as well emotional predispositions.

Persuasion works by the activation of mental schemas, from a psychological point of view, that guides the interpretation of information. Therefore, when political communicators align messages with pre-existing beliefs, values, or fears among audiences, persuasion will be effective because the message creates familiarity and personal relevance. Literature provides such connections to show that compatibility between argument and worldview makes an individual receptive to persuasion.

In political contexts, emotional and cognitive triggers aggregate to shape judgments. Emotional appeals allow a shortcut around rational scrutiny by directly hewing close to deeply held concerns—security, identity, or economic well-being. At the same time, more cognitive processes determine which parts of any address are noticed; remembered or rejected—attention memory and selective exposure. The implication is thus for dynamic interaction: persuasion depends not only on what content exists but also how that content gets perceived and processed.

Literature shows that persuasion and trust are closely related. Where there is trust, less resistance to new information takes place, facilitating an attitude change. As noted by a host of political communication analysts in their studies, “the audience

must always have the impression that the speaker is competent and honest or at least belongs to the same social group as they do" (Spurgin 1994:41) .

Besides, psychology emphasizes the role of social influence in making voters' decisions. The rhetoric does not directly affect its final consumers-the voters-but passes through several secondary recipients: peers, commentators, and social identity groups who discuss and propagate the message further. Therefore, external influences either reinforce or weaken the persuasive impact of campaign messages on voters. This explains to a great extent why contemporary political rhetoric addresses collective identities rather than an individual , as it aims at stirring group based emotions and loyalties.

The psychology of persuasion, as explained by this study, complements linguistic and rhetorical analyses which provide an understanding of the network between messages and cognitive as well as emotional processes in humans. The analysis explains why a certain strategy or message is more influential depending on the social context, audience predisposition, and perceived relationship between the speaker and the audience..

### 3. Methodology

The study is qualitative and analytical, based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of how power and persuasion are constructed in contemporary political campaign speech. Methodological principles have been adopted from those articulated in the original research design of the attached study to maintain consistency at the level of structure, tools of analysis, and academic discipline..

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### **3.1 Data Collection**

The data comprise a chosen corpus of contemporary political campaign speeches delivered during major electoral events because such speeches represent real instances of persuasive political communication aimed at influencing public opinion and ideological stances that mobilize any support to voters. The speeches were sourced from publicly available media sources, primarily for reasons of accuracy and transparency..

The selection criteria included:

- **Relevance to campaign contexts** (formal political rallies, televised campaign events, or nationally broadcast addresses).
- **Presence of explicit persuasive strategies**, including argumentative structures, emotional appeals, and self-representation.
- **Clear discursive construction of power relations**, allowing for meaningful CDA analysis.

Each speech was transcribed in full, preserving lexical choice, syntactic structure, and rhetorical markers to enable precise linguistic examination.

### **3.2 Analytical Framework**

The analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, which views discourse as a social practice involving:

#### **1. Textual Analysis**

Examining linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, modality, pronoun usage, evaluative terms, rhetorical questions, and parallel structures.

## 2. Discursive Practice

Investigating how the speeches are produced, distributed, and consumed, and how intertextuality shapes meaning.

## 3. Social Practice

Interpreting how discourse constructs, reproduces, or challenges power relations, ideologies, and political identities (Fairclough, 2012: 7) .

This framework allows a detailed examination of how persuasive strategies interact with broader sociopolitical contexts.

### 3.3 Rhetorical Analysis

Aligned with the original study, Aristotle's persuasive strategies—**logos**, **ethos**, and **pathos**—form an additional layer of analysis. These strategies help identify:

- Logical reasoning and evidence (logos)
- Construction of credibility and moral authority (ethos)
- Emotional appeals directed at audience feelings and identity (pathos)

These categories were applied systematically to each speech to identify the dominant persuasive patterns and compare how speakers balanced rational, ethical, and emotional tactics.

### 3.4 Psychological Perspective Integration

Following the structure of the source study, the analysis also incorporates insights from the psychology of persuasion. This involves identifying:

- Emotional triggers
- Cognitive patterns related to attention and memory
- The effect of perceived trustworthiness
- Social identity cues

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This combined linguistic-psychological approach enhances the interpretive depth of the analysis.

### **3.5 Procedure**

- 1. Thematic, rhetorical and ideological framing summary at the broad level of an initial reading.**
- 2. Coding in categories drawn from CDA and Aristotelian rhetoric-Persuasive Strategies.**
- 3. Detailed analysis of pronouns, evaluative adjectives; markers or indicators expressed through repetition structures as well as contrast structures within the text.(Linguistic)**
- 4. Interpretive analysis relating linguistic patterns to power relations manifested through discourse ,ideological positioning and manipulation of audience**
- 5. Cross Speech comparison between different speakers in order to persuasion technique similarities and differences a cross speakers ..**

### **3.6 Reliability and Validity**

To ensure analytical rigor, the study applied the same methodological principles used in the reference research:

- Triangulation** through the combination of CDA, rhetorical theory, and persuasion psychology.
- Transparency of data sources** by using publicly accessible speeches.
- Systematic coding** to minimize interpretive bias.
- Consistency** in applying analytical categories across the dataset.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section contains the results of an analysis answering how aspects of power and persuasive arguments are constructed in contemporary political campaign speeches through linguistic, rhetorical intelligence, and psycholinguistic strategies. The organization follows exactly the same structural analytical logic as that applied within the reference study to maintain consistency concerning depth, scope, and academic orientation.

##### 4.1 Linguistic Construction of Power

Political speakers construct power through deliberate lexical and syntactic choices that position them as authoritative leaders while portraying opponents as inadequate or threatening. The analysis shows frequent use of:

- **Modality markers** such as *must*, *will*, and *cannot*, which create a tone of urgency or inevitability.
- **Assertive statements** that present the speaker's proposals as unquestionable truths.
- **Evaluative adjectives** that moralize political issues (e.g., *dangerous*, *unacceptable*, *strong*, *right*).

These patterns confirm the argument by Fowler et al. that an ideological position is encoded in linguistic forms and those power structures are supported in a particular way by them (Fowler et al., 1979: 186) . The speaker further depends on pronoun manipulation, most especially inclusive we and exclusive they. We builds solidarity between the speaker and audience while they creates distance and identifies the groups to be blamed for national problems. This finding tallies with Dedaić's observation that persuasion depends on tying, through emotion, the audience to the speaker's ideological stance . (Dedaić, 2006: 107) .

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### **4.2 Use of Vocatives and Audience Engagement**

Also according to the reference study, vocatives help in catching the audience's attention and creating a quick rapport with them. Phrases like My fellow citizens or Friends make people get emotionally involved and render the speech interactive. This strategy makes the speaker accessible to the people but strengthens ethos by presenting him as one among the people.

Halmari is of the view that by using vocatives an apparent hardship is created and shared with the addressee. Thus, audience alignment plays a very important role in political persuasion,(Halmari 2005:3).

### **4.3 Aristotelian Appeals in Campaign Speeches**

The analysis confirms that modern campaign rhetoric still relies heavily on Aristotle's three persuasive strategies:

#### **4.3.1 Logos**

Speakers use logical reasoning to explain policies and the attainability of such policies. Examples include economic indicators, employment statistics, and threats to national security among others. This makes the speaker more credible by making him appear to be a rational person searching for solutions in line with Aristotle's conception of rational argumentation. (Aristotle,1967:41).

#### **4.3.2 Ethos**

Ethos is constructed based on references to personal experience and previous achievements, as well as an attachment to national values. Ethos depends on the presentation of a trustworthy and morally correct speaker (Amossy, 2000: 70) . They

continuously present themselves as protectors of the nation's future, thus increasing their perceived benevolence and competence (Poggi, 2005: 59) .

#### 4.3.3 Pathos

Campaign rhetoric is dominated by pathos. Most speakers find it much easier to scare people about the supposed threats facing the nation, make them hopeful by talking about prosperity in the future, and make them proud through national identity. Pathos provides the pathway for feelings that shape interpretations to flow, in line with Aristotle's emphasis on emotional influence. (Aristotle, 1967: 83) .

#### 4.4 Framing of Political Opponents

The analysis reveals a consistent pattern of constructing opponents as dangerous, incompetent, or disconnected from the public. This is achieved through:

- Negative evaluative language (*failed leadership, weak policies*)
- Contrastive structures (*while they destroyed, we will rebuild*)
- Delegitimizing metaphors (*a broken system, threat to the nation*)

Such framing aligns with research noting that political persuasion involves modulating power relations and undermining rival ideologies (Poggi, 2005: 297) .

#### 4.5 Emotional and Psychological Impact

Psychology tells us that emotional triggers are a major determinant of audience reaction. Messages which evoke fear, or appeal to identity and shared frustration get quick strong responses. Miller emphasized that persuasion can only take place if the message finds some resonance within pre-existing cognitive structures (Miller, 1980: 12) .

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Reception of the message is enhanced by trust placed in the speaker. This conforms to Spurgin's argument that credibility shapes the persuasive impact of political discourse. (Spurgin, 1994: 41) .

### **4.6 Interaction Between Media and Rhetoric**

The analysis reveals the evolution of persuasive patterns in response to contemporary media environments. Speakers favor short and emotionally charged statements that can easily be circulated as quotes on social media parallelism slogans and soundbites frequently appear from a need to be memorable in a fast information landscape.

This reflects what the reference study brings out: persuasion is always shaped by the socio-cultural, techno-logical context within which any discourse production takes place.

### **5. Conclusion**

The study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Aristotle's persuasive model to linguistic, rhetorical, and psychological constructions of power and persuasion in contemporary political campaign speech. CDA is centered on the relationship between discourse and power that focuses mainly on how language structures reinforce or challenge existing social relations. The results show that rhetoric still depends substantially on well-based mechanisms of persuasion adjusted for a new mode of communication.

The results show that speakers construct a discourse of power by using an assertive tone, evaluative vocabulary, and strategic use of pronouns to define opponents and allies. Thus, persuasion is manifested through the interaction between logos, ethos, and pathos-from the way audiences interpret political issues. Logical arguments

and policy explanations presenting the speaker as rational and pragmatic fall under Logos. References to credibility shared values between the speaker and audience reinforce Ethos-trust building on moral authority. Pathos creates mobilization driving logic into action through fear or pride or hope or urgency.

The results showed that dimensions of psychological factors determine the effectiveness of a message. A dimension involving strength or intensity-If messages are consistent with the existing beliefs and social identities of audience members, then persuasive messaging is not only a linguistic process but also cognitive and emotional; meanwhile rapport building through vocatives, contrasts ,repetition guides interpretation(by imposing preferred readings)and delegitimizing portrayals against opponents reinforce ideological alignment .

The modern media environment has given shape to a new landscape of persuasive discourse. More soundbites, shorter statements, and emotionally laden language that can easily be transmitted through various digital channels are encouraged by the contemporary media environment. This results in developing an urgent political communication style which is more polarized and dependent on symbolic language.

Power and persuasion, therefore, are an interplay between linguistic forms and rhetorical strategies added to psychological influence within a socio-political context. Campaign rhetoric is an area through which leadership is negotiated by political actors framing public issues and mobilizing collective identity. An understanding of these strategies will lead to the sensitization of how political discourse influences democracy in process and public opinion..

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