



Terrorism and the Ideology of Victory: a Critical Language Study of Barack Obama's Speech--'Osama Bin Laden is Dead.'

Edna Ngozi Chuku

Department of Foundation and General Studies, School of Foundation and General Studies, Port Harcourt, Polytechnic, Rumuola, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
ednachuku@yahoo.com; Tel: 08033327312

Abstract: This paper examines how the language of President Barack Obama reflects victory as the main ideology against terrorism. The 9/11 attacks on the World's Trade Centre and the Pentagon in 2001 announced a new wave of sophistication and complexity in global terrorism as the issues of national security and peace were tested and threatened. The assumption of this paper is that a critical appraisal of Obama's speech would reveal different shades of ideologies that are subsumed under the ideology of victory. The paper adopts the concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as proposed by Norman Fairclough (1995). The method of analysis is descriptive as the linguistic configuration of the speech provides the entry point of the analysis. The paper concludes that the ideology of victory in the president's speech espouses other ideologies which justify the pursuit of pacifism in the fight against global terrorism.

[Edna Ngozi Chuku. **Terrorism and the Ideology of Victory: a Critical Language Study of Barack Obama's Speech--'Osama Bin Laden is Dead.'** *Rep Opinion* 2020;12(1):25-30]. ISSN 1553-9873 (print); ISSN 2375-7205 (online). <http://www.sciencepub.net/report>. 6. doi:[10.7537/marsroj120120.06](https://doi.org/10.7537/marsroj120120.06).

Keyword: Terrorism, Language, Ideology and CDA

1. Introduction

September 11 of every year is set aside to commemorate the 9/11 twin terrorist attacks on the World's Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States of America in 2001, which led to the death of nearly three thousand people. From that moment, the American government intensified its fight against terrorism and the search for Osama bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda who masterminded the attacks. After almost ten years on the trail of the terrorist, the US President, Barack Obama, on May 2, 2011, announced the death of the world's most wanted terrorist. The year 2015 marks fourteen years of that incident which introduced a new dimension to global terrorism. Consequently, the effects of 9/11 have left increasing threats to the ideologies of security and pacifism and have so questioned the sovereignty of many independent countries in the world.

Therefore, the speech of President Obama on the death of Osama bin Laden is of importance for two reasons. First, it places the American nation on the page of victory in the fight against terrorism. Second, it creates a sort of psychological relief for the people who were directly or indirectly affected by those attacks. Terrorism is any act designed to threaten humanity. It is generally understood to feature diverse objectives. The word "terrorism" has both political and religious undertones. A lot of political organizations

practise terrorism to project their objectives. It has been practised by right-and left-wing political parties, nationalist groups, religious groups, revolutionaries, and ruling governments. Terrorists often exploit human fears to help them achieve these goals and in their pursuits, life and property are lost.

1.1 Language and Politics

Finegan (2004) argues that, "a language is a set of elements and a system for combining patterned expressions to be used to accomplish specific task in specific context...." He asserts further that, "the base of language use in context and language itself can be best viewed as a three-sided figure comprising, expression, meaning and context". This statement concludes that language is all about the expression of thoughts, ideas, emotions and the creation of meaning within a context. Language therefore, should be realized by concrete individual utterances made by participants in interactions. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative that linguistic constituents which add to meaning in any discourse should be studied with a view to accounting for how they reflect a speaker's intended meaning and subtle ideologies situated within a specific social context.

People use language to achieve various aims. It can be used for social integration and national development or international negotiations. Language can also be used to disintegrate social groups and

bring disunity. Through persuasive discourse (rhetoric) that cut across political divides, a social system can collapse or be erected. People engage in communicative activity whenever they use language which resides at the centre of every discourse. Language has been described as a system that constitutes meaningfulness in its own terms (Locke, 2004).

2. Discourse

One problem of discourse analysis is the delimitation of the very idea of discourse. Depending on the different theoretical approaches adopted for linguistic analysis, discourse is conceptualized in different ways. For some scholars structure is central, for others function, for many others its social role, and for some others, communicative features in terms of context, cultural interaction, and so on (Schiffrin, 1994). Discourse has been defined by various writers as language in use as social practice of describing, representing, constituting, constructing and negotiating meaning (Fairclough, 1989). The thrust of discourse is on the functional aspects of language. It involves those elements that make language a living experience in which communicative effectiveness is derived from message or text, addresser and addressee, writers or reader's reaction and their context or situation (Crystal, 2009). The focus of discourse is therefore on the potential object of text as a coherent and consistent means of interpersonal communication.

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is a multidisciplinary and analytic school of Discourse Analysis (DA) that emphasizes the way power related issues are exposed by text and talk. Nwagbara, (2007) posits that the theoretical principles of CDA analyzes language use as a communicative event, probing the social and ideological outcomes of language use as well as considering the extent to which language use represents the exercise of power and authority. It also involves an analysis of the relationship between language, power and ideology. The theory is used to explain language as a phenomenon that possesses meaning and conveys ideologies in particular contexts and is used for describing, interpreting, analysing, and critiquing language use in social life as reflected in texts.

The implication of the above is that language reflects a speaker's ideology. Fowler, (1996) is of the view that the ordinary reader (the oppressed) is not theorized, so he has to be equipped to engage in "demystifying" readings of ideology laden texts. The term "critical" is considered by Wodak (2007) as "making visible the interconnectedness of things" to "produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves through self and group reflection". In this study, this unveiling of

hidden things is vital because they are not obvious to the powerless, the oppressed hence may not be resisted. Fairclough clarifies three levels of doing CDA of any text: first being the context in which the text is produced; the second is the discourse practice level that is the way the text is received; the third level is the details of the text itself also referred to by him as the "textual level". CDA analytical concepts that are relevant to this study are power, ideology, identity and relationships. These concepts guided the choice of extracts for the macro analysis of the data for the study.

2.2 Language and Ideology

According to Fairclough, Critical Language Study (CLS) conceptualizes language as a type of social practice. He defines the term discourse as practice, which is discursive, meaning actual talk or writing. Interdependent networks within discourse and practice are called orders of discourse and orders of practice (Fairclough 2001). Indeed, when people become preoccupied with an idea, it soon comes to affect the way they speak about whatever subject that idea is related to, and if they want to spread an idea, doing so is to spread the way the idea makes them speak. Religions, philosophies and political orientations are all based in ideas which have come to determine how people speak, by giving great meanings to simple words. People hardly notice it because such ideologies have been in place for so long, and are so widely known that the way they make people speak is simply the norm for them.

Language projects ideologies when it contains specified phrases, the meanings of which escape a casual observer, and words we know may have completely different values than we assign them. This is where we can still witness how an idea, through language, becomes ideology. In order to come to a coherent interpretation of a written or spoken text it is necessary to make sense of it. We need to establish a fit between the text and the world. Coherence of a whole text is generated in a kind of chemical reaction, which you get when you put together what is 'in' the text and what is already 'in' the interpreter. We need to take into account that there are pre-existing common sense assumptions and expectations of the interpreter (Fairclough, 2001).

According to Fairclough common sense is ideological. It is essentially tied to power relations, in a way where common sense is seen as a tool of sustaining unequal power relations. Ideology is most effective when it is least visible. This is linked to the fact that anyone can challenge it, if they become aware of the processes of power relations. Invisibility is gained when ideologies are used not as explicit elements of the text, but as background assumptions, which then leads the reader to understand the text in a

certain way. When the members of a discourse find themselves confronted with an enemy, objectivity steps in and the question whether all the others are wrong and their own community or movement alone is right, is raised. The paralysis of their own strength surfaces and a number of different enemies is then regarded as one in such a way that the war is being waged against one enemy alone. This makes them stronger as a community (Fairclough, 2001).

Thus, ideological diversity puts limits on the so-called ideological common sense. There are cases where ideologies with few constituencies are nevertheless treated as common sense. In an effective ideological society all or almost all of the members will share this common sense. Often these ideological societies are groupings of a local sort, associated with certain institutions. In Fairclough's view the ideological struggle is of a special concern as it takes place in language. The struggle is apparent not only in language in text, but in all types of discourse. This consciousness of language use is a major characteristic of critical language study (CLS) (Fairclough, 2001).

3 Data

The full text of President Obama's speech got from the Internet forms the data for this paper. The Internet provides a textual version of the speech to make the speech analysable. The speech has twenty-four paragraphs made of one thousand three hundred and eighty-seven words.

3.1 Analysis of Data

The analysis of the speech is done following Fairclough's 1995 concepts of CDA which are predicated on the assumption that ideologies are couched in text and are subject to diverse interpretations. The analysis has been done following: text, process and social analysis.

3.2 Ideology of Victory

The ideology of victory is the main concern of the speech. However, other ideologies are subsumed under it as support strategies to justify every means through which victory is achieved. The ideology of victory is made operational through the act of killing the opposition. The death of bin Laden's is metaphorically projected in the following ways in President Obama's speech as a protective strategy, a means of providing justice to those who had been affected by the acts of terrorist groups, the restoration of peace and human dignity and a positive effort against terrorism. 'And so we went to war against al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies. We were also united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring those who committed this vicious attack to justice.' And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin

Laden and bring him to justice.... we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al Qaeda's terror: *Justice has been done. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity. The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat al Qaeda. The ideology of victory is made visible through the expressions: 'his demise', death, 'the killing', 'the capture', 'bring him to justice', 'they killed bin Laden', 'took custody of his body' 'the death of bin Laden', etc.*

3.3 Ideology of Social Responsibility

In this ideology, the president puts forth a case concerning the responsibilities of leadership. The president proves in this speech that the leadership owes the following the responsibility of ensuring the safety of life and property in all situation. The president makes references to himself using the first person singular pronoun 'I' to show his level of commitment to the American resolve towards the fight against terrorism. He begins on the note of stewardship when he says, 'Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world,' 'I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda,' 'I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden,' 'I met repeatedly with my national security team,' 'I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice.'

'Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties' Over the years, I've repeatedly made clear that we would take action within Pakistan if we knew where bin Laden was,' 'That is what we've done'. These efforts weigh on me every time I, as Commander-in-Chief, have to sign a letter to a family that has lost a loved one, or look into the eyes of a service member who's been gravely wounded'. 'Finally, let me say to the families who lost loved ones on 9/11 that we have never forgotten your loss, nor wavered in our commitment to see that we do whatever it takes to prevent another attack on our shores.'

3.4 Ideology of Solidarity/Neighbourliness

This ideology shows that the president has a humane approach to matters that bother on human interest. Here, the president recounts the level of assistance and friendship his country has extended other people. This show of benevolence is captured in the expression, 'We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood,' 'We reaffirmed our ties to each other, and our love of community and country'.

3.5 Ideology of Unity

The president presses the issue of the bond of unity that exists among the American people as the major factor for all the recorded successes. He stresses this ideology when he states that, 'in our time of grief, *the American people came together*' 'On that day, no matter where we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were, *we were united as one American family*' 'We were also united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring those who committed this vicious attack to justice,' 'And tonight, *let us think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11*',... *our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place*'.

3.6 Ideology of Appreciation /Commendation

This ideology is used to commend the effort of the military officers who were responsible for operations against terrorism. The president acknowledges the commitment of the military when he said, 'Over the last 10 years, *thanks to the tireless and heroic work of our military and our counterterrorism professionals, "A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability," "We give thanks for the men who carried out this operation, for they exemplify the professionalism, patriotism, and unparalleled courage of those who serve our country," "And they are part of a generation that has borne the heaviest share of the burden since that September day.*

3.7 Ideology of Collectivism

Collectivism is any philosophical social or political outlook that underscores the interdependence of every human being in a collective group and the priority of group's goal the goals of the individuals who make up the group. President Obama espouses this ideology by the use of the first person subjective plural pronouns 'we' and 'our'. The pronoun show that the president believes that the fight that brought down the terrorist is won on the grounds of a collective effort. Hence, he uses the expressions to project this ideology woven around the statement, 'Let us remember that *we* can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.' '... *we've* made great strides in that effort,' '*We've* disrupted terrorist attacks and strengthened our homeland defense,' '... *we* removed the Taliban government,' '... *we* worked with our friends and allies to capture,' '... *we* continued our broader efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat his network, '*we* developed more information about the possibility,' '*we* had located bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan,' '*We* must -- and *we* will -- remain vigilant at home and abroad,' 'As *we* do, *we* must also reaffirm that the United States is not

-- and never will be -- at war with Islam,' '*we* will never tolerate our security being threatened, nor stand idly by when our people have been killed,' '*We* will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies,' '*We* will be true to the values that make *us* who *we* are' and '*we* are once again reminded that America can do whatever *we* set our mind to'.

4. Findings

The analysis of this paper has been able to establish that the ideological constituents of president Obama's speech include those of social responsibility, unity, collectivism, appreciation, commendation and solidarity. Again, the analysis has shown that the president's actions against terrorism were driven by his duty towards providing justice for the affected citizens and protection against further attacks.

5. Conclusion

This paper has analysed the ideological components in the speech on the death of the terrorist, Osama bin Laden, in 2011. The analysis was based on Furlough's notion of ideology embedded in text dwelling on the assumption that meaning is enacted through critical interpretation of language. The paper has examined the strategies employed by President Barack Obama in presenting hidden ideologies in his speech. The language of the American president was examined against the backdrop that ideologies are reflected through language use. Hence, language becomes a reflection of hidden or indirectly espoused ideologies. The implication of this speech is that the ideology of victory is justified even when the means of achieving it is not socially acceptable, especially if national security and sovereignty are threatened.

References

1. Crystal, D. (2009). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cup.
2. Fairclough, N. (2003). *Textual Analysis for Critical Discourse Analysis Social Research*. London: Routledge (2001). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press..... (1995). *The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman..... (1989). *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
3. Finegan, E. (2004) *Language its Structure and Use* (4thedn). New York: Thomson Wadsworth.
4. Fowler, R. (1986). *Linguistic & Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
5. Lock, J. (2004) *Critical Discourse Analysis*: London Continuum.
6. Nwagbara, A.U. (2008). "Travelling Thoughts, Trailing Text: Vehicle Writing as Discourse" in *English Language and Literature: Cross Culture*

- Currents*. (Eds.) Cambridge Scholars Publishing House.
6. Schiffrin, D (1994) *Approaches to Discourse*. Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers.
 7. Van Dijk (2001). "Critical Discourse Analysis", in Schiffrin D., Tannen, D., Hamilton, H.E. (ed.) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Malden Mass: Blackwell..... (1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Study*. London: Sage Publications.....(1996) *Discourse, Power and Access. Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by R. Coulthard and M. Coulthard. London: Routledge.
 8. Wodak, R. (2007). *Pragmatic and Critical Discourse Analysis: A Cross Disciplinary Inquiry in Pragmatics Cognition*. U.S.A: John Benjamin Publishers.

Appendix

Osama Bin Laden Dead

Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children. It was nearly 10 years ago that a bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people in our history. The images of 9/11 are seared into our national memory -- hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky; the Twin Towers collapsing to the ground; black smoke billowing up from the Pentagon; the wreckage of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreak and destruction. And yet we know that the worst images are those that were unseen to the world. The empty seat at the dinner table. Children who were forced to grow up without their mother or their father. Parents who would never know the feeling of their child's embrace. Nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts.

On September 11, 2001, in our time of grief, the American people came together. We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood. We reaffirmed our ties to each other, and our love of community and country. On that day, no matter where we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were, we were united as one American family. We were also united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring those who committed this vicious attack to justice. We quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al Qaeda -- an organization headed by Osama bin Laden, which had openly declared war on the United States

and was committed to killing innocents in our country and around the globe. And so we went to war against al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies. Over the last 10 years, thanks to the tireless and heroic work of our military and our counterterrorism professionals, we've made great strides in that effort. We've disrupted terrorist attacks and strengthened our homeland defense.

In Afghanistan, we removed the Taliban government, which had given bin Laden and al Qaeda safe haven and support. And around the globe, we worked with our friends and allies to capture or kill scores of al Qaeda terrorists, including several who were a part of the 9/11 plot. Yet Osama bin Laden avoided capture and escaped across the Afghan border into Pakistan. Meanwhile, al Qaeda continued to operate from along that border and operate through its affiliates across the world. And so shortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda, even as we continued our broader efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat his network.

Then, last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community, I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden. It was far from certain, and it took many months to run this thread to ground. I met repeatedly with my national security team as we developed more information about the possibility that we had located bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan. And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice. Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties. After a fire fight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body. For over two decades, bin Laden has been al Qaeda's leader and symbol, and has continued to plot attacks against our country and our friends and allies. The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat al Qaeda. Yet his death does not mark the end of our effort. There's no doubt that al Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us.

We must -- and we will -- remain vigilant at home and abroad. As we do, we must also reaffirm that the United States is not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam. I've made clear, just as President Bush did shortly after 9/11 that our war is not against Islam. Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al Qaeda has

slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity. Over the years, I've repeatedly made clear that we would take action within Pakistan if we knew where bin Laden was. That is what we've done. But it's important to note that our counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding.

Indeed, bin Laden had declared war against Pakistan as well, and ordered attacks against the Pakistani people. Tonight, I called President Zardari, and my team has also spoken with their Pakistani counterparts. They agree that this is a good and historic day for both of our nations. And going forward, it is essential that Pakistan continue to join us in the fight against al Qaeda and its affiliates. The American people did not choose this fight. It came to our shores, and started with the senseless slaughter of our citizens. After nearly 10 years of service, struggle, and sacrifice, we know well the costs of war. These efforts weigh on me every time I, as Commander-in-Chief, have to sign a letter to a family that has lost a loved one, or look into the eyes of a service member who's been gravely wounded. So Americans understand the costs of war. Yet as a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened, nor stand idly by when our people have been killed. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies. We will be true to the values that make us who we are. And on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al Qaeda's

terror: Justice has been done. Tonight, we give thanks to the countless intelligence and counterterrorism professionals who've worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome. The American people do not see their work, nor know their names.

But tonight, they feel the satisfaction of their work and the result of their pursuit of justice. We give thanks for the men who carried out this operation, for they exemplify the professionalism, patriotism, and unparalleled courage of those who serve our country. And they are part of a generation that has borne the heaviest share of the burden since that September day. Finally, let me say to the families who lost loved ones on 9/11 that we have never forgotten your loss, nor wavered in our commitment to see that we do whatever it takes to prevent another attack on our shores. And tonight, let us think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11. I know that it has, at times, frayed. Yet today's achievement is a testament to the greatness of our country and the determination of the American people. The cause of securing our country is not complete. But tonight, we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for equality for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place. Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

1/25/2020