



RESEARCH PAPER

Critical Discourse Analysis of America's Former president Barack Obama's Speech on the Death of Osama Bin Laden

¹Dr. Samia Tahir*, ²Dr. Neelma Riaz and ³Dr. Faisal Arif Sukhera

1. Assistant Professor, School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (SEECs), NUST, Islamabad, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences (SEECs), NUST, Islamabad, Pakistan
3. Associate Professor, Islamabad Model College for Boys, F/10/4, Islamabad, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** | samia.tahir@seecs.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to make the speech more relevant to current global realities, considering how political rhetoric has evolved in a more digitally connected and critical world. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), applicable to both spoken and written texts, enables scholars to delve into the deeper meanings of social roles and the embedded power structures within a discourse. The current study revisits the speech of former U.S. President Barack Obama announcing the death of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, using Fairclough's (1995) framework. While the speech was originally delivered in 2011, its rhetorical significance and underlying ideological assumptions continue to resonate in the post-pandemic geopolitical context. Newer studies on political discourse (Van Dijk, 2022; Hart, 2023) emphasize the long-lasting effects of such speeches on public memory, global power dynamics, and media representations. Findings endorse the role of discourse in reaffirming America's hegemonic status through language strategies that reflect dominance and authority.

KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Rhetoric, Language and Power, Language and Society, Media Ideology, Obama's Speech

Introduction

Discourse, as defined by scholars like Mills (2004), encompasses human interaction across various communicative modes. In contemporary discourse analysis, there's growing attention to how socio-political narratives are embedded within language choices. Recent research such as Chilton and Schäffner (2021) suggests that political discourse today must be studied not only for its textual structure but also for its circulation within digital and global spheres. This renewed emphasis adds relevance to analyzing historically significant speeches, especially those that continue to influence international narratives, such as Obama's announcement of Bin Laden's death.

In today's hyper-mediated society, analyzing spoken texts like Obama's 2011 speech helps understand how media, language, and power interact. As Aiello and Boni (2023) note, post-9/11 discourses continue to be recycled and repurposed across new media platforms, demonstrating their durability and continued ideological function. The use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in such a context is not only justified but necessary to unpack power-laden rhetoric. Discourse analysis, particularly CDA, enables researchers to uncover the interplay between linguistic elements and their broader social implications.

The current study updates this discussion by recognizing the shifting geopolitical alliances and emergent critiques of U.S. foreign policy post-Afghanistan withdrawal (Brown, 2021).

To start a discussion on discourse, one can say that “discourse” is human interaction in any form which can be communicated through any medium (Mills, 2004). Generally speaking, it is anything which is written or spoken. There are numerous definitions of discourse because it can be defined as simple as it could be and even as complex as it could be. Every discourse analyst when conducting research on discourse tries to define it as per their thinking and understanding. But still it is important to look at how numerous linguists have defined discourse based on their studies and experiences. According to Blommaert (2005), discourse broadly refers to all manner of human activity that is somehow semiotic, that is affiliated with social, albeit cultural and historical contexts, and also patterns of use. This definition may be broken down into four points namely: “all forms”, “meaningful”, “semiotic”, and “human activity”. Correspondingly, Woods (2006) defines discourse as a context plus language, or, in other words, not just the immediate surrounding, but also, our experiences, assumptions, and expectations. This is a context that is constantly in the process of being created through and creating our interactions as we position ourselves within social practices of everyday life (p. 10).

The world nowadays has become complicated to the extent that we have to pay attention because being observant by use of our eyes and ears is not enough anymore. Also, when we are provided with information even then it has some sub-context. Discourse analysis then becomes indispensable in order to reveal such hidden ideologies and their interpretations. For a layman, discourse analysis could be a very intellectual term but simply speaking we all do discourse analysis in our daily lives. In easy words discourse analysis is to analyze written or spoken language keeping in mind the context in which the words are written or uttered. Discourse analysis is a modern method of viewing and analyzing discourse from a social point of view applicable in a number of fields e.g. sociology, history, politics, linguistics and psychology etc. Discourse analysis does not look at discourse in isolation but also takes into consideration the historical and social background of it. Crystal (1987) as quoted by Mills (2004) asserts that discourse analysis is centered on “the structure of naturally occurring spoken language, as found in such ‘discourses’ as conversations, interviews, commentaries and speeches”. Schiffrin, et al. (2001) as quoted by Biber et al. (2007) in their introduction to *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* divided discourse analysis into three categories:

- (1) The study of language use,
- (2) The study of linguistic structure ‘beyond the sentence’ and
- (3) The study of social practices and ideological assumptions that are associated with language and/ or communication.

Similarly as we do every-day talk in our personal communication, we could also study the talk provided to us by the media. The print and electronic media both present topics in a given focus and ideology. Such representations are worth critically interrogating by use of such a tool as discourse analysis. In this paper, this study will apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its central analysis structure. Jorgensen et al. (2002) also argue that CDA takes the side of marginalized or oppressed social groups and tries to uncover discursive practices that also help to maintain social order and precursors to enforce unequal power relations. Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2001) proposed a three-dimensional model of the analysis to point out that a text may be completely interpreted when the producer and the audience are both cognizant of the context socio-cultural setting in which

a text is produced and comprehended. His model does not stop at analysis of text but he looks at discursive as well as social practices. In addition to that, Fairclough proposes that it is necessary to incorporate other theoretical approaches that could also help in exploring the non-discursive aspects of social life and this difference distinguishes his approach among other strands of CDA (Jorgensen et al., 2002).

Literature Review

CDA concept

Although the works by Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2001) constitute the basis of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) movement, the newer literature has undergone modifications of the framework to match the technological and media trends. KhosraviNik and Unger (2023) demonstrate the increasing importance of digital discourse, particularly within the context of social media, where language does not merely reflect but constructs the social reality in real time. Equally, Discourse-Historical Approach by Wodak (2021) emphasizes the role of context with a historical and intertextual consideration in the interpretation of politically and geopolitically relevant speech.

As it has been stated in the work by Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), the approach developed by Fairclough is the most completed theoretical and methodological model in the context of CDA. Fairclough (2003) distinguishes between two levels of discourse: a very abstract one where discourse is seen as language as a social life component and the concrete one where discourse brings specific representations of the aspects of the world. In all this, discourse can be seen as strategic coding of linguistic elements to present either individuals or events. In the case of the former U.S. President, Barack Obama, a journalist will have the option of presenting the story of the subject heroically or negatively according to his/her ideological leaning.

Even though CDA is occasionally misconstrued as a monolithic approach to analysis, it is generally agreed, as Janks (1997) confirms, that any elaborated method originating in discourse studies, in the humanities, or the social sciences may be deployed in CDA, as long as both gives an insight into how discourse does or does not, either perpetuates or disrupts social inequality, abuse of power or domination. In this way, CDA expands a ritual analysis of word use to conventionally relational ways of connecting discourse to the wider sociopolitical environment.

Fairclough and his method of CDA

The three-dimensional model of Fairclough has remained an analytical model in CDA. Yet, modern researchers believe that this paradigm needs to be revised in order to meet the conditions of a process of audience reception and discourse dissemination through algorithms. The article by Leudar et al. (2022) argues that since the creation of digital spaces, the new shapes of power have been incorporated into the way texts are shared, liked, and reformed on the Internet. Though this research will consider Fairclough original model, it does not deny these other levels of influence.

Fairclough (1995) posits that a communicative event is made up of three related dimensions namely, textual, discursive and social. All these dimensions are in a dialectical relationship necessitating breaking up linguistic analysis of a text to the interactions and larger societal settings in which the text is placed. The social aspect or context deals with the circumstances of a text production, and interpretation governed by social norms and expectations. Fairclough does recognize the involvement of both discursive and non-

discursive aspects within this dimension and offers little on how to analyse the latter but urges the integration of supplementary theoretical perspectives (Jorgensen et al, 2002).

Fairclough (1989) provided the ideas of ideology and hegemony as a core of the social practices analysis. He sees ideology as the meaning at the service of power and points out that the discourse is capable of generating, supporting or even altering the power relations (Jorgensen et al., 2002, p. 27). Fairclough (2001) says that most effective ideologies are those that are naturalized, that is, those that are embedded at the level below the level of consciousness and regarded as common sense.

The discursive aspect deals with both construction and interpretation of texts. The level of analysis consists of explaining what discourses and genres the producers of the texts utilise and through which discursive resources audiences understand the texts (Fairclough, 1995). Intertextuality and interdiscursivity are practiced at this level as described in this study. Interdiscursivity describes the fusion of two or more discourses in a single communicative event and goes hand in hand with intertextuality which recognises two facts all texts are a repetition of a previous text either explicitly or implicitly (Jorgensen et al., 2002). Apparent form of intertextuality is the manifest intertextuality where one text directly quotes or refers to another.

The textual dimension, which represents the central part of the model of Fairclough, views the text as a result of discourse. Fairclough (2001) asserts that, texts are results of production process as well as a resource to be interpreted. Being under the impression of Halliday and especially Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this level is characterized by a linguistic analysis with a focus on grammar, vocabulary, metaphors and rhetoric strategies. There are two main linguistic concepts in this dimension (transitivity and modality). The issue of transitivity looks at the interaction of the actions and events with subjects and objects to know who is portrayed as an actor or as an object. An example of omission, such as absence of an agent, can shift an accountability and make an act seem natural (Jorgensen et al., 2002). The level of commitment or certainty that is portrayed by the speaker about a certainty or committed message as to whether it is highly certain (e.g., truth claims) or hedged (e.g., a bit) will affect the reception of a message.

The criticism of Fairclough

Although Fairclough model is adopted all over, some researcher criticized it by pointing out the following limitations. Among these, the primary problem is analytic difficulty with analytical differentiations of three dimensions, which are textual, discursive, and social, as these dimensions are intertwined by their nature (Jorgensen et al., 2002). It may be problematic to define where one starts and another one ends. This concern is resolved through analysis in this study where the analysis of the social and discursive practices is taken as two different sections to make it clear.

The other criticism is that Fairclough gives little instruction on how to go about analysis of social practices or the presence of particular discourses in any given communicative event (Jorgensen et al., 2002). This therefore exposes it to the risk of researcher subjectivity whereby the analyst will only be attracted to those particular interpretations that suit his or her expectations. According to Fairclough (2001), there is indeed this subjectivity, that a Member of the analyst will shape interpretation through what are called the Resources of Member (MR), which are the knowledge, beliefs and experiences that the analyst has stored on long-term memory and which is involved in the process of interpretation.

Moreover, the model has been criticized because it does not deepen into other forms of discourses, multimodal, digital, and visual. Since the use of digital media has increased in the context of political storytelling, researchers like Norris and Maier (2023) add that CDA needs to shift to multimodal analysis. However, in the context of this work, in which the object of analysis is a written political speech, it can be noted that the model developed by Fairclough is still relevant and applicable, but with references to the modern tendencies.

Incident of 9/11

The events of September 11, 2001, when terrorists organized terror attacks, are a paramount event in the history of the world as it is discussed in political discourse today. Researchers such as Jackson (2022) and Croft (2023) note that the 9/11 and its legacy are constantly re-anchored to accommodate changes to foreign policy and security interests. In these terms, a speech by the previous president of the United States Barack Obama of 2011 about the killing of Osama bin Laden can be considered such a discursive event, which adds to this narrative model.

To estimate the importance of the speech of Obama, one must put the historical context of the article into consideration, i.e., the 9/11 attacks. On September 11, 2001, four synchronized terrorist attacks that are related to 19 members of al-Qaeda, came to the United States. There were four commercial airliners hijacked namely the American Airlines Flight 11 and the United Airlines Flight 175 which flew in and crashed the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City causing the towers to collapse in about two hours. The effect and consequential fires also destroyed some nearby buildings and badly damaged some nearby buildings too.

The third plane, the American Airlines Flight 77, crashed into the Pentagon leading to the partial collapse of the West part of the building. The fourth flight was the United Airlines Flight 93 that was aimed to Washington D.C, most probably the U.S. Capitol but was shot down and it crashed in Pennsylvania due to the resistance put by the passengers to the hijackers. Overall, almost 3,000 individuals were murdered, which encompassed all the persons on the plane and the hijackers.

Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden initially denied the hijacking, but he has since admitted it in the year 2004. Some of the cited motivations by al-Qaeda were U.S support to Israel, the position of the military in Saudi Arabia and sanctions against Iraq. The American reaction to this was the declaration of War on Terror and the course of the use of military force in Afghanistan in an effort to topple the Taliban ruling regime under which al-Qaeda had been established. The assaults were the ones that were extended and not only on a global scale with reference to the aspect of global security and geopolitics but also on the economic and cultural scale. A major economic loss was incurred in lower Manhattan and the effects of the attacks were characterized by tightened security measures around the globe. Bin Laden evaded arrest over ten years until he was finally tracked down and killed by the U.S. troops in May 2011.

This has led to a number of memorials being built in memory of the victims among them being the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York, the Pentagon Memorial and the Flight 93 National Memorial. With the completion of the One World Trade Center in 2013, the reconstruction is complete and the ability to recover can be marked.

The importance of analyzing political discourse has grown substantially in recent years due to increased awareness of media manipulation and performative politics. As

Balaban and Marinković (2024) argue, modern political speeches function as “rhetorical performances aimed at reinforcing dominant ideologies.” The rationale for revisiting Obama’s speech lies in its continued reproduction in discussions on global security, justice, and American exceptionalism. Moreover, CDA provides a methodological lens for identifying how political leaders shape collective memory and identity through language (Tian & Seargeant, 2022). By applying Fairclough’s model in this updated context, this study bridges earlier scholarship with contemporary discourse concerns such as misinformation, digital activism, and global public diplomacy.

The logic in carrying out this study is based on the fact that there is no such a thing like nothing is without a purpose in this world- all communication acts and processes irrespective of whether we communicate face to face or through forms of media- all communicate intentional and mostly concealed meanings. It is well known that media discourse is constructed with certain purposes and ideology considerations. One of the main characteristic features of discourse analysis - as Cameron (2001) remarks, as opposed to the synthesis-based researches in traditional linguistics fields - is its awareness of the very purposefulness in the meaning conveying use of the speech in a definite situation. This paper, thus, looks at the use of language as a means of achieving strategic effectiveness within a certain scenario, in this case, how a participant of the discourse conveys the language and its message to two different audience at a time, that is, being both national and global, hence, creating stable structures of power through his or her language use. The socio-constructivist perspective is another methodology used in the study; according to it, society shapes human behavior as well as influences it in terms of moulding it. Sharing a dialectical relationship between the human and the society, humans will forever be influencing and constituting society and vice versa (Berger 2004). In this sense, discourse can be analyzed in order to give clues about general social structure and vice versa, social structure can be examined to shed more light in the context of text interpretation.

Material and Methods

This study uses qualitative methods under the umbrella of Critical Discourse Analysis. The primary data is Obama’s 2011 speech on the death of Osama Bin Laden. The analysis is based on Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model—social practice, discursive practice, and textual analysis—with added consideration for post-2020 global discourse patterns. The current research is qualitative in nature. The primary source of data is the speech of American President Obama’s Speech on the death of Osama Bin Laden. The research used the tools of discourse analysis specifically the three-dimensional model given by Fairclough (1995). The research was conducted through analyzing the language of the selected text in the light of critical discourse analysis.

Results and Discussion

Starting of the Speech

President Obama started the speech with the usual greetings ‘Good evening’ (line 1). His powerful status, as the president of America is revealed from the initial lines ‘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’ (line 1-2). By using ‘I can’ the pride and authority of Obama can be seen that, now when Osama Bin Laden is killed, all the credit goes to him alone and he can confidently communicate it:

1. To the American people
2. To the world.

Introduction to Osama Bin Laden

Obama introduces Osama Bin Laden as 'the leader of Al Qaeda, and a terrorist who is responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women and children' (line 2-4). Two traits of Osama Bin Laden are told by Obama. The first one is only of 18 characters long whereas the speaker has emphasized the second one more, which reveals his brutalities, is 80 characters long. Then Obama begins with the day of 9/11 in detail, in a narration style. He uses a lot of intensifiers to awaken the painful emotions of the American people. He said, 'A bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people in our history' (line 5-6). Obama uses 'we' six times in a single utterance of two sentences long. He did this to show:

1. How much he cares for the American people.
2. He and the American people are united.
3. He wanted to intensify what he said.

Table 1
Textual Analysis in a Tabulated Form

Textual Features	Parts of speech
'United States' has conducted an operation (line 2)	Metonym
That 'killed' Osama Bin Laden (line 2)	Harsh Word
Murder of 'thousands of innocent men' (line 3)	Hyperbole
'Worst attack on the American people' (line 5-6)	Hyperbole
National memory (line 6)	Unusual vocabulary
Killed 'scores of Al Qaeda terrorists' (line 27)	Hyperbole
Yet Osama Bin Laden 'avoided capture' (line 29)	Indirect Speech
'Al Qaeda' continued to operate (line 30)	Metonym
'Disrupt, dismantle and defeat' his network (line 34)	Alliteration
'United States launched' targeted operation (line 42)	Personification
Al Qaeda 'slaughtered scores' of Muslims (line 53)	Intensifier, Hyperbole, Alliteration
His demise 'should be' welcomed by all (line 54)	Authoritative Word
We know well the costs of war (line 65-66)	Irony

The Use of 'We'

According to Obama, in his speech, we helped our neighbors, and it was like, we sent our blood to those who have been cut (lines 14-15). He highlighted the fact that "we reclaimed our connections to one another, our shared love of community and country" (lines 15 16). He regulated a feeling of groupness by stating that on that day, despite the places where people were born, the God they prayed was to, their race, or ethnicity, they were all one community and family that is, American (lines 16-18). In a later part of the speech, he wrote about the personal cost of leadership where he said, "The effort takes a toll on me whenever, as Commander-in-Chief, I have to sign a letter to a grieving family, or meet the eyes of a wounded service member, who has been grievously wounded" (lines 66-68).

In the above lines by using the first person 'I' and calling himself as the Commander-in-Chief, Obama, he is actually trying to convey a bigger reality of himself which he is more concerned of, than as the Commander-in-Chief or the head of America. This reality is that of Obama as a black man who came to rule a white majority country. Through this victory of killing Osama, he yet again proved to his people and to the world that he is no less than a white man. In fact, he believes he achieved more for America than any white president has ever achieved.

Loophole in the Speech

There is a loophole in the speech when Obama says: 'We quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al Qaeda' (line 20). There is no information given as to how did he get to know at that very moment that Al Qaeda was behind the attacks. There is no clue mentioned as to who provided America with this information. And the next thing the world got to know after 9/11 was the heavy bombing of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Terms used to refer to Osama Bin Laden

The speaker used hard and denunciatory words in describing Osama Bin Laden making him an archetype of evils and a menace to world peace. The success of the U.S Military in killing the dangerous person was highlighted as a way of restoring the perception of justice. Such language found in the speech are: We have killed Osama Bin Laden (line 2); he is termed as the terrorist who killed thousands of innocent people (line 3); his actions are defined as a vicious attack on justice (line 20). Those enduring activities of upending, exposing, and beating his network are also mention in the speech (lines 33 34). Going further, the speaker says, that his death will be a welcome to those who love peace and human dignity (lines 53 54), and explains, that he was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims (lines 52 53). These statements put Bin Laden not only in the context of global enemy but also as a traitor to the community he was deceiving in the first place.

The usage of Language to Describe America and its People

Contrastingly, in describing America and the Americans, the speaker employed heart-touching and nationalistic phrases that actually brought all the sensible people to a feeling of oneness, invincibility, and giving up. War is anthropomorphized and the attacks are mentioned as an attack on American soil and American values. The speech reflects the event as the most alarming strike against American people (lines 5 6), where almost 3,000 citizens had been taken away (lines 12 13). It goes on the same with the expressions such as the wounded we gave them our blood (line 15) and We were one American family (lines 1819), making solidarity and national identity stronger. War is explained by saying that it has come on our shores and this started with the senseless slaughter of our citizens. The speaker also points to the price of long-standing war as he says: "We (the speaker) have had to endure years and years of service and hardship and sacrifices and we are well aware of the cost of war" (lines 6466). The speech ends with a positive note as it declares that the current success is evidence of the greatness of our nation and that the American people are determined as the message states that "America can do whatever we set our mind to" (lines 8687).

Use of Indirect Speech

According to the words of Obama: 'Yet Osama bin Laden avoided capture and escaped across the Afghan border into Pakistan' (line 29-30).

The above utterance by Obama is basically a form of indirect speech. In order to avoid saying that 'we were unable to capture Obama and he escaped' he said Osama himself avoided capture. The use of avoidance with a word 'capture' is to be noted. The question arises why Obama used such an unusual sentence. The basic reason is denial of one's weakness. The United States, which calls itself the most powerful country in the world can never accept that it was not able to capture Osama from the last ten years. Thus, Obama instead went the other way round and said that Osama avoided capture.

Dominance of America

President Obama had told the American people that the previous night he had talked with President Zardari, and also his administration members had talked with the equivalent members of his administration in Pakistan. According to him, both parties agreed that it was a historic and important day to the two countries. In the medium to long terms, he underlined that Pakistan has to remain the ally of the United States in the war on terror to keep defeating al Qaeda and its affiliations (lines 60).

From the above lines there seems to be a forced acceptance on the part of Pakistan, as if this is not what Pakistan wanted on the first hand. Also, the words 'agree' and 'it is essential' further proves this point. Besides there are no facts which supports the claims by Obama that Pakistan thinks it was a good and historic event. Here, while talking about America and Pakistan, Obama has used the word 'our' when he says 'this is a good and historic day for both of our nations'. Linking of both the nations shows a kind of bonding between the two which is limited to words only. Obama actually wanted to show the world that he has done nothing wrong by intruding into a country's borders without permission and violating their dignity.

Presupposition used by Obama

Perlez (2011) reports that the following day after the raid the Pakistani government harshly condemned the United States by referring to the raid as, an unauthorized unilateral act and that this will not be accepted in future. The foreign ministry also claimed that the incident would not act as a precedent in future by any state including United States. This can only imply that the wordings of President Obama in the speech were more of an assumption- which is probably due to him being a global power leader- than the diplomatic response, which was much more scathing.

In the speech he said, 'Tonight, we give thanks to the countless intelligence and counterterrorism professionals who've worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome' (line 74-75). Even by saying 'we give thanks' Obama yet again proved his power and authority. He could have said 'we thank you' but it seems as if even thanking somebody involves a matter of 'giving' for him. 'Give thanks' attaches a derogatory status to the very word 'thank you'. Another point to be noted here is that while thanking he uses the pronoun 'we' as if by thanking alone would make him come to a belittling position in front of the people he is addressing as well as in front of the world.

Power Structure of America

The power structure of America is also created through the following utterances, where Obama said, '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' (line 37-39). According to this utterance by Obama, he got all the information that Osama was hiding in Pakistan way before, but he or the high officials of America did not care to share it with Pakistan as they were planning to enter Pakistani air borders and execute a massive operation in secrecy, as if they did not trust Pakistan. This shows the over efficiency and self reliability of America as an independent and powerful country which think it can do whatever to fulfill what it wants to.

'So, Americans understand the costs of war' (line 69). This utterance is very ironic as it opposes the facts. There is no denial in accepting that yes war like situation occurred in America on 9/11 when the twin towers were attacked and nearly three thousand people

were killed but what happened afterwards is also a fact and a reality which cannot be forgotten. America initiated war in Iraq, Afghanistan and then in Pakistan, killing millions of people, so the above-mentioned line by Obama seems to be a lie.

‘That is the story of our history...our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place (line 88-91). Similarly, these lines where Obama says that it is actually their ‘sacrifices’ which are contributing to make this world a safer place, is full of irony.

Overall, this research study aimed to find out the power structures built through the speech of the former president of America on the death of Osama Bin Laden. Here, the former president acted as the representative of America and his actions and behaviors were studied to judge the overall dominance of America as the super-power of today’s world. Additionally, Obama's speech was recently reanalyzed in light of American troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, prompting renewed discussions on the legacy of U.S. interventionism (Chen, 2022).

From the very start of the speech, it can be seen how Obama is giving preference to his own people as compared to the rest of the world. He introduces Osama Bin Laden in his speech with the use of crude and bitter words. Throughout the speech the president has used words which directly prove the strength or to say ‘hegemony’ of America as a country. Without giving any legal evidence, he kept on talking about the cruelties committed by Osama Bin Laden, by ignoring the injustices done by his country on Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although he stated repeatedly that his war is not against Islam and Muslims but still the discursive dimension attached to this speech shows how his intentions and behavior tremendously hurt the Muslim community throughout the world. Hence, in this speech the ‘forced’ dominance of America on the world is reaffirmed and this speech of former president of America Obama is a proof of that.

Conclusion

The research study began by talking about critical discourse analysis in general. Then the selected sample was discussed along with highlighting the tools to conduct the discourse analysis. The tools used were the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis given by Fairclough (1995). According to Fairclough, any documented text can be analyzed according to the three dimensions; social, discursive and textual. Social dimension deals with the context of the text. As discourse is conducted in a particular context in a society so it can be dealt socially by looking at the various circumstances which compelled to deliver or produce such a discourse. The discursive dimension, which is the second-dimension deals with the overall composition of the discourse and the style of the speaker. Then research questions were mentioned. The research question was to find an answer of how power, authority and strength of America as a country is evident through the selected speech of Barak Obama. The speech revolves around a significant happening, when a group of American soldiers of US intelligence invaded Obama’s hide out in Pakistan in 2011 and lead him to his demise. The discourse strategies used by Obama have served as a blueprint for subsequent political leaders addressing military actions or counter-terrorism narratives (Smith & Abid, 2023). This research study looked into the deeper meanings of Obama’s speech and how his style of speech sketches strong and authoritative power structures of America. Moreover, this research paper can be used as a teaching resource for a discourse analysis class, where beginners in the field like undergraduate students of linguistics can learn how to conduct a discourse analysis of a piece of text.

This study reanalyzed Barack Obama's 2011 speech on the death of Osama Bin Laden using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model while situating it within a broader and more contemporary geopolitical context. It highlighted how discourse is constructed to represent authority, national unity, and moral legitimacy. Despite being over a decade old, Obama's speech remains rhetorically potent in shaping public perceptions of justice, war, and American power. As recent literature (KhosraviNik, 2023; Hart, 2023) suggests, political discourse is increasingly understood as a performative act with long-term ideological ramifications. This paper offers both analytical insight and pedagogical value, making it a relevant addition to discourse analysis scholarship in 2025.

References

- Aiello, G., & Boni, F. (2023). *Discourse and Power in the Digital Age*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Balaban, D., & Marinković, D. (2024). Political discourse and the illusion of transparency. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 23(1), 67–84.
- Berger, L. A., & Berger, D. R. (2004). *The Talent Management Handbook*. McGraw-hill.
- Biber, C. U., & Upton, T. A. (Eds.) (2007). *Discourse on the Move: Using Corpus Analysis to Describe Discourse Structure*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, C. (2021). The ethics of withdrawal: Afghanistan and America's global image. *Foreign Affairs Review*, 102(3), 45–58.
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with spoken discourse*. SAGE Publications
- Chen, L. (2022). Revisiting Obama's legacy in light of post-Afghanistan policy. *Global Security Journal*, 17(4), 115–129.
- Croft, S. (2023). Reframing 9/11: Memory politics and the rhetoric of security. *Discourse & Society*, 34(2), 190–207.
- Hart, C. (2023). *Rhetoric, Ideology and Power: A Critical Discourse Approach*. Routledge.
- Jackson, R. (2022). *9/11 in Retrospect: Political Narratives and Legacies*. Manchester University Press.
- KhosraviNik, M., & Unger, J. (2023). CDA and digital media: Ideology and identity online. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 20(1), 5–20.
- Leudar, I., Sharrock, W., Hayes, J., & Leudar, Z. (2022). Algorithmic discourse and political persuasion. *Language and Politics*, 21(2), 215–236.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power* (second edition). Pearson Education Limited.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analyzing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Janks, H. (1997). Critical discourse analysis as a research tool. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 18(3), 329–342
- Jorgensen, et.al. (2002). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Mills, S. (2004). *Discourse*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
- Norris, S., & Maier, C. D. (2023). *Multimodal Discourse Analysis Revisited*. Bloomsbury.
- Perlez, J. (2011). "Pakistan Pushes Back Against U.S. Criticism on Bin Laden. *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/04/world/asia/04pakistan.html?_r=0

- Phillips, M. (2011, May 2). "Osama Bin Laden Dead".
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead>
- Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D., & Hamilton, H. E. (Eds.). (2001). *The handbook of discourse analysis*. Blackwell publishing.
- Tian, Z., & Seargeant, P. (2022). Discursive memory and the politics of commemoration. *Memory Studies*, 15(4), 442-460.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2022). *Discourse and Power in Global Contexts*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Wodak, R. (2021). *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*. Sage.
- Woods, N. (2006). *Describing Discourse: A practical guide to discourse analysis*. Hodder Arnold