

An Investigation of Interpersonal Metafunction in Obama's Discourse on Muslim World Issues

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المستخلص :

أجريت هذه الدراسة لمعرفة ما وراء الشخصية المبنية في الخطاب السياسي للرئيس أوباما من خلال إدراك أنواع الوسيلة والوظيفة. وتبين أن لغة خطاب أوباما الذي يخاطب أحداث العالم الإسلامي ما زالت تفتقر إلى الاستقصاءات اللغوية. الدراسة الحالية هي محاولة لتحليل مثل هذا الخطاب. يتم تطبيق مفهوم Metafunction بين الأشخاص كجزء من نموذج اللغويات الوظيفية النظامية (SFL) (1985، 1994، 2004 و 2014) في الدراسة كإطار مفاهيمي. يتم استخدام الطريقة النوعية لتحليل النص. يتم اختيار ستة خطابات قدمها أوباما للحصول على بيانات البحث. يتم تطبيق التحليل على مستوى الجملة لاستكشاف الطريقة القائمة على فكرة SFL. تظهر النتائج أن الرئيس يطبق خيارات مختلفة من الطريقة من أجل التعبير عن آرائه والوصول إلى الجمهور. ومن ثم يتم إنشاء ميتافرقمي إيجابي بين الأشخاص في الخطاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: خطابات أوباما ، أنواع الوسائل ، فكرة SFL.

ABSTRACT

The present study is conducted to find out the interpersonal metafunction built in the political discourse of President Obama through the realization of Modality types and function. It was found that the language of Obama's discourse addressing the Muslim world events still lacks linguistic investigations. The present study is an attempt to analyse such discourse. The concept of Interpersonal Metafunction as a part of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) model of Halliday (1985, 1994, 2004 and 2014) is applied in the study as a conceptual framework. The qualitative method of text analysis is used. Six speeches presented by Obama are selected for research data. The analysis is applied at the clause level to explore Modality based on SFL notion. The findings show that the president applies various choices of Modality in order to express his views and reaching the audience. And then a positive interpersonal metafunction is established in the discourse.

Keywords: Obama's Speeches, Modality Types, SFL notion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Presidential political speeches have been used widely in order to study political languages and realize what is beyond the words of politicians. Schäffner (1996) proposes that political texts reflect the political activities of the politicians and they provide different functions related to these activities. In line to this, Van Dijk (1997) suggests that any speech presented by a politician is a realization of

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his intentions and has its own function. According to these arguments, this study aims to realize the interpersonal metafunction in the speeches of President Obama based on SFL concept as proposed by Halliday (1985, 1994, 2004 and 2014) through the analysis of the modality choices and function found in the speeches. (SFL) is concerned with the function of discourse in social contexts. Obama's speeches as a communicative device to address Muslims can be an appropriate data to understand what is beyond his words regarding the Islamic world issues.

From the major argument that any politician uses his/her own words in different contexts and there is a function behind his/her words (Van Dijk, 1997), It is hypothesized that the investigation of the Presidential speeches of Obama would provide a reflection of his ideas, thoughts and intentions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Foundation of SFL Notion

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a theory of studying language was firstly proposed by Halliday in 1960s in his PhD work at Lingam University. It is based on the linguistic conceptions of Malinowski (1887- 1942) and J.R. Firth (1920s). Both of the scholars focused on the importance of analyzing language in relation to the environment and context. Halliday was concerned with explaining the principles of grammar function and meaning in contexts. (Halliday and Matheissen, 2004).

2.2 The concept of SFL

M.A.K Halliday has a great contribution to British Discourse Analysis. His Functional Approach to language is concerned with analyzing language in its social context. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) explain that each language is organized in five forms of order "structure: compositional aspect of language. System: paradigmatic order in language, i.e. any set of alternatives together with its condition of entry, constitutes a language system. Stratification: language as a complex semiotic system having various levels or strata. It is organized in four strata: semantics, lexicogrammer, phonology and phonetics. Instantiations: concerns the relationship between language as a system and language as a text: the system of any language is instated in the form of text. And metafunction: the function of language in contexts" (p. 20). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), proposes that all languages have three metafunctions. **Textual, Experiential, and Interpersonal.** The experiential metafunction is the "representation of the —flow of events and goings on" in the clause" (p.30): the interpersonal metafunction reflects the language function to create relations between language user and audience. The interpersonal metafunction is realized by the structure of Mood and modality in the clause. Mood is 'the unit in the clause functions to exchange information and /or demanding goods and services'. The communication role of the speaker and listener is identified through the Mood structure. Finite and Subject are the basic units in the Mood structure. If the subject precedes the finite, the

clause will take the form of statement, and then the speaker becomes a provider of information. Otherwise, if the finite precedes the subject in the Mood of the clause, the clause becomes a question and the speaker role is a seeker of goods or services (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Modality on the other hand is the language semantic domain that tells the opinions and assessments of the speaker towards what is talked about in the interaction. Modality can be existed in the form of modal verbs or adjuncts as a part of Mood or Residue. Residue is the complementary part of Mood in the clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Modality has been utilized by scholars and linguists to investigate various discourses, such as Palmer (1986); Recski (2006), Thu (2010); Abdulfattah (2011). In political discourses by: Wang, J. (2010); Bonyadi (2011); Alvin and Albaseer (2011); Shayegh (2012); Pengsun and Fengfeng (2013). Al-Faki (2014); Narley (2014); Amalia, Subandowo, Faliyanti, and Thresia (2018). Abusalim, Zidouni, Alghazo and Rabab'ah (2022).

From literature, there are limited researches using SFL notion investigated the language of President Obama in the context of Islamic world issues. This gap has led to conduct the current study.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Halliday and Matthessein (2014) define “Modality as the area of meaning that lies between yes and no- the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity. What this implies more specifically will depend on the underlying speech function of the clause. “(1) If the clause is an information clause (a proposition, congruently realized as indicative), this means either (i) ‘either yes or no’, i.e. ‘maybe’; or (ii) ‘both yes and no’, i.e. ‘sometimes’; in other words, some degree of probability or of usuality. (2) If the clause is a ‘goods and services’ clause (a proposal, which has no real congruent form in the grammar, but by default we can characterize it as imperative), it means either (i) ‘is wanted to’, related to a command, or (ii) ‘wants to’ related to an offer, in other words, some degree of obligation or inclination” (P.691).

Table 1: Modality Occurrence in Modal Space

+	She teaches Latin	
Modal Space	She might teach Latin	Perhaps yes, perhaps no
	She ought to teach Latin	“At present no but ideally in future yes”
	She will teach Latin if you want	“At present no but in future yes if you want”
	She can teach Latin	At present no but in future yes if she wants
-	She does not teach English	

(Thompson, 2014: 70)

3.1 MODALITY TYPES WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF SFL

Halliday and Mattheissen (2004) classify modality into two main types (Modulation and Modalization) with different degrees to identify what is between yes and no.

3.1.1 Modulation

Modulation construes how commands are laid out in utterances of proposal through the degrees of Obligation or Inclination forms. Fontain (2013) defines Modulation as “a kind of connotative meaning relates to obligation or permission, including willingness and ability” p. 121)

Table 2: Types and Degrees of Modulation

Realization	Degree of Modalization		
	High	Median	Low
Obligation	must, have to, ought to, need, is to	should, shall, will, would	may, might, can, could, allowed
Inclination	determine to, need to	want to, keen, will, would, won't, wouldn't	willing, can

Halliday and Matheissen (2014: 189)

3.1.2. Modalization

As a type of modality, Modalization expresses the validity of the information given in propositional utterances through the expressions of probability and usuality forms. The two types of modalization in propositions are: (1) “degrees of Probability and it is related to judgments of likelihood and (2) degrees of Usuality which is related to judgments of oftenness (frequencies of what happens, happened and will happen)” (2014, 249).

Types and Degrees of Modalization

Realization	Degree of Modalization		
	High	Median	Low
Probability	must, certainly, sure, believe, definitely, can't, couldn't, bet, of course	probably, probable, think, will be, wont, should	maybe, possibly, may, perhaps, can
Usuality	Always	usually, often, frequently	sometimes, occasionally, ever, never, once, seldom, rarely

Halliday and Mathiessen (2014: 337)

The interpersonal metafunction of language concerns the process of exchanging utterances between the speaker and listener in the discourse, and the relationship between the speaker and listener. “Modality as a linguistic system expresses the speaker’s judgment toward the topic. It refers to the validity of what is being predicated, stated, questioned, commended or offered within the clause”. Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 177). They add that the interpersonal meaning and social roles between the speaker and the listeners can be understood from the use of Modality (2014).

4. METHODOLOGY**4.1 Data Collection and Description**

The data of the study were selected from six different speeches produced by Obama in the period between 2009 and 2013 for different occasions. The transcripts of the speeches were downloaded from the Official American Government website. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/> .

Speech no.	Location	Time
S1	Turkey	6/4/2009
S2	Cairo	4/6/2009
S3	Jakarta	10/11/2009
S4	United nations	11/5/2011
S5	Afghanistan	1/5/2012
S6	Ramallah	22/3/2013

Since the speeches were very long, it was decided to focus on analyzing the clauses used to talk about the recurrent issues addressed across the six speeches. Therefore; two stages were followed to limit the data and collecting the clauses:

- Finding out what issues addressed in each speech, and these issues are called as themes.
- Highlighting the sections of the recurring themes from the six speeches.
- The clauses of these sections are selected to be analysed.

Table 3: the recurring themes found in the six speeches

Speeches	War in Afghanistan	War in Iraq	Cooperation	Israel-Conflict	Palestine
Cairo Speech	√	√	√	√	
Jakarta Speech	√	√	√	√	
Turkey Speech	√	√	√	X	
Middle East Speech	X	√	√	√	
Ramallah Speech	X	X	X	√	
Afghanistan Speech	√	X	X	X	

From the table above, the recurring themes found across the selected speeches were 4 themes. It can be stated that the speeches made in Cairo and Jakarta addressed the four themes, while the other speeches covered the themes variously. The Speech of Turkey encompasses the themes of War in Afghanistan, Cooperation, and War in Iraq. The Middle East speech discusses the themes of War in Iraq, and Israel- Palestine Conflict, and Cooperation. Both the Speeches of Ramallah and Afghanistan are about only one theme each.

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Investigation of Modality Types

The analysis was applied on the selected clauses where the types of Modality are found. All modality words found in the data were determined. Then the words were identified in terms of SFL modality types (Modalization or Modulation) and function. In other words, the types of Modality and their degrees are analysed according to the context of the clauses, because according to SFL Modality aspects may have same expressions with different functions. Here are some samples taken from the current data to show how Modality types are identified.

Table 4: samples of Modality types and degrees found in the data.

The clause	Modality types											
	Modulation						Modalization					
	Inclination			Obligation			Usuality			Probability		
	H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L
Palestinians must abandon violence				√								
I believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein.										√		
International troops will continue to train, advice and assist the Afghans, and fight alongside them when needed.		√										
America is not and will never be at war with Islam										√		
On education, we will expand exchange programs and increase scholarships.					√							
A teenager in Kansass can communicate instantly with a teenager in Cairo.						√						

In the table above, the type of modality and degree to which the word belongs to is detected with (√). H (High degree), M (mediun degree), and L (Low degree).

4.2.2 Investigation of Modality Function

Through performing the qualitative method of analysis, the interpretations of the function of each type of modality were conducted. The contextual backgrounds of the choices of Modality found were taken into consideration in order to explore how the interpersonal metafunction was constructed in the speeches. The percentages of modality in the discourse was also performed to ascertain which types were used and which were not.

5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Modality types realized in the four themes across the speeches are expressed by: auxiliary verbs such as ‘must’, ‘should’, ‘will’, etc; lexical verbs such as ‘need’, ‘require’; adjectives such as ‘necessary’ and/or adverbs such as ‘certainly’, ‘probably’.

5.1 MODALIZATION

5.1.1 Probability

Table 5. The frequency of probability expressions

Degree	Israel - Palestine conflict		War in Iraq		War in Afghanistan		Cooperation	
H	6	17.65%	2	5.88%	0	0%	3	8.82%
M	6	17.65%	2	5.88%	1	2.94%	1	2.94%
L	7	20.59%	2	5.88%	0	0%	4	11.76%
Total	19	55.88%		17.65%	1	2.94%	8	23.53%
Probability No	55.88%							

Within the context of the determined themes, Obama used half of the probability choices of Modality to address the theme of Israel Palestine Conflict 55.88%., then the theme of Cooperation 23.53%, while the themes War in Iraq and War in Afghanistan have only 17.65% and 2.94% respectively. The operators ‘could’, ‘can be’, ‘cannot’, ‘neither can’, ‘can’, and ‘believe’ are used to express what Obama is very certain about indicating a high level of probability. The president expresses his certainty about the improvements in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and to remind the public of the actual existence of both Israel and Palestine as two nations. He gives an affirmative judgment on the ability of Palestinians to face hard life. ‘Cannot’ entails Obama’s affirmative realization of the need of human progress in the Muslim countries. Obama’s assurance of the necessity of cooperation between the Muslim countries and the Western world which extends exchanging oil and gas between the two nations, is conveyed through the use of high probability.

Median probability is mostly expressed through the modal 'will'. In some sections of the speeches Obama uses this modal to show what events that can be predicated and expected to happen with the existence of specific circumstances. This contributes to make people believe and trust the president and his administration because he shows them his commitments. Thus, the median Probability through 'will' convey expectations by Obama of some future events. This can be interpreted from the context of the clauses which have the function of condition. For example, Obama predicates that the 'loss of control over economic choices' will occur because of modernity. Also Obama provides his promises to the people of Iraq by using the verb 'will', to get his assistance if they face any terrorist attacks.

Within the theme of Israel Palestine Conflict Obama predicates that people are blind to the truth of the conflict if they have biases to one of the parties. He lays out his predication of the failure of achieving peace if the leaders of Palestine continue in supporting terrorism in the area.

The modals 'can', 'could', and the adjective 'possible' are used to express low probability of actions. The low Modality of probability shows Obama's doubtfulness about some of events. He talks about the possibility of providing a better life for Muslims through trade and investment. He also uses low probability to say how that investment and trade may also bring about loss and debt for people. So the situation here involves possibility of events which is the low form of probability based on SFL.

The possibility expressed by 'can' and 'could' function to inform Muslims what may happen if they work hardly for peace and collaboration that is: empowerment, prosperity, development and security to all people. In the discourse, the possibility of creating peace is expressed variously through the word 'possible'.

5.1.2 Usuality

Table 6: The frequency of Usuality expressions

Degree	Israel - Palestine conflict		War in Iraq		War in Afghanistan		Cooperation	
H	1	33.33%	1	33.33%	0	0%	1	33.33%
M	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
L	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	1	33.33%	1	33.33%	0	0%	1	33.33%
Usuality No	3							

Obama used only one expression to express high usuality in each of the themes except the theme War in Afghanistan which does not have any words of usuality. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) argue that the word 'never' gives a high

value of Usuality. In the current discourse, the word ‘never’ highlights a high level of usuality. It is used once in each of the themes: War in Iraq, Cooperation and Israel- Palestine Conflict. It can be argued that the high degree of usuality in the data depicts no foundation of facts or occurrence of events or things under any circumstances and at any time. Through the word ‘never’ Obama expresses his rejection of terrorism and being against Muslims, and his refusal of what people claim regarding the non -existence of Israel. The use of ‘never’ depicts that the utterance is negative .The purpose of negative utterances was to express the negation from the viewpoint of the president of some facts and events people are doubt about.

5.2 MODULATION

5.2.1 Obligation

Degree	Israel - Palestine conflict		War in Iraq		War in Afghanistan		Cooperation	
H	11	22.44%	2	4.81%	2	4.81%	5	10.20%
M	6	12.24%	0	0%	9	18.36%	6	12.24%
L	2	4.81%	1	2.04%	1	2.04%	4	8.16%
Total	19	38.77%	3	6.12%	12	24.48%	15	30.61%
Obligation No	49							

Obligation choices as used by the president appeared many times in the theme Israel Palestine Conflict 38.77% while the other themes have lower percentages of usage of obligation; the them Cooperation 30.61%, War in Afghanistan 24.48% and War in Iraq 6.12%. High obligation is realized through the modals ‘must’, ‘require’ and ‘need to’. The modal verbs of obligation are found prominently in the context of Israel Palestine conflict when the president calls for the great importance of the unity of the nations of Palestine and Israel. The president was balanced in obligating the two parties to take the responsibility of their security. Obama is very keen on inciting people to take their roles. He forces Palestinians to progress for peace insistently and asking Israel firmly to accept the Palestinians’ existence. The application of the personal pronoun ‘we’ mostly used before the modals ‘need to’ ‘require’, and ‘must’ in the discourse, refers to the inclusion of both sides ‘Muslims’, and ‘the West’ as an assistant partner in the issues.

Besides, the president affirms that ending the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and securing both countries are very urgent requirements. Also he is forcing people not to forget the attacks of 11 September in order to instigating them to fight terrorism, He also calls for the urgent necessity of applying democracy in some of Muslim countries including the Arab countries where the political disturbance is found.

Obama's usage of high obligation in the data reaches out to 'the Arab States' as a part of Muslim world. He asks them to recognize their attempts in the process of peace through the modal 'must'. The term 'must' also assigns urgent actions which are required for the purpose of achieving cooperation. It sounds that the president is asking people to realize some important truths related to progress and cooperation such as the need to build bridges between the two worlds.

The frequent occurrence of high Obligation terms in the theme Israel Palestine Conflict means that there are several procedures which people of both nations are forced to accomplish to deal with the issue. High obligation outlines what is needed as urgent missions from the addressee. It can be stated that although there is a prominent use of high obligation which signals power, the president tends to minimize the gap between himself and the audience through the use of inclusive pronoun 'we' in most clauses of Obligation in the data. On the other hand, the use of names such as 'Afghans and Palestinians' reflects a sense of Presidential authority, and this is found in a minimum number of clauses.

The modals 'will' and 'should' appear in the discourse as markers of median obligation in some clauses. From the context, modal auxiliaries 'will' and 'should' are combined with the personal pronoun 'we' which includes both the American government and the Islamic world. It is clear from phrases 'We will / should' how the speaker calls for the moral participation. He gives advices and recommendations. He wants the two peoples to listen to each other, seeking and bridging common grounds and avoiding misunderstanding. 'Should' appears mostly with the verb 'know'. The application of 'will' and 'should' as modals of median obligation appears in the contexts where the events to be done are required, but not very important.

The low degree of obligation in the discourse was realized by the choice 'can'. This verb was used to express low obligation when the situation is not very urgent. It looks like that the president attempts to give allowance to people to perform some simple things such as strengthening the communication between young people of both nations Western and Muslims' in the fields of education and technology.

The president expresses low obligation in order to call addressee 'Palestinians' to look at developing their community. And also he gives a permission to the Western governments to launch their role towards the issue of Israel- Palestine Conflict to announce Israel and Palestine as two settled states. From the context, these requirements are not major interests from the view point of the president.

5.2.2 Inclination

Degree	Israel - Palestine conflict		War in Iraq		War in Afghanistan		Cooperation	
H	0	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
M	7	16.67%	9	21.43%	11	26.19%	14	33.33%
L	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	7	16.67%	9	21.43%	11	26.19%	14	33.33%
Inclination No	42							

There is no frequency recorded for the high and low levels of inclination with a high usage of median inclination. It is used mostly in the theme Cooperation 33.33%, then the theme War in Afghanistan 26.19%. The theme War in Iraq takes 21.43%. The lowest percentage is found in the theme Israel Palestine Conflict 16.67%. The Inclination is realized through the modals 'will' and 'want' with a little Application of 'would'. The president introduces his administration offers and suggests. He tends to show the willingness of his administration to support trade science and the political situations in the countries under current political and economic chaos. Some of these willingness are 'getting more Indonesian students in American institutions', expanding exchange of programs and increasing scholarships in the fields of science and technology, 'supporting technological development', 'bringing a lot of the American troops home from the Islamic district and 'endorsing a proposal to support a strong and sustainable long-term Afghan force'. In general, the repeated usage of the median inclination is seen combined to the pronoun 'we', 'American troops', and the 'international community' which all refer to the Western side to present these changes as an American tendency and wishes.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

What is significantly noted in the current study is that there are some similar modal operators used in the data to express different functions within different contexts, such as the operators 'will' and 'can' which can be distinguished by the context of situation.

The realization of Modality markers in the discourse of Obama about Muslim world issues assigns that the operators of modulation (Obligation and Inclination) are prominent in comparison to modalization (Probability and Usuality). According to SFL this indicates that the president displays proposals more than propositions. This is in contrast with Hussein and Almofti (2014). They argue "the US President Obama makes no clear obligations or commitments towards helping the Syrians, in any kind". They add "Also, the occurrence of

inclination is too low, again showing lack of desire for real engagement and the occurrences are the highest for probability”. (P: 38). On the other hand, the results are in agreement with THU’s (2010) findings “sentences which signal a request or command are typical in political speeches” (p: 12).

THU (2010) “the use of wide range of Modality markers with different levels of certainty may reveal that sometimes the US Presidents should show that they were certain of the validity of the information. (P: 16). Obama in the data analysed provides people with information of what is possible to happen and what is predicated to be done by the western world within the context of the four themes, in order to remind them of the future negative or positive expectations. Therefore; people can get knowledge about the issues he discussed and be ready for any expected events. This makes Obama as a trustful person who thinks about others’ matters.

The application of **usuality** in the discourse tells how much knowledge the president have regarding the themes; it is used for the purpose of assuring people of some things which they are doubtful about.

The function depicted from inclination is to express wishes and desires of the Western governments to assist Muslims by supplying them with positive services and developments. The usage of inclination with the use of future forms gives hope to people to have better life. The personality of Obama appears as the supporter who is attempting to repair what is damaged.

Obligation is used to express assertions, recommendations and permissions. High obligation is prominent in the discourse. Although the use of high Obligation in the data shows the distance between both the speaker and the audience (the status of Obama as a leader and the listener as public), the use of inclusive pronoun ‘We’ with the high modalities of obligation works to lessen the speakers’ strength as an obligator. Giving recommendations by the speaker in the speeches makes him as a wise man who has the ability to guide the world. In the same time, the solidarity of both the speaker (Obama) and the audience (Muslims) could be created since the recommendations expressed by the median degree of obligation do not carry any impositions

Obama prefers not to focus on the low degrees of obligation to express permissions in his speeches, instead he aims to show his position as a leader by the frequent employment of median and high obligation.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the realization of Modality types and function has led to investigate the interpersonal metafunction in the discourse. Through the analysis of the Modality degrees what is in the president's mind regarding the current events the Muslim World encountering has been explored. The dominant application of Modulation in the discourse presents Obama as a successful leader and friendly person who calls for working with the whole, and encourages the audience (Muslims) to gather around him. Thus a positive relationship between the president (a Western Speaker) and the audience (Muslims) is created.

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