

**PERSUASIVE POWER AS REFLECTED
BY RHETORICAL STYLES IN POLITICAL SPEECHES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BARRACK OBAMA
AND JOHN MCCAIN**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated about persuasive power and rhetorical style in Barack Obama's and John McCain's speeches to answer two problems: how Barack Obama's and John McCain's political speeches conveyed persuasive power as reflected in their rhetorical styles and what the differences of Barack Obama's political speeches from John McCain's speeches are in terms of: persuasive power of the message conveyed and the rhetorical style from eighteen speeches during Presidential Election Campaign of United States in 2008. The researcher used rhetorical criticism as the technique in analyzing the data. The data of the present study were sentences which were considered to have persuasive power that were created by using rhetorical style. Having analyzed the data, the researcher revealed the following findings: (1) The researcher found that both Obama and John McCain used rhetorical style to convey the meaning in their speeches. Yet, they produced the rhetorical style differently in case of the time they brought into the speeches; Obama brought the future but McCain brought the past; (2) Obama had more persuasive power in his speech comparing with John McCain since he produced more frequent and more various rhetorical style.

Keywords: persuasive power, rhetorical style, rhetorical criticism, political speech

ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini menginvestigasi tentang kekuatan persuasi dan gaya retorik yang terdapat dalam pidato Barrak Obama dan John McCain untuk menjawab dua pertanyaan: bagaimana Barrak Obama dan John McCain menyampaikan kekuatan persuasi yang tercermin dari gaya retorik yang digunakannya dalam pidato politiknya; dan apa perbedaan keduanya dalam membawakan kekuatan persuasi tersebut didalam pidato politiknya pada Pemilihan Presiden Amerika Serikat tahun 2008. Peneliti menggunakan kritik retorik sebagai teknik dalam pengumpulan data. Data penelitian ini adalah kalimat-kalimat yang memiliki kekuatan persuasive yang dibentuk dari gaya retorik. Setelah menganalisa data, peneliti menemukan

bahwa Obama dan McCain menggunakan gaya retorik yang berbeda dimana Obama lebih membicarakan tentang masa depan sedangkan McCain membicarakan tentang masa lalu. Obama juga lebih persuasif jika dibandingkan dengan McCain karena menggunakan gaya retorik yang lebih banyak dan variatif.

Kata kunci: kekuatan persuasif, gaya retorik, kritik retorik, pidato politik

A. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response (Griffin, 2012:6). Besides, communication is a process of sharing information or expression between men (Nord, 2007:1). In daily communication, every single person surely has the event when s/he needs to persuade or convince others. The success of this persuading effort will influence his/her goal of creating the communication. Therefore, persuasive power is worth to study to give knowledge about the most effective ways in convincing or persuading others. This reason encourages the researcher to have a study about persuasive power.

To see how persuasive power is activated by the use of rhetorical style, the researcher examines the political speeches. Political speech is a kind of oral communication which the purpose is to convince the audience to go with the orator's idea and then get their vote. The reason why the researcher takes political speech as the object of this study is that political speech's purpose is to persuade the audience, then there must be some strategies which are used in order to get the audience attention. Therefore, persuasive power and rhetorical style commonly exist in it and it can be a good example and object to study about persuasive power and rhetorical style.

A big issue related to the problem above raised in 2008 when U.S presidential election was held. The victory of Barack Obama in U.S election in 2008 became a great phenomenon there since Obama came from minority group which is African-American. He became the first black President of USA. Barack Obama is commonly described by journalist and commentators as a political phenomenon which can be compared with one of the most famous American President, John F Kennedy. According to Samuelsen (2008), the strength of Obama is located in his powerful rhetorical speech. Christopher Wills (2008) even believes that Obama's speeches are a big reason he has become the Democratic presidential nominee then became the first black President of United States. Samuelsen (2008) said that Obama winning is because his speech is due to his time in serving as a Senator in Washington since 2005. With the short time being in Washington, it is sure that he has not made many records that made him can be believed as a President of America. So, most of the reasons behind his success in 2008 election is because his

powerful speech. Another opinion comes from Herbert (2008) who said that Obama's victory speech was a concise oratorical gem in which there was no candidate can move audience as he can.

B. THEORY

Rhetoric is the art of convincing people. Aristotle (2007:7) said that rhetoric is a form of mental or emotional energy imparted to a communication to affect a situation in the interaction of the speakers. According to contemporary rhetorician like Campbell (2001) that rhetoric is symbolic action through which humans constructs the worlds in which we live. Moreover, Brummet (1994) states that rhetoric is the way in which text influence people. Based on the previous stated definition, the researcher takes the definition of rhetoric as the way to influence or to persuade the audience through language. Audiences are only persuaded when the speaker's rhetoric is successful. In classical antiquity definition, rhetoric is the art of speaking well in public. It means that rhetoric can be successful if only it is delivered powerfully (Charteris-Black, 2011).

According to Fairclough (1989:3) power refers to the ability of an entity to make change or to convince people to accept his idea and to act upon it. The similar definition is proposed by Nye (2009:1) who said that power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes he wants. According to Nye (2009:1), power is divided into two kinds: soft power and hard power. Hard power is known as coercive, it means the use of strength or authority to make others do what the speaker wants. This power is often used by a leader of a nation such as president, king or emperor. Military and economy are the tools of doing the hard power to other. In another hand, there is a soft power in which the use of persuasion to change others' beliefs or attitude instead of strength or authority. Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. This power exists mostly in political world. Political leaders have been familiar with the implementation of soft power. Politicians use certain strategies in order to winning the voters through the application of soft power. This present research will focus on soft power or persuasive power, therefore the following explanations are about persuasion (Nye, 2009:4).

Persuasion is a communication process in which the communicator intends a desired response from the receiver. Smith in Grigsby (2011) adds that persuasion is a symbolic activity whose purpose is to effect a voluntary acceptance a new idea proposed by the speaker through the exchange of messages. Perloff (2009:10) defines persuasion as a symbolic process in which the communicators try to change the receiver's attitudes or beliefs about an issue through the exchange of messages.

Furthermore, persuasion is a nonphysical type of power in which the speaker is using the power to makes his intentions and desires known by the receiver who

is the targeted of the power. Therefore, persuasion is a major part of politics. Lobbying, speechmaking, debating, and writing letters are examples of persuasion. When persuasion is used successfully, the agent whom power is exercised knows of the power. Persuasion is felt and experienced by the receiver of the power. Moreover, the receivers realize not only the act of power, but also the intention of the act (Grigsby, 2011:52-53).

In delivering message, the orator or author uses persuasive rhetoric. Persuasive rhetoric is the art of using language to argue effectively for against a set up beliefs of course of action and to convince others to adopt a position or act in a certain way (Aristotle, 2007:15).

Charteris-Black (2011) employs an empirical method to investigate the relation between rhetoric, metaphor and leadership. He identifies a number of metaphors and organizes these according to their original or literal sense; he considers in what sense they are metaphors-inevitably this requires some attention to the contexts in which they are used.

As stated above that the orators will select their strategies in transferring the message in order to create a strong persuasive power in his political speech as his campaign communication (Perloff, 2009), therefore, to improve the persuasive power in the speech can be done by varying rhetorical style which are used by the speaker (Brummet,2003:83). Then, to persuade the receiver, some orator or speech makers use rhetorical devices which offer an opportunity to subtly guide their perspective in ways often barred in a direct approach. By arousing an emotional response, evoking powerful imagery, or calling upon reputable authorities, rhetoric gives the orator a great deal of power with which to communicate his messages (McGuigan, 2007:9). Persuasive power is generally defined as the ability of someone to encourage the audience to accept the speaker's point of view. The most effective way in creating a persuasive power is by using rhetorical style. Rhetorical style is the methods which are used by the speaker to persuade the audience using the existence of rhetoric. Rhetorical style can give many alternatives to say something in different ways. By using rhetorical style, someone can reduce disagreements, emphasize an argument, creating analogy and etc. In another words, persuasive power cannot be separated from the use of rhetorical style and vice versa. Therefore, the use of rhetorical style is also the focus of this study.

Furthermore, Aristotle (2007) stated that speech is a part of rhetoric which persuades or convinces public to agree with the orator's point of view. To convince audience through speech is somehow risky since the orator must consider the pro and contra in audience. Becoming too directly stated disagreement or a blame of other can raise another conflict which can be a boomerang for the orator himself. Therefore, the orator needs to have certain strategy in composing or delivering his speech.

In order to get the clear description of how strong the persuasive power of Obama's speech, the researcher intends to compare his political speeches with his opponent, John McCain. This comparison is based on the definition that rhetoric is the art of speaking well in public (Charteris-Black:2011) then this definition requires comparative judgment in which it is assumed that same people speak better than others (Sauer: 1997). Therefore, the researcher designs this study to compare these two candidates in order to prove that Obama has more power than John McCain.

C. METHOD

The researcher used descriptive qualitative method in conducting the study since the data was in the form of words rather than numbers. According to Tracy (2013:21), descriptive qualitative is a type of research which results the descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from the observed object. In this research, the researcher did not reserve the writing of the result in the end of the project but while doing the project, so the researcher had a time for reflecting and continue the analysis.

In conducting the study, the researcher was the key instrument who has knowledge all about the study. As the key instrument the researcher was the one who collects the data, then reduced the data in order to make it more focus and simpler to analyze, afterwards the researcher displayed the data which were ready to be concluded and verified as the next step.

This study attempted to describe the persuasive power which is reflected by the use of rhetorical style occurred in Barrack Obama's and John McCain's speeches. In addition, the researcher used rhetorical criticism in order to reveal the findings of this study. Rhetorical criticism is a systematic method for describing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating the persuasive force of messages embedded within texts (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1999).

Rhetorical criticism covered several stages as follow: firstly, the researcher coded the data which had been highlighted in the procedure of data collection by using content analysis to obtain the lines or statements which had persuasive power. In qualitative research, it was possible for the researcher to collect the data while analyzing the data therefore there was an overlapping showed from the data collection process and data analysis one. After that, the researcher analyzed the means of the persuasive power existed in those statements. The researcher made explanation on the purpose which might be hidden in the political speeches. The researcher also made some interpretations for the metaphorical word or phrase which may be obtained in the speech. In the next step, the researcher classified the kinds of rhetorical styles in those statements which were used to convey the

persuasive power of the statements and then label it. This labeling process was based on Quinn (2010) and Alm-Arvius (2003) classification of rhetorical style.

The next process is the researcher counted the frequency and the percentage of rhetorical style used in the statements because the frequency and the variations of the rhetorical style that were used affect the persuasive power. This data led the researcher to find out the picture of which candidate who used rhetorical style more often and more various. Then, she compared the persuasive power of Barack Obama and John McCain political speeches to find out the one whose political speeches had more persuasive power according to the rhetorical style used and the related issue found in the political speeches. The last step of this analysis process was narrating the findings into a good report which the researcher presented in the findings.

D. DISCUSSION

The researcher found several differences in Barack Obama's and John McCain's Political Speeches. The differences included the time they used as reflected from the use of rhetorical style, the preference of using certain rhetorical style, the way the candidate satirize his opponent, the frequency of utterances containing persuasive power and the variation of rhetorical style they used.

The first difference is the time used by Barack Obama and John McCain as reflected from the use of rhetorical style in their speeches. Barack Obama tends to be an optimist person by using future time in many chances in his speeches. It can be seen from several utterances in which Obama presents more about his plans if he was elected President. He presented many promises and plans since he did not have enough record to be a proof for the voters to choose him. Therefore, the thing that he did was visualizing his plans and what Americans could get if he was a President. Unlike Obama, John McCain appeared as an experienced politician who had records in Washington and also in military because he was a soldier when he was young. His experience when he was a soldier became a proof for the voters that he would sacrifice himself for Americans' interest. However, this experience had trapped him in a tendency to talk more about the past. It was due to his sacrifice which he always proud of. Moreover, he did not give much visualization of his plans because he liked to tell about his experiences.

The researcher also sees the different choices which are taken by the candidates in creating persuasive power. Obama made great speeches by using exemplum in creating persuasive power. Exemplum is telling story about himself or someone else as the example for the audience. In Obama's speeches, there are many stories from Obama himself or American people which are packaged into powerful persuasion. These utterances can move the audience since they consisted of struggles of middle-class people. They merely talked about the people's suffer

and how unfortunate they were during Bush's government. They cannot get a good health care, jobs and education for their children. These stories are so powerful so can make the audience perceived what the people felt during that time. Unlike Obama, McCain did not use exemplum as his choice in creating persuasive power. It can be seen from his speeches which rarely included exemplum in it. Therefore, if the audience read John McCain's speeches, the audience can lose the feeling in which they perceived when they were reading Obama's speeches.

The third difference is the way the candidate satirize his opponent. The satires are reflected from the use of irony and cynicism. Irony is telling something untrue or contradictory with the actual condition in order to satirize another. While cynicism is a direct satire to bring someone's down. From this perspective, John McCain took more chances in using irony and cynicism to bring Obama's down. He even initiated his speech (Republican Presidential Nomination Acceptance Address Line) by using cynicism. John McCain always satirized Obama in every speech he delivered. However, Obama did not do the same thing, he just tried to clarify what had been accused to him by McCain.

After having all data of the present study in the form of extractions, the researcher counts the frequency of utterances containing persuasive power because one of the ways to see the persuasive power is by looking at the frequency of the utterances. Obama created 152 utterances containing persuasive power while John McCain created 88 utterances. From this finding, it can be concluded that Obama had more persuasive power than John McCain.

Despite the frequency of the utterances, the variation of rhetorical style they were also determined the persuasive power created by someone. Therefore, the researcher in this study also counted the number of variations of rhetorical styles made by Barack Obama and John McCain. Obama used 23 rhetorical styles while McCain created 18 rhetorical styles. From this perspective, the researcher can also suggest that Obama were more persuasive than McCain.

E. CONCLUSION

The researcher investigated the rhetorical style and persuasive power in Obama's and McCain's speech to find the differences and the similarities between their speeches. From the investigation, the researcher concluded that there were two conclusions: First, the researcher found that both Obama and John McCain used rhetorical style to convey the meaning in their speeches. Yet, they produced the rhetorical style differently in case of the time they used as reflected from the use of rhetorical style, the preference of using certain rhetorical style, the way the candidate satirize his opponent, the frequency of utterances containing persuasive power and the variation of rhetorical style they used. Second, The researcher found

that Obama has more persuasive power in his speech comparing with John McCain since he produced more frequent and more various rhetorical style.

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