

Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners' Understanding of Using Paralinguistic Features in Obama's Presidential Election Campaign: A Socio-phonetic Analysis

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Abstract

The language of politicians, particularly when they are speaking in public, is an interesting mixture of old and new for persuasive ends. It shows much of the ritual phraseology and consciousness of precedent, associated with religion or law, and it makes use of many of the rhetorical and dramatic techniques linked to advertising or the media. In order to create a successful communication, a politician has to express attitudes and emotions that are mutually known to the participants in a particular context. In which paralinguistic strategies play a major role in persuading audience. Hence, the present study sheds light on the use of paralinguistic strategies by politicians (i.e., Obama's presidential election race (2008)) with reference to Iraqi EFL learners understanding of pace, pitch, intensity and pause. Methodologically, the speech was divided into six units and then delivered to the investigated students. The instrument of the study is monitoring and tape recording. In terms of the results, the study found that in election rise meaning is not essentially inherent in a word or expression but it is given to the words and expressions by a shared understanding of a linguistic community and paralinguistic cues play a major role in attributing some meaning to them. Statistically, only 40% of the investigated subjects understood and recognized the use of paralinguistic strategies in political discourse for persuasive ends. (see appendices)

Key words: *paralinguistic cues, political discourse, Presidential speeches.*

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1. Introduction

infinite numbers of purposes, from writing letters, to gossiping with friends, expressing facts, ideas or events, making speeches and talking to ourselves in the mirror. Language, according to Kramsch (2005: 3), is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex way. To support this fact, Brown and Yule (1983: 1) allege that the analysis of language should not be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs. But it is necessary to investigate what the language is used for. For instance, the idea that language is used for communication is of a common sense, but there are many purposes and needs, may or may not be covered by the term 'communication'. That is, 'political language' has many functions used to cover the human affairs with different senses.

The rhetoric and persuasion utilized in these speeches are submitted to a number of complex features some of which are cultural references, political slogans, catch phrases, and sentences that can be simply acquired by the audience. The most important thing is that the communication factors which play the essential role of the political activities occurring in so many countries. What achieves the political leaders' aims at their societies is the use of the global effective communication systems which can have a special impression on the audience (Int.5: 1-2). In this kind of speeches the audience feels comfortable and happy since it is a festive and a celebration day for every country. Every president starts with a speech including phrases and sentences designed to be memorable, i.e. he refers to communal values drawn from the past. Moreover, the president in this kind of speech states his new political strategies that are to be governed in his presidential term (Welliver, 2004: 1).

2. Methodology and Data Analysis

The aim of the study is to investigate Iraqi EFL learners understanding to different patterns of pace, pitch, intensity and pause that used in different units of the selected speech, Obama's presidential election race (2008). Hence, the study sheds light on the importance to paralinguistic cues in political discourse as the purpose and nature of the current work. Moreover, the effect of paralinguistic cues on the linguistic strategies is taken into consideration while analyzing the interconnection between the sub-intentions and strategies. The speech has been divided into six units on the basis of intentions and strategies to ease the process and stages of analysis, and then delivered to the participants as recorded discourse. A special care has been taken to paralinguistic cues that each unit has to deal with definite sub-intentions. The subjects of the study were 50 Iraqi EFL undergraduate learners from two English Departments. 25 participants were from College of Education and the other 25 were from College of Arts in University of Thi-Qar who are all native speakers of Arabic. The instrument of the analyzed data was monitoring and tape recording and then takes notes. Practically, the subjects of the study first introduce to a short introduction and definition to the main paralinguistic strategies and then exposed to the recorded speech.

In terms of the data analysis, Obama's 'New Hampshire Primary Concession Speech' often titled 'Yes We Can' has been taken from www.youtube.com. The original speeches have been transcribed without removing any false start and repetition. This speech was delivered by Senator Obama in Nashua, New Hampshire on

January 8, 2008. Obama as the Democratic presidential candidate gave this speech after coming in second to opposing candidate Senator Hillary Clinton at the Democratic Primary Election. Directly, he was speaking to an audience of New Hampshire, but because the organization of his campaign used social electronic media widely, his audience were far more people.

3. Discussion and Analysis

The first unit of the speech consists of 75 words spoken in 19 MUUs in 79 seconds. The range of this unit is from MUU No. 1 to 19. In this unit the length of MUUs varies from 0.51 second to 7.58 seconds. The length of pauses ranges between 0.31 second and 14.39 seconds. The sub-intentions in this unit are to connect to the audience and establish common grounds, and to establish trustworthiness. For realizing these intentions, he uses the strategies of thanking, using informal tone and congratulating.

In the opening unit of the speech, Obama has the sub-intention of connecting to the audience. For realizing this intention, he uses the strategies of thanking the audience and informality in tone. He thanks the audience of New Hampshire full fifteen times for voting, waiting, and campaigning for him. He strengthens his connection with the audience by using informal language and style giving the impression of intimacy. He uses slightly higher pitch to show his enthusiasm and sincerity of his feelings. Obama strengthens his connection with the audience by proclaiming his love with increased pitch. He addresses the audience saying, "Thank you, New Hampshire. Thank you guys. Thank you so much. I love you back." By using the strategy of addressing the audience by mentioning the name of their place New Hampshire for their group identity, Obama intends a strong mass appeal.

The shouting of slogans of 'Obama! Obama!' fills the speaker with enthusiasm and he thanks the audience in high pitch with increased force. The speaker responds to slogan shouting of 'Obama!' by thanking the audience in comparatively higher pitch. The speaker shouts the punch line and gives a long pause in which the audience shout slogans encouraging each other.

Obama begins the second step of his speech by establishing his trustworthiness and character. For realizing this intention, he uses the strategy of congratulating. Obama congratulates Senator Hilary Clinton for her victory. Praising others is thought to be an important virtue. Hence, this strategy enhances Obama's character and establishes his trustworthiness. His trustworthiness is also enhanced by the use of low pitch and force in congratulating Hilary Clinton as it lends gravity to his voice.

The style and strategies that Obama uses for realizing the intention of connecting to the audience are not very common among political orators. Generally political orators use low pitch and slow pace in the opening part of their speeches and in this way they establish the gravity and reliability of their character. Low pitch hints the confidence and self-control of the speakers. Obama begins his speech with a very high pitch of 268 Hertz, which is far above his average pitch. Besides this, he observes a lot of informality in selection of words and sentence structure. The utterance units like "Thank you guys" and "I love you back" have a lot of informality. Other things like asking the audience to give Lady Clinton 'a warm round of applause' and clapping with the audience himself is also not very common in political oratory. All this informality of tone and style indicates that Obama intended to connect to the audience not as a powerful leader but as a cordial friend as informality is taken as an indicator of intimacy.

3.1 Analysis of unit 2

The second unit of the speech comprises 70 words spoken in 13 MUUs in 50.87 seconds. The length of MUU ranges between 0.77 second and 3.51 seconds and the length of pauses is recorded between 0.70 second and 9.86 seconds. The main sub-intentions of the speaker in this unit are to introduce the issue, to state the issue, to elaborate the issue and to amplify the issue by using different strategies. This unit is short but important as it sets the mood and tone of the speech.

After getting connected to the audience and establishing his trustworthiness, Obama introduces the issue by comparing the past with the present of his campaign. Obama sets the scene of his speech by referring to the unfavourable situation of his election campaign a few weeks ago and contrasting it with the huge support of people that he gets now.

A few weeks ago, no one imagined that we'd have accomplished what we did here tonight. For most of this campaign, we were far behind, and we always knew our climb would be steep. But in record numbers, you came out and spoke up for change. And with your voices and your votes, you made it clear that at this moment - In this election -there is something happening in America.

He also encourages and motivates his audience by praising their efforts in bringing this unimaginably favourable situation. He gives the audience the full credit of his strengthening situation by using pronoun 'you', and by using inclusive first person pronoun 'we', he boosts the team spirit and cooperation. The use of the metaphor of mountaineering in the clause "our climb would be steep" also motivates the audience. This metaphor strengthens the fellow feeling and boosts the fighting spirits of the audience.

He states the issue of bringing 'change' in America by using the strategy of indirect statement. This issue of 'change' is indirect and ambiguous as it may mean the change from white to black president, or the change from all problems to their solutions. The audience are free to interpret this 'change' in their own way. The issue has been elaborated by using the strategy of describing the reason and components of the efforts for bringing 'change' in America. This strategy is noticeable in the line "with your voices and your votes, you made it clear that at this moment - in this election -there is something happening in America". Obama amplifies the issue by using the strategy of contrasting the present with the past situation. He amplifies the issue by contrasting the hardships with enthusiasm of the audience for bringing 'change'. The speaker gives full credit of bringing 'change' to the audience.

This is also noteworthy that Obama uses low pitch in this unit. This low pitch lends gravity to his tone and establishes his reliability. It seems that Obama dedicated the opening part of the speech to rapport building and connecting to the audience, and he seriously started his speech from unit 2. This is unlike the other two political orators in this study as they tried to realize several sub-intentions in the opening units of their speeches.

3.2 Analysis of unit 3

Unit 3 is comparatively longer as it consists of 159 words spoken in 22 MUUs in just 112.16 seconds. The intensity is recorded between 55.90 dB and 76.89 dB in this unit. The length of MUUs varies between 0.78 second and 6.81 seconds and the pause length has been recorded between 0.51 second and 26.69 seconds. The major sub-intentions in this unit are to amplify the issue, to elaborate the issue, mass appeal and to motivate the audience. The strategies used for realizing these intentions have been discussed hereunder.

The speaker amplifies the issue by using the strategy of repetition. He repeats the clause “there is something happening in America” full five times. This strategy has been very popular among the orators for amplifying the issue and also for stirring the emotions and boosting enthusiasm of the audience. Rise is pitch in this unit adds to amplification of the issue.

There is something happening when men and women in Des Moines and Davenport; in Lebanon and Concord come out in the snows of January to wait in lines that stretch block after block because they believe in what this country can be. There is something happening -there is something happening when Americans who are young in age and in spirit who have never before participated in politics. Turn out in numbers we've never seen because they know in their hearts that this time must be different. There is something happening when people vote not just for the party they belong to but the hopes they hold in common that whether we are rich or poor; black or white; Latino or Asian; whether we hail from Iowa or New Hampshire, Nevada or South Carolina, we are ready to take this country in a fundamentally new direction. That is what's happening in America right now. Change is what's happening in America.

The speaker elaborates the issue of ‘change’ by using the strategy of describing components and elaborating the reason. He describes the efforts of the people of different places for bringing ‘change’. People in Des Moines, Davenport, and Concord came out to vote for ‘change’ without caring for extremely cold weather or pain of standing in long lines because they want to “take this country in a fundamentally new direction” by bringing change.

For realizing the sub-intention of mass appeal, the speaker uses the strategy of addressing the audience by their group identities, such as, young Americans, rich and poor, black and white, Latino and Asian. The strategy of mentioning the names of different places has also been used for effecting mass appeal. The speaker mentions the names of various places like Des Moines, Davenport, Lebanon, Concord, Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina. The audience of these places feel that their presence has been properly acknowledged and they have been given proper importance. These strategies of mentioning group identities and mentioning places of the audience connect the orator to the audience at personal level. These strategies are very effective for mass appeal as the audience feel personally addressed when his group identity or name of place is mentioned.

The speaker motivates and encourages the audience by using the strategies of showing hope and appealing to their sense of dignity and social responsibility. The use of high pitch and force in speaking the optimistic statement – “we are ready to take this country in a fundamentally new direction” adds force to motivation. The repetition of ‘something happening’ and ‘change’ motivates and encourages the audience particularly when they are given the credit of bringing ‘change’.

3.3 Analysis of unit 4

Unit 4 consists of 101 words spoken in 11 MUUs in just 52.29 seconds. The length of MUUs is measured between 1.15 seconds and 8.92 seconds and the length of pauses varies between 0.45 second and 1.86 seconds. The sub-intentions in this unit are to motivate the audience, to appeal to emotion, and mass appeal. Various linguistic and paralinguistic strategies have been used for realizing these intentions.

Obama encourages and motivates the audience by using the strategy of showing hope and giving them the credit of all positive that happens in Obama’s government. The audience could become ‘new majority’ and lead America out of ‘political darkness’ into prosperity and good governance. Obama’s government would

be people's government which he hints by saying "You can be the new majority who can lead this nation out of a long political darkness". He also uses the strategy of showing hope for motivating the audience. He shows the audience the hope that their united efforts can solve 'any problem' of 'detraction and division' and can fulfill 'any destiny'. He states very forcefully that they can do anything to lead America to a better tomorrow. He shows dissatisfaction with the present situation in American politics and appeals to the collective responsibility of the speaker and the audience to lead America to a better future.

[...] who understand that if we mobilize our voices to challenge the money and influence that's stood in our way and challenge ourselves to reach for something better. There's no problem we can't solve. There is no destiny we cannot fulfill.

The speaker appeals to the audience's emotions of anger and fear by using the emotive metaphor of darkness. Darkness is the traditional symbol of fear and 'political darkness' can stir people's anger in a democratic country. He tries to stir the anger of the audience by mentioning undesirable things in American politics. He mentions the influence of 'money and influence' on American politics, and hints the "detraction and division that has clouded Washington" to stir the emotion of anger of the audience. Since all the negative things are attributed to the then government of America, the audience may get angry and think of bringing 'change'. Attribution of negative things to the opponents has been a very popular strategy of political orators. In this unit, the pitch and force of delivery slowly increases for creating a surge of emotion in the audience.

For mass appeal the speaker uses the strategy of addressing the audience by their group identities. He addresses the audience as 'Democrats, Independents and Republicans' and explains that they share the same problems. Hence, they can work together for solving the existing problems. This strategy not only enhances the image of the speaker but also makes the speaker acceptable even to his opponents.

3.4. Analysis of unit 5

Unit 5 consists of 14 MUUs comprising 146 words in 81.33 seconds. The length of MUUs varies between 0.74 second and 7.02 seconds and the length of pauses is recorded between 0.18 second and 11.34 seconds.

The major sub-intentions are to motivate the audience for action and stir their emotions. The speaker also intends to get mass support for which he addresses the groups of people. He uses the strategy of showing hope for encouraging and motivating, while for arousing audience's emotions he uses emotionally charged words and emotive metaphors. The use of paradigm results in an enhanced appeal to logic.

Motivation of the audience is directly related to their persuasion. The political orators use various strategies for motivating the audience, such as, showing hope, appealing to their sense of dignity, and appealing to sense of responsibility. Obama encourages and motivates the audience by showing hope that the existing problems of healthcare, insurance, education, and unemployment in America will be solved in Obama's government.

By talking about these common problems of the Americans, he tries to win their confidence and motivate them to vote for him. Healthcare and insurance are very expensive services in America. Common American is angry with the companies which outsource the jobs to the countries like India and in this way the opportunities of job in America decrease. Obama speaks people's language when he says that such companies will not be given tax relaxations. Quality education is the next major problem. Obama promises

that in his government the children will be given better education that will lead them to success. He encourages the audience and fills them with enthusiasm by using emotively appealing high pitch and force while saying that people will not err this time. He encourages the audience for taking the suggested action of voting for Obama by showing hope that the working class will be benefitted. The use of the first person inclusive pronoun 'we' as the agent of all corrective measures, Obama shares the sense of social responsibility of solving the mentioned problems with the audience.

The effect of motivational strategies increases manifold with the combination of right emotion. So, the political orators mostly use the strategies of motivating the audience and appealing to their emotion in close proximity. Obama appeals to the emotion of anger by using emotionally charged words like 'outrage of unaffordable and unavailable healthcare'. He strongly appeals to the emotion of anger by referring to the injustice of unavailability of equal opportunities of education to the poor. The use of emotive metaphor of 'corridors of shame' also arouses the audience's anger. He stirs their emotion of anger by mentioning the injustice of outsourcing by American companies, which has caused unemployment in America. This emotion of anger may motivate the audience to punish the people responsible for all these problems by voting for Obama.

For mass appeal, Obama addresses to the groups of people such as, doctors, patients, workers, businessmen, democrats, republicans and teachers. He tries to win the support of the teachers and their families by indicating that his government may raise their pay and reward them for their great service. He also enhances the dignity of the teachers by saying "how great teachers are" and in this way he tries to win the support of the audience of this profession.

3.5 Analysis of unit 6

Unit 6 comprises 147 words spoken in 18 MUUs in 84.56 seconds. The length of the MUUs in this unit ranges between 1.47 seconds and 6.81 seconds. The pause length is recorded between 0.18 second and 20.75 seconds. The main sub-intentions of the speaker in this unit are to motivate the audience for the intended action and to appeal to their emotions. For encouraging and motivating the audience, the speaker uses the strategy of showing hope, and for appealing to emotion, he uses emotionally charged words and mentions emotional events.

Hope has been a great motivational strategy in political rhetoric. Obama also uses this strategy skillfully in this unit. He encourages and motivates the audience to take the suggested action of bringing change by supporting Obama. For this, he uses the strategy of showing hope of proper utilization of American resources for scientific advancement and environmental balance in his government. He promises to the audience that he will end the war in Iraq and bring the soldiers home. By saying so Obama tries to win the support of those whose family members are on the war front and also of those who are against this war. He also promises that he will "finish the job with Al Queda" and restore the moral understanding of America in the world. He also appeals to their sense of dignity by mentioning their social responsibility of solving the major problems of the world such as "terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease". Motivation becomes most effective if done with fear and anger forming its background. Obama, an expert practitioner of political oratory, combines the strategies of motivating and stirring the emotions of anger and fear.

He appeals to emotions of anger and fear in the audience by using emotionally charged words and mentioning emotive events. He stirs the emotion of anger and fear by mentioning Iraq war, Al Qaeda's attack on World Trade Center on 9/11, and "terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease". While mentioning 9/11 and Iraq war, his pitch and force are very high resulting in an emotive boost in speech (See MUU No. 84, 85 & 91 in appendix 2). In the background of the emotion of fear, it becomes easy for the speaker to persuade the audience to take the suggested action of voting for Obama as he may take the audience out of this fear.

The analysis of this speech shows that the speaker uses the strategies for connecting to the audience and establishing trustworthiness in various units of the speech. However, the main concentration of these strategies is seen in the opening units of the speech. The reason of this phenomenon may be speaker's desire to stay connected to the audience throughout his speech.

The speaker tries to enhance his character and establish his trustworthiness by praising his opponents. Praising others is perceived as a virtue so the audience may think Obama to be very virtuous as he is praising his political rivals. He expresses his thankfulness to the audience and the organizers for supporting him and gives them the credit of his success. Thankfulness is again a virtue which enhances Obama's character and trustworthiness. Virtue of character establishes trustworthiness of the speaker, which in turn increases the chances of audience's compliance with the speaker.

Obama strengthens his connection with the audience by using the strategy of sharing goal and showing association. The audience and the speaker both are working for the goal of bringing 'change' in America. Their goals and aspirations are the same. By giving the audience the credit of his success, he endears himself to the audience. Use of inclusive pronoun promotes fellow-feeling and unity among the audience. In this unit also, the speaker intends to effect mass support by mentioning the group identities of the audience 'organizers, volunteers and staff'.

Obama motivates the audience for action of bringing 'change' by appealing to their sense of self-respect and dignity by giving them importance. He also appeals to their sense of social responsibility. He reminds people that they can do a lot for bringing change in America. Their patriotic feelings and sense of social responsibility is stirred in the following words.

Reason we began this improbable journey almost a year ago is because it's not just about what I will do as President, it's also about what you, the people who love this country, The citizens of United States of America can do to change it. That is what this election is all about. That's why tonight belongs to you. It belongs to the organizers and the volunteers and the staff who believed in this journey and rallied so many others to join.

4. Conclusion

Meaning is not essentially inherent in a word or expression but it is given to the words and expressions by a shared understanding of a linguistic community, and paralinguistic cues play a major role in attributing some meaning to them. Even a pause can significantly affect the meaning of an utterance. Furthermore, Roman orthographic system does not have such notations through which the paralinguistic features can be

represented in written texts. As language is primarily spoken and the spoken discourses, such as drama, conversation, and public speech, cannot be analyzed impartially without considering its phonological and paralinguistic features, as a change in tone and occurrence of pause can significantly change the meaning of an utterance. Hence, there is a need of a model of spoken discourse analysis which takes care of linguistic and paralinguistic features simultaneously. This can be seen as a good opportunity for further research area.

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