

The Power of Rethoric: The War on Terror Through the Words of U.S. Presidents

Carlos Javier Díaz Ferrer

Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

It is our goal in this doctoral thesis to analyse several speeches on the war on terror made by the former U.S. presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, as well as the current US President Joe Biden, taking into account Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA).

Even though terrorism has been part of American political speeches for quite a long time, it was right after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York when this particular subject became important. In his first speech to Congress post 9/11, ex-president Bush used the expression "War on Terror" for the first time, which had an enormous impact on his whole presidency.

Later on, in September 2014, Obama held a speech on ISIL ((Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), declaring them a barbaric terrorist organization.

Despite the fact that the democratic president was replaced by a republican one, we could still hear similar words in ex-president Trump speeches with reference to ISIL and their unscrupulous methods of killing indiscriminately

This work aims to analyze several speeches made by the ex-presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, as well as the current president Joe Biden, from the perspective of critical discourse analysis.

In our working assumption, a couple of questions arise:

- 1) What changes and continuities, if any, are perceived throughout the different American administrations in the speeches analysed in this work?
- 2) To what extent has the political position of the different administrations changed over the years with relation to the war on terrorism, and specifically to ISIL?

With relation to the methodology, we used Fairclough's three-level model of discourse, based on a dialectic view of language.

Fairclough's method of CDA falls into three levels, and it starts with the textual level of the text. The second level is discursive practice. Finally, the third level of CDA is an study of ideology in the texts.

The textual level involves: vocabulary, word meaning, grammar, cohesion and modality. The second level deals with discursive practice, which focuses on: force, coherence and intertextuality. Finally, the third level refers to ideology and hegemony.

In this doctoral thesis so far, we have seen how the ex-presidents Trump and Obama, as well as the current president Biden, expose their particular conception of foreign policy with relation to terrorism, especially with ISIL.

We have also seen how each administration points out the justification of the war, as well as the immense power of the attacked nation, in this case The United States.

To conclude, we have seen how language in general, and rethoric in particular, can be used to construct an ideology or set a disequilibrium between different groups of people.

Keywords: terror, rethoric, discourse, ideology, discursive.

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