

## Critical discourse analysis on Joe Biden's elected president speech

**Try Mahendra Siregar**

Applied Linguistics-Program, Yogyakarta State University

Email: [trymahendrasiregar@gmail.com](mailto:trymahendrasiregar@gmail.com)

**Abstract** – This research discusses critically about Joe Biden's elected president speech on 8 November 2020. The research objectives are the discourse structure and the ideologies contains in Biden's speech. The research designed is qualitative descriptive which the data source is in form of documentation that is online transcription of Joe Biden's speech. The technique to analyze the data, researcher adopted six CDA steps; problem identification, literature specification, development of code analysis, content analysis and coding, reading and interpretation and explaining findings. The theory to analyze the speech is Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis Elements; namely macro-structure, micro-structure, and superstructure. By applying the CDA elements, the researcher found discourse structures those are macro-structure (thematic) - intertextually, micro-structure in two main focused semantics (background, detail and presupposition), syntaxes analysis (cohesion; who, and, so etc. and pronoun; I, you, they, we, etc.), stylistic (pronoun; related to certain contexts and lexicon selection to show speaker's emphasizes) and rhetoric in term of persuasive function. Then superstructures of the speech are opening, content, and closing remark. The other important of this research finding is the ideologies stated implicitly and explicitly by Biden, those are unity, equality and freedom for the US citizens.

**Keywords:** critical analysis, CDA, Joe Biden, speech act

## 1. Introduction

In one case, language needs to be viewed not just as ‘systems’ but as ‘discourse’. A discourse, as it is widely known, is a whole package, in which a way of using not just words, but words, deeds, objects, tools, and so forth to enact a certain sort of socially situated identity (Rogers, 2004). In our society language or discourse is used for certain contexts to construct certain sorts of situated meaning; that may relate to cultures, ideologies, economic, social, and so on. Gee in Hamad & Maghlouth, (2017) argues by giving some comments and statements that once someone studies language because it uses during a particular context, it enables us to reveal or analyze more about how things are stated or done or how they can exist differently in the worlds.

The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use (Rogers, 2004). In language philosophy concepts, a language in use, specifically regarded as a language in relation to human activities (Basyaruddin, 2015). It is more than just a product (spoken and written), but as a constitutive dialectical, productive, distributive, and reproductive process that is in relation to social worlds. A further way to analyze discourse is by applying a critical point of view or more noticed as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

CDA is categorized as critical thinking. Critical thinking is typically defined as a lively, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed sort of knowledge in light of grounds that support it and therefore the further conclusion to which it tends (Dewey, 1933). Beyer (1995) also defines that ‘critical thinking means making reasoned judgments’. The CDA may be a –critical- perspective/interpretation which is concentrated on social problems, and particularly on the role of discourse within the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In addition, the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' states the aim of critical interpretation of discourse for 'recovering the social meanings expressed in discourse by analyzing the linguistic structures in the light of their interactional and wider social contexts' (Fairclough, 1992; cf. Lauwren, 2020; Kriyantono, 2019).

Nowadays, many discourses either in the form of written or spoken, are essential to reveal its meaning and purposes, also the language structures on its interactional-wider context. In spoken form, the discourse to analyze can be from a speech that related to many fields; such as politics, presidential, economic, etc. One case that has been highlighted by the world is an American Election on November 3rd, 2020. Joe Biden was announced as the elected president. Regarded in the common situation after the election, there must be pros and cons over the results. A speech is a medium of communication to deliver power, information, and some other contexts to the public. Joe Biden’s speech is the newest hot topic to be discussed. Thus to see critically what lies in Joe Biden’s speech is essential especially on how the discourse is used in social practice. This research will try to figure out the discourse structures on Joe Biden’s speech and how the ideologies represent in his speech.

## 2. Method

This research is conducted in qualitative description to analyze the issue by CDA in Joe Biden’s speech. Qualitative research typically studies many variables intensively over an extended period of time to capture the richness of context and personal perspectives of the subject based on the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as observations, interviews, documentation, and other more discursive sources of information (Gay & Peter, 2000).

In qualitative research, the data can be collected from documentations. Arikunto (2006) states that documentation method to seek data from books, notes, transcribe newspaper, magazine, agenda, etc. For this research, the documentation used is a kind of transcription in online news about Joe Biden’s elected president speech on November, 11th 2020.

The researcher adopts six steps in conducting a CDA (Wall et al., 2015), namely (1) identify the problem, (2) specify the literature, (3) developing of code for analysis, (4) analyzing content and coding, (5) reading and interpreting, and (6) explaining the findings.

### 3. Results and Discussion

van Dijk (1988) emphasizes three kinds of CDA, those are macro-structure, micro-structure, and superstructure. For the following analysis and discussion about the CDA elements; those will be presented below.

van Dijk (2014) explains situations, as well as the events, actions, people, or objects contained in them, maybe described at various levels of the macro-structure. First, in the macro-structure basic concept, a structure cannot be determined by each sentence but need further exploration to understand the whole text to get a speaker's intentions. Thematic, as a lead sentence in speech or text, must be considered beforehand.

Thematic of Biden's speech has been considered as National Presidential Speech which is mainly about grateful feelings to be the elected president in 2020.

*"And I am humbled", Biden makes a statement in front of American and world people, "by the trust and confidence you placed in me". Biden continues his statement, "I pledge to be a president who seeks not to divide but unify, who doesn't see red states and blue states, only sees the United States"* (Biden's Speech, 2020).

In the speech above, Biden intends to say his grateful thank to all electors for winning the election. By this victory, He pledges to unify America in general without any diversity. To see people equally; no matter what races, cultures, sex-orientation, religions, and origins of the people. There is no separation of Red State and Blue State but the United States.

Further investigation of the macrostructure level is intertextually by recalling 'old' information to assign the general theme appearance. The word 'to unify' resembles big gratitude to win the election. The current administration or precedential were made people, especially Biden disappointed. Racism, discrimination, sexism, and some other negatives issue come up for a whole time. The thematic 'feeling grateful to win the elections' has implicit meaning to fulfil people's needs to be seen equally and explicitly to create joy, happiness, and renew faith for a better day.

The microstructure is about analysis within discourse elements. The elements to be analyzed are semantics, syntaxes, stylistics (lexicon), and rhetoric. There are three extensions while analyzing the semantics elements in text or discourse. Those are including background, detail, and presupposition.

Backgrounds exclusively affect the text tendencies of its social and ideological practices while detail lies for the control of information being delivered. Biden in his speech used background and detail as can be seen below.

"I'll have the respect", Biden states before the public, "of serving with an incredible vice-chairman. Biden continues his statement "You just heard from Kamala Harris", he mentions his vice president "who makes history because the first woman, first Black woman, the primary woman of South Asian descent, the primary daughter of immigrants ever elected to this country. Don't tell me it's impossible within us. It's long overdue" (Biden's Speech, 2020).

The social situation of the current president was quite painful due to discrimination or racism. Some cases arise negatively about how Black people are treated. One case issued was that the current president issued referring to abuse Black people by saying 'Black lives matter a symbol of hate' but now after Biden is elected to be the next president; those Black people can now be living equally. Biden illustrates that by mentioning Kamala Harris, his vice president, as the first black and immigrant woman ever elected. Some Phrases also initially used to support his statement; "Don't tell me, it's not possible" and "It's long overdue". These

phrases used to convince audiences or the addressee that the United States is not totally filled with racist, but more loves exist.

#### Presupposition

The other extension in microstructure aside from background and detail is a presupposition. In Biden's speech, he said as follows.

“The battle to restore decency, defend democracy, and give everybody in this country a fair shot. That’s all they’re asking for. A fair shot” (Biden’s Speech, 2020).

The presupposition occurs as a statement that is considered reliable and does not need to be debated over its occurrence. The words “to restore, defend, and gives a fair shot” are considered as what people need while they live in a country, even more, those who initially as an immigrant. The presuppositions are facts that yet been proven, but still can be used to support certain ideas and statements.

The syntaxes analysis focus to analyze the sentence structures wit and without considering other non-linguistics aspects such as cultures, socials, or ideologies. The Syntax will more specifically see about the cohesion and pronoun.

Cohesion is a grammatical and lexical linking within a text or sentence that holds a text together and gives it meaning. In order to convey his speech, Biden uses some kinds of conjunctions, those are who, and, well, or and so.

“My fellow Americans and the people who brought me to the dance: Delawareans. I see my buddy Tom, Senator Tom Carper, down there” (Biden’s Speech, 2020).

The conjunction for the utterance above is who. The who is a relative pronoun to connect two clauses in a sentence or an utterance. This conjunction stands as the subject of a dependent clause or refers to Biden’s American fellow.

“Let us be the nation that we know we can. A nation united, a nation strengthened. A nation healed. The United States of America, ladies, and gentlemen, there’s never, never been anything we’ve tried we’ve not been able to do.

So I remember as my grandpa said when I walked out of his home when I was a kid up in Scranton, he said: “Joey, keep the faith.” And our grandmother, when she was alive, she yelled: “No, Joey, spread it.” Spread the faith” (Biden’s Speech, 2020).

The other conjunction is so to show cause and effect. The so stands as an effect for his previous statement that is a nation united, a nation strengthened which remind him of his grandfather's memory to spread the faith.

Table 1 Pronoun Used in Biden’s Speech

No.	Pronoun	Reference
1	I/me/my/ myself	Joe Biden, <i>himself</i>
2	You	Addressee or Audience; US Citizens
3	We/our/us	Joe Biden and Addressee (US Citizens)
4	They/them/ themselves	US Citizens (those who’s being discriminated)
5	He/his	Obama and Biden’s Grandfather
6	She/her	Jill’s mother and Biden’s Grandmother
7	It	The election result, the fight against inequality, Covid-19 issue, leading science and experts group, people power, faith, US Administration,

Based on the table above, Biden, in order to point to certain people is using various pronouns. The dominant pronouns; “I/me/my/myself” used to show his power over another addressee; mainly the intention of pronouns applied in his speech is to show the position of speaker and addressee; those areas elected president and US citizens.

The context models are so important because they are the interface between mental and information (knowledge and so on) about an event and actual meanings being constructed in discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). The specifics event, things or person, or more generally, need not all be expressed in discourse because of irrelevant selections or redundant. Thus the stylistic here is used to see the meaning of words or sentences based on the contexts.

The first stylistic device is the selection of pronouns. The pronoun usage refers to people in a certain context for an implicit meaning in it. The pronoun notices show social power and hegemony among the speaker and addressees.

*“On Monday, I will name a group of leading scientists and experts as transition advisers to help take the Biden-Harris Covid-19 plan and convert it into an action blueprint that will start on January the 20th, 2021” (Bidens Speech, 2020).*

The pronoun I in the utterance above represents the speaker’s power to manage scientists and expert groups to overcome the Covid-19 issue in the United States. The power as being indicated by the pronoun I here strengthen by the date of the presidential inauguration which has been scheduled on January the 20th, 2021. An officially announced president means having a lot of power to take over the administration in the country.

The other usage of pronouns is to indicate equality among the speaker and addressees. Biden uses the pronoun we to indicate equality to move forward together for the United States, as follows.

*“Folks, America has always, is shaped, by inflection points, by moments in time. We’ve made hard decisions about who we are and what we want to be” (Biden’s Speech, 2020).*

Equality means having the same status or treating someone in the same way. Biden intends to show that everyone has faced the same problems to make decisions for personal and communities matter as in today is about citizen’s life in the United States.

The other stylistic device is the selection of lexicons. The selected lexicons represent attitudes towards the ideology and social affairs of the state, as such:

*“I pledge to be a president who seeks not to divide but unify, who doesn’t see red states and blue states, only sees the United States” (Biden’s Speech, 2020).*

A pledge is being selected to use instead of a promise. These pledges and promises have the same explicit meaning (denotative meaning), however, both lexicons can be interpreted differently by their associative meanings (connotative meaning). As a verb, the word pledge is to make a solemn promise (to do something), while the promise is to commit to something or action. The state issues must be taken seriously because it covers the nation's life; that why the pledge is being selected.

Biden, in his speech, tries to convince people to reach out for some changes in the United States. This case is basically considered as a rhetorical art of speaking or as a persuasive strategy. *Well, folks, we stand at an inflection point. We have an opportunity to defeat despair, to build a nation of prosperity and purpose. We can do it. I know we can. I’ve long talked about the battle for the soul of America. We must restore the soul of America (Biden’s Speech, 2020).*

The rhetorical art of speaking above used to advocate Americans to work together against inequality and to defeat despair for a new American or United States prosperity. This rhetoric, persuasive strategy, is mainly used to make people accept what is being conveyed.

Superstructure research examines the speech sequences; how the speech is begun and closed. Joe Biden’s speech consists of critical parts, those are opening, content, and closing part.

In this part, Biden mentioned few names to begin his speech, especially his American Fellows who fully support him during the election. He conveys that the victory is not just belonging to him but to all people in the US who have spoken for a better life in the US. By the victorious he also implies that he will take his position seriously to unify the US; minimalizing discrimination, separated US territory to be unity to rebuilt new faith among Americans.

*My fellow Americans, and the people who brought me to the dance: Delawareans. I see my buddy Tom, Senator Tom Carper, down there. And I think, I think Senator Coons is there. And I think the governor's around and ... is that Ruth Ann? And that's former Governor Ruth Ann Minner. Most importantly, my sisters-in-law, my and my sister, Valerie. Anyway. ... Folks, the people of this nation have spoken. They've delivered us a clear victory, a convincing victory, a victory for we, the people. We've won with the most votes ever cast for a presidential ticket in the history of the nation. Seventy-four million. ... Well, I must admit, it surprised me tonight. We're seeing all over this nation, all cities and all parts of the country, indeed across the world, an outpouring of joy, of hope, renewed faith in tomorrow to bring a better day. And I'm humbled by the trust and confidence you placed in me. I pledge to be a president who seeks not to divide but unify, who doesn't see red states and blue states, only sees the United States (Biden's Speech, 2020).*

In this part, he delivers some ideas those are about Kamala Harris, the first black and immigrant woman, being elected as the vice president. By this, he tries to show the US is not a racist country; everything is possible in the US. Then, he also shows his thanks for the support he receives from some communities in the US; by implying equality by mentioning what being taboo among people earlier; sex-orientation communities: gay, straight, and transgender and those who come from the different cultural background; white, Latino, Asian and Native American. Moreover, restating his ideas during the campaign; to control the Covid-19 diseases, to build up nation prosperity, removing racism, to rebuild a new justice, etc.

*...I'll have the honor of serving with a fantastic vice president. You just heard from Kamala Harris, who makes history as the first woman, first Black woman, the first woman from South Asian descent, the first daughter of immigrants ever elected to this country. Don't tell me it's not possible in the United States. It's long overdue.*

*....And we're reminded tonight of those who fought so hard for so many years to make this happen. Once again, America's bent the arc of the moral universe more toward justice. Kamala, Doug, like it or not, you're family. You become an honorary Biden, there's no way out. ....And all those who supported us. I'm proud of the campaign we built. I'm proud of the coalition we put together, the broadest and most diverse coalition in history. Democrats, Republicans, independents, progressives, moderates, conservatives, young, old, urban, suburban, rural, gay, straight, transgender, white, Latino, Asian, Native American.*

*....Now, this campaign is over. What is the will of the people? What is our mandate? I believe it's this: America has called upon us to marshal the forces of decency, the forces of fairness. To marshal the forces of science and the forces of hope in the great battles of our time. The battle to control the virus, the battle to build prosperity, the battle to secure your family's health care. The battle to achieve racial justice and root out systemic racism in this country. And the battle to save our planet by getting climate under control.*

*....The battle to restore decency, defend democracy and give everybody in this country a fair shot. That's all they're asking for. A fair shot (Joe Biden's Speech, 2020).*

In this part, he tries to persuade people to work together for a sake of the nation; it would be hard for him to work alone but faith in his people would help a lot to heal up the new America and the new administration. In his, final statement he hopes the entire country be blessed by God.

*....Let us be the nation that we know we can. A nation united, a nation strengthened. A nation healed. The United States of America, ladies and gentlemen, there's never, never been anything we've tried we've not been able to do.*

*....So I remember as my grandpa said when I walked out of his home when I was a kid up in Scranton, he said: "Joey, keep the faith." And our grandmother, when she was alive, she yelled: "No, Joey, spread it." Spread the faith.*

*....God love you all. May God bless America, and may God protect our troops. Thank you. Thank you (Biden's Speech, 2020).*

Stating up an ideology, Biden, in his speech, brings up ideologies to sustain his power toward the nations. The meaning and intention of his statement in the speech contain various ideologies such as unity, freedom, and equality. Most important to know that ideologies cognitively define the identity, values, and goals of a group and provide a basis for its interest

(van Dijk, 2014). Thus, the ideological in Biden speech will describe representatively, as follows.

National unity means that all of the parties in a nation are working together to accomplish national sets of goals. This is done together in times of difficulties for the prosperity of the nation. Biden in his speech uses Unity as Ideology, such as:

*And it goes like this: And he will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, and make you sign just like the sun and hold you in the palm of his hand. **And now together, on eagles wings, we embark on the work that God and history have called upon us to do, with full hearts and steady hands, with faith in America and each other, with love of country, a thirst for justice** (Joe Biden's Speech, 2020).*

It can be purely seen that Biden invites Citizens to a unit, build and heal up America once again with full faith in each other without any cultural or racial diversity but the United States which has full of justice.

The other ideology is equality. Equality is about the same treatment for people without any diversity (culture, ideology, sex-orientation, tribe, origin, faith, and so on) remaining. Biden in his speech says:

*The battle to achieve racial justice and root out systemic racism in this country. And the battle to save our planet by getting climate under control. The battle to restore decency, defend democracy and give everybody in this country **a fair shot**. That's all they're asking for. **A fair shot** (Biden's Speech, 2020).*

The phrase "A fair shot" resembles the purpose of giving equal treatment to people in the United States. E.g.: to treat Black, immigrants, Muslims (other religions), and other non-native Americans equally without yearning for some bad issues. A fair shot means giving an opportunity to people.

Freedom is the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restrain. Biden says:

*We will lead not only by the example of our power, but by the power of our example. I know I've always — believe many of you heard me say it — I've always believed we can define America in one word: possibilities. That in America, everyone should be **given an opportunity to go as far as their dreams** and God-given ability will take them.*

The clause gave an opportunity to go as far as their dreams reflected freedom as an ideology for people. To let people freely decide for whatever they want to for their own goodness; what to do without any imperialism system, what to believe without any racism (e.g. "Islam is a core of terrorism") and so on. Biden sees freedom as a factor to a nation healed thus the grim era of demonization in the United States begin to end.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In analyzing the discourse, it is better to see how the discourse constructed on its interactional and wider social context. A wider social context here used to clarify what is implicitly intended to convey by the speakers. van Dijk, on his CDA theory, did not see the discourse by only its appearance but also made us do further investigation correlatively to social practices, people background in detail, to relate a discourse with other discourse (intertextual) and some other contexts. From the CDA elements being analyzed; we could highlight that a macro-structure is a global meaning of discourse (thematic) to lead off a topic to be spoken, a micro-structure is the local structures of the discourse;- how and what the purpose of deciding the structures may lead to certain purposes; on Biden's speech, he intends to show his feeling of winning the election, to show his goals (reviewing US administration, to heal the US from demonization era and etc.) and his power to take over the US presidential. Then, the superstructure constitutes the basic frameworks of a discourse composition, namely opening, content, and closing remark. In addition, Biden's speech contained some ideologies; those are 'unity' to work together for the nation's prosperity, 'equality' to treat the US or American equally, and 'freedom' to give people chance to decide whatever they want to do.

The following research can be done by using Discursive Psychology (DP) on a similar discourse; political conversation, medial issue, economics areas, etc. Discursive psychology usually begins with psychology as it faces people living their lives. The DP does not certainly focus on ‘discourse’ but more critically see on language psychology as a topic amongst others (prejudice, social influence, etc.) but the DP can be used for discourse because it is the primary arena for action, understanding, and inter-subjectivity by viewing people as social and relational with psychology as a domain of the practice. The basic concept to be applied; such as 1) the discursive action (questioning, explaining, etc.), 2) linguistics practices (how the action is being done), and 3) variation (words used vary by the context).

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