

**ANALYSING BARRACK OBAMA'S
CAIRO SPEECH 'A NEW BEGINNING'
(A STUDY OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS [CDA])**

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Abstract: This essay will analyse and discuss Barack Obama's Cairo speech by using CDA framework such as lexical sets and choice of lexis, modality, cohesion and coherence, and generic structure of text. Based on the analysis and discussion, the choice of lexis may give an impact on the way the listeners think and believe to what Obama says, to show to the listeners that Obama understands the religion of his audience, to show his seriousness of making 'a new beginning' with Muslims around the world, to give a good impression of the overall of the speech to the audience, and to appreciate Muslim audience. In cohesion and coherence, it is well organized which means Obama tries to make his speech easier to follow by everyone by using additive conjunctions' or 'transition phrases' which have a function 'to list in order'. Besides, the generic structure of the speech is well structured.

Keywords: 'A New Beginning', Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is previously known as Critical Language Study (Fairclough, 1989) or Critical Linguistics (Fairclough, 1995; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999), sees language as a fundamental element of the social and cultural practices (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 1995; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Fairclough (1989) explains that the objective of this approach is as 'a

contribution to the general raising of consciousness of exploitative social relations, through focusing upon language' (p. 4). He also argues that CDA is concerned with analysing relationships between dominance, discrimination, power and control within language (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 1995) and the aim of CDA is to make the connection between discourse practice and social practice transparent (Fairclough, 1995).

CDA is different from other forms of discourse analysis. That is why it is called 'critical'. Cameron (2001) says that 'critical' 'refers to way of understanding of the social world drawn from critical theory' (p. 121). Fairclough (1995) also says, "'Critical" implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 9). In shorts, CDA is concerned with the hidden agenda (Cameron, 2001) and looking for the meaning of something hidden is necessary and important because it can be unclear for the people that are involved in that situation (Fairclough, 1989). Interestingly 'CDA can in principle be applied to both talk and text' including speeches given by leaders or politicians who usually have a power (Cameron, 2001, p. 123). Furthermore, CDA, which has techniques to explore the hidden meaning of texts, is still the best tool to analyse texts because of its critical ability (O'Halloran, 2003, cited in Alfayes, 2009). This essay, firstly, will give some idea of CDA research that has been previously conducted and it will then explain the aims of this research and how is data collected. Lastly, this essay will analyse

Barrack Obama's Cairo speech 'A new beginning' by using CDA framework and discuss the ideology of his speech.

Literature review and research aims

Much research of texts in CDA has been conducted. For example, Aman (2005) conducts research using CDA on general election 2004 manifesto (policy statements made by politicians before an election) in Malaysia. He used Fairclough's CDA framework (1992; 1995): *discourse Practice* and *textual Analysis*. *Discourse practice* consists of production of text, distribution, consumption, condition of the discourse practice, forces of utterances and semiotics, whereas *textual analysis* is concerned in vocabulary, grammar (transitivity and modality), cohesion and generic structure of text. This study concludes that power is hidden in the manifesto and it also explains that language can function as a power in governing. This study also finds that 'striving of power in the manifesto is constructed through integration its discursive practices and textual features' (Aman, 2005, p. 36). Another example of CDA research is a research conducted by Alfayez (2009), he writes CDA of Martin Luther King's speech 'I have a dream'. To analyse the speech, he used a number of linguistic markers based on Wodak's CDA (Wodak *et al.*, 2001, p.26, cited in Alfayez, 2009) such as stress and intonation, word order, lexical style, coherence, local semantic moves, topic choice, speech acts, schematic organisation, rhetorical figures, syntactic structures, propositional structures, turn takings, repairs and hesitation. Like Aman's research, Alfayez (2009) also argues that CDA is a good tool for

analysing texts including speeches which are often associated with power, struggle and politics as like Martin Luther King speech. His conclusion is that CDA can explore hidden meaning of 'I have a dream' which is related to poverty and struggling of the majority of black Americans. The speech has a strong and powerful meaning and therefore the messages have been giving aspiration for many people around the world especially the USA people (Alfayez, 2009).

Similar to the research above, this essay aims to analyse and recognize what CDA framework is used in Obama's Cairo speech 'A new beginning' and also it will discuss the ideology of his speech, as Fairclough (1992) says that discourse and language can function ideologically in daily social life. Also, Halliday (1985) argues that linguistic forms including speech can be related to social and ideological functions. Regarding Obama's Cairo speech, actually many comments, critics and analysis of Obama's Cairo speech have appeared and can be found in the internet and media, but as far as I know that there has been no study or research in CDA of this speech yet.

The data

The data is a speech of the president of the USA Barack Obama 'A new beginning' on 4th June 2009 at Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt. This data actually is easily found in many websites, but for many reasons the data is chosen and taken from the 'official' White House website. However, listening, watching, checking and embedding have been done to ensure that every word is exactly the

same with what written in the website. In terms of the content of the text, Obama's Cairo speech is an important speech that addresses a Muslim audience and aims to seek new relationship between the USA and Muslim world after the 'break' caused by the previous president George W. Bush. That is why the title of his speech is 'New Beginning.' This speech has been giving a big impact on millions of people especially Americans and Muslim around the world. This essay will explore 'the power' behind the speech and what exactly Obama was trying to say to the Muslim world. From many perspectives, this speech is very interesting to be analysed by using CDA framework, as Fairclough (1992) argues that language is not only seen as a tool of communication but also it has to be seen as a tool of power. Actually in using language there is such strategy which aims to getting people who are involved to do certain actions.

The analysis

Based on Fairclough (Fairclough 1992; Fairclough 1995), there are two frameworks of CDA: *discourse practice* and *textual analysis*. The first one is concerned in production of text, distribution, consumption, condition of the discourse practice, forces of utterances and semiotics, and the second one is concerned in vocabulary, grammar (transitivity and modality), cohesion and generic structure of text (Fairclough 1992; Fairclough 1995). Similarly, based on Halliday (1985) and Fairclough (1989), it can also be summarised that grammatical features that can be examined are lexicalisation, transitivity, active and passive voice, nominalisation, mood,

modality or polarity, thematic structure of the text, information focus and cohesion devices. In addition, Flowerdew (2008) argues that grammatical features are the main focus on CDA that has to be observed although 'to understand the grammar fully a lot of work is required' (p. 199). The practitioners of CDA also say that there are three areas in CDA: (1) field (vocabulary choices, transitivity, active or passive voices, tenses etc), (2) tenor (modality, personal, mood such as declarative, imperative, interrogative, etc), and (3) mode (clause types, cohesion, coherence, etc) (Halliday, 1985; Fairclough, 1995; Paltridge, 2000; Cameron, 2001; Gee, 2005; Wodak & Chilton, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Bloor & Bloor, 2007). In this essay, not all CDA framework and the grammatical features above will be explained; only the main features which are important and interesting to be looked at from Obama's Cairo speech such as lexical sets and choice of lexis, modality, cohesion and coherence, and generic structure of text.

Lexical sets and choice of lexis

There are a lot of Islamic words in the text such as *Islam*, *Muslim*, *Islamic*, *Holy Koran*, *the azaan*, *assalamualikum*, *zakat* etc. and the majority of the words are Muslim(s) which occurs 46 times and *Islam(ic)* which occurs 23 times. For example,

1. *Al-Azhar has stood as a beacon of Islamic learning.*
2. *And I'm also proud to carry with me the goodwill of the American people, and a greeting of peace from Muslim communities in my country: Assalaamu alaykum.*

3. *We meet at a time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world -- tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate. The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars.*
4. *As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and at the fall of dusk.*

Interestingly, Obama (the speaker) also mentions five times *the Holy Koran* and four of them he quotes verses of *the Holy Koran*.

5. *As the Holy Koran tells us, "Be conscious of God and speak always the truth."*
6. *The Holy Koran teaches that whoever kills an innocent is as -- it is as if he has killed all mankind.*
7. *And the Holy Koran also says whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind.*
8. *The Holy Koran tells us: "O mankind! We have created you male and a female; and we have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."*

This choice of lexis may give an impact on the way the listeners think and believe to what the speaker says, as Aman (2005) says that the use of these certain words shows the seriousness of the speech to convince people. This choice of lexis may indicate that the speaker may want to show to the listeners that the speaker understands the religion of his audience (Islam; most of them are Muslims) although the speaker is a Christian. The speaker may also want to show that he is serious to make 'new beginning' with Muslims around the world, and importantly to give a good

impression of the overall of his speech to the audience, and therefore the speaker looks successful to do it. The evidence of this is based on video that, for example, when the speaker says *Assalaamu alaykum* (example number 2) the audience gave applause, and also every speaker quotes *the Holy Koran* (examples 5-8), the audience always gave applauds. There are at least 42 applauds from the audiences.

Another aim of this lexical choice is that the speaker really wants to appreciate Muslim audience. The example as the evidence of this is that the speaker mentions *Muslim(s)* 46 times and *Islam(ic)* 23 times, and on the contrary, the speaker mentions *Christian* six times, *Jew(s/ish)* nine times and *the Holy Bible* once only. Regarding this choice of vocabulary, Denham and Roy (2005) argue that 'the vocabulary provides valuable insight into those words which surround or support a concept' (p. 188). So, for example, if the lexical sets of the concept *Islam* included words such as *Muslim, Islamic, the Holy Koran, etc*, this can apply that if there is the concept *Islam* appeared in the text, the lexical sets such as *Muslim, Islamic, the Holy Koran, etc* will be close by.

In addition, although almost every body probably knows that Islam may be often identical with terrorism since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the speaker tries to avoid words which are associated with terrorism. In other words, there is no any word of *terrorism, terrorist* or *terror* in the text. However, the speaker chooses other similar words, but they are better in connotation such as *violent extremists* (4 times) and *violent extremism* (2 times).

9. *When violent extremists operate in one stretch of mountains, people are endangered across an ocean.*
10. *The first issue that we have to confront is violent extremism in all of its forms.*

If we look at Collins Cobuild advanced learner's English Dictionary (2006), extremist is 'if you describe someone as an extremist, you disapprove of them because they try to bring about political change by using violent or extreme methods' (p. 504) whereas terrorist is 'a person who uses violence, especially murder and bombing, in order to achieve political aims or to force a government to do something' (p. 1495). These meanings show that although both are bad, extremist is probably 'better' than terrorist in meaning. This may mean that the speakers may try to speak 'softly' to Muslims in order not to make the situation and the relationship between the USA and Muslim world worse.

Another example of lexical choice of the text is these two sentences below:

11. *Let me also address the issue of Iraq. Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq was a war of choice that provoked strong differences in my country and around the world.*
12. *Among some Muslims, there's a disturbing tendency to measure one's own faith by the rejection of somebody else's faith.*

The example (11) may suggest that the speaker avoids blaming the previous president George W. Bush and his followers who supporting the war by saying *a war of choice*. In other words, the speaker does not mention who is the chooser of the war (George W. Bush). The speaker does not want to offend Republicans, George W.

Bush's party (Newhall, 2009). *Strong differences* is also phrase that the speaker may want to emphasize that not every American liked the decision of George W. Bush which is war (Newhall, 2009). The example (12) may also indicate that the speaker uses a noun *rejection* instead of verb *reject* for softening. Also, the speaker uses *somebody else* instead of using *Christians* or *Jews*, again, to make his sentences 'softer' (Newhall, 2009).

Modality

In modality, this essay will analyse '*will*', '*can*' and '*must*' only. This is because *will*, *can* and *must* are found more than other modality words such as *may*, *might*, *should* etc. in the text there are 40 *wills*, 39 *cans* and 29 *musts*. This essay will analyse these modality words one by one.

Will occurs 40 times in the text. This means *will* is the highest number of modality compared to other words of modality. According to Grammar experts, (see, for example, Berk, 1999; Collins and Hollo, 2000; Huddleston and Pullum, 2005), there are many meanings of *will*, but in simple way it can be summarised that *will* can be used to express (a) an intention, e.g., *I will do my assignment after this* (b) certainty (certain prediction), e.g., *I am sure that he will pass the exam*, and (c) a promise, e.g., *if you go there, I will go there also*.

13. *That is what I will try to do today -- to speak the truth as best I can*

This sentence number (12) is an example of *will* that expresses an intention or willingness. This sentence means that the speaker *is going* to try to speak the truth as best he can. *Will* in the sentence (12)

is different with *will* in the sentence (13) below which expresses certain prediction.

14. *We cannot impose peace. But privately, many Muslims recognize that Israel will not go away.*

The above sentence (13) means that the speaker predicts with certainty that Israel will not go away. Now look at the sentences from the text below:

15. (14) *In Ankara, I made clear that America is not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam.*

16. *There's so much fear, so much mistrust that has built up over the years. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward.*

17. *And that's why we're partnering with a coalition of 46 countries. And despite the costs involved, America's commitment will not weaken.*

18. *On education, we will expand exchange programs, and increase scholarships, like the one that brought my father to America. At the same time, we will encourage more Americans to study in Muslim communities. And we will match promising Muslim students with internships in America*

The above sentences (14-17) are sentences which have *will* that expresses promises. For example, number (14) means that the speaker promise to the audience or Muslims around the world that America will never have a war with Islam at any time. Other examples also mean the same, express promise. It has been mentioned before that there are 40 *wills* in this text and most of those 40 *wills* are used to express promise. This means that the speaker tries to convince the audience or Muslims by giving promise, and therefore, the speaker hopes that what he says will be followed up

since the speech is given to the future time. If *will* in this sentence is changed into another modality such as *may*, the meaning will be much different. For example, *In Ankara, I made clear that America is not -- and may not be -- at war with Islam* or *In Ankara, I made clear that America may not be -- at war with Islam*. These sentences indicate that there is possibility that America will have a war with Islam.

Can

Can are found 39 times in the text. This means *can* is the highest number of modality after *will*. Similar to *will*, there are many meanings of *can*, but in simple way it can be summarised that *can* can be used to express (a) ability/inability or capacity, e.g., I can speak Arabic, (b) request, usually in interrogative sentences, e.g., can you help me, please? (c) permission, e.g., Can I leave now? Yes, you can leave now (see, for example, Berk, 1999; Collins and Hollo, 2000; Huddleston and Pullum, 2005). Now look at the sentences below from the text:

19. *That is what I will try to do today -- to speak the truth as best I can.*
20. *This same story can be told by people from South Africa to South Asia; from Eastern Europe to Indonesia*
21. *And finally, just as America can never tolerate violence by extremists,*
22. *I am convinced that our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons.*
23. *The Internet and television can bring knowledge and information*

From the examples taking from the text above, all the sentences express ability except (20) which expresses inability because it is followed by *never*. The other sentences of the text also have the same meaning; expressing ability or inability. This means

the speaker uses *can* only for expressing ability (or inability), not for permission or request. (For asking permission, the speaker uses 'let'. 'Let' occurs seven times in the text. For example *let me speak as clearly and as plainly as I can about some specific issues that I believe we must finally confront together.*

Must

Musts are found 29 times in the text. This means *must* is also the highest number of modality after *will and can*. *Must* is a modal that can be used for obligation or necessity (and prohibition if it is followed with not = must not) (see, for example, Berk, 1999; Collins and Hollo, 2000; Huddleston and Pullum, 2005).

24. *We must say openly to each other the things we hold in our hearts and that too often are said only behind closed doors.*

25. *Now, that does not mean we should ignore sources of tension. Indeed, it suggests the opposite: We must face these tensions squarely*

26. *Palestinians must abandon violence*

27. *And Israel must also live up to its obligation to ensure that Palestinians can live and work and develop their society.*

28. *You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party.*

All the sentences above have the same meaning that is obligation or necessity. Moreover, the modal auxiliary has two functions: deontic modality and epistemic modality (see, for example, Palmer, 1990; Yule, 1998). Deontic modality is objective modality which indicates general view or logical view, e.g. *you must*

study this book, meaning you are forced or required to study or read the book. Whereas epistemic modality is subjective modality which indicates personal assumption or judgment or conclusion, e.g., *you must be healthy*, meaning because I have a lot of evidence of 'you', so I conclude that you are healthy. So, it can also be concluded that epistemic modality is personal modality because it comes from the subjectivity of the speaker and deontic modality is social modality because it is determined by society (Palmer, 1990; Yule, 1998). From this discussion, it can be concluded that the sentences above have deontic modality functions because those are not from the speaker's subjectivity. In other words, the speaker tries to speak as objective as possible to indicate general or logical view, not assumption. The speaker tries to avoid his subjective judgment.

Cohesion and coherence

These sentences below show one type of coherence and cohesion of the text.

29. *The first issue that we have to confront is violent extremism in all of its forms.*
30. *The second major source of tension that we need to discuss is the situation between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world.*
31. *The third source of tension is our shared interest in the rights and responsibilities of nations on nuclear weapons.*
32. *The fourth issue that I will address is democracy.*
33. *The fifth issue that we must address together is religious freedom.*
34. *The sixth issue that I want to address is women's rights.*
35. *Finally, I want to discuss economic development and opportunity.*

The cohesion and coherence that the speaker uses in his speech is well organized. This may suggest that the speaker tries to make his speech easier to follow by everyone by using *the first, the second, the third* etc. This cohesion and coherence is a kind of 'additive conjunctions' which include '*and, or, moreover, in addition, and alternatively*' (Martin, 1992, cited in Paltridge, p. 135). In addition, Oshima and Hogue (2006) name this kind of cohesion and coherence as 'transition phrases' which have a function 'to list in order' and it is a kind of 'transition signals' (p. 27). They also argue that 'transition signals are like traffic signs; they tell your reader [or listener] when to go forward, turn around, slow down, and stop' (Oshima & Hogue, 2006, p. 25).

Another kind of cohesion that is interesting to be looked at from the text is 'that's why'. 'That's why' or 'that is why' occurs 14 times in the text. For example:

36. *Moreover, freedom in America is indivisible from the freedom to practice one's religion. That is why there is a mosque in every state in our union, and over 1,200 mosques within our borders. That's why the United States government has gone to court to protect the right of women and girls to wear the hijab and to punish those who would deny it.*
37. *These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.*
38. *In fact, faith should bring us together. And that's why we're forging service projects in America to bring together Christians, Muslims, and Jews. That's why we welcome efforts like Saudi Arabian King*

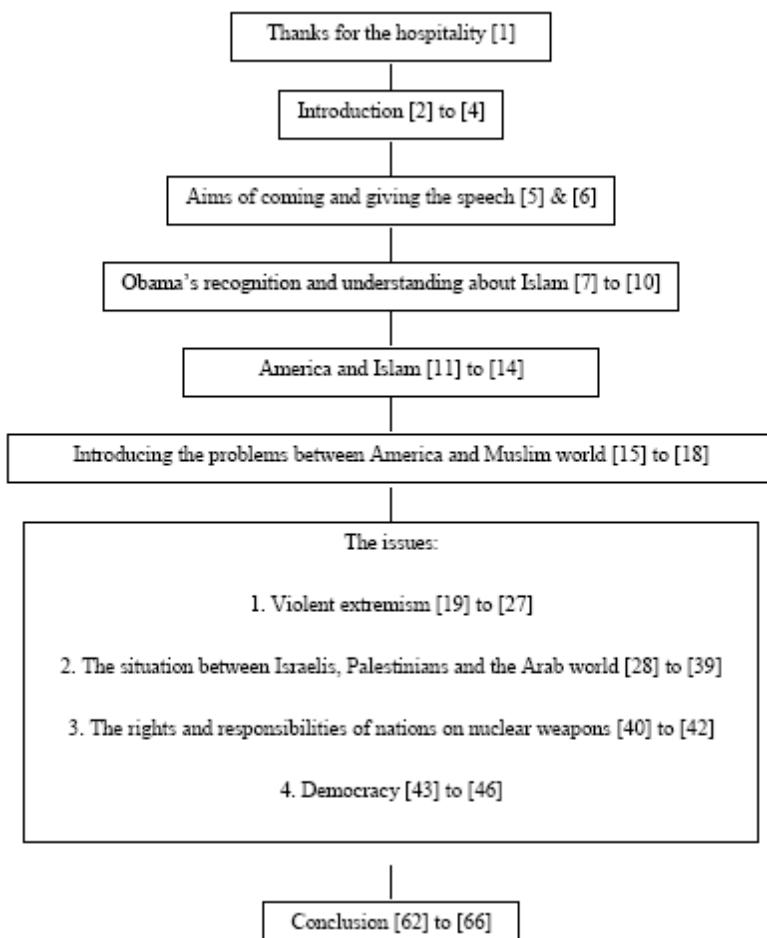
Abdullah's interfaith dialogue and Turkey's leadership in the Alliance of Civilizations.

From the examples above, the speaker prefers to use *that's why* or *that is why* instead of *therefore* or *so that* or any other 'consequential conjunction' (Martin, 1992, cited in Paltridge, p. 135-136). It is very seldom to find speeches which are using more informal conjunction such as *that's why*. It seems the speaker may want to make his speech more informal speech to the audience but it is still acceptable as (formal) speech, and also to make his audience more interested and not to be bored to the speech because the speech is long enough (55 minutes).

Generic structure of text

Generic structure of text is "the overall structure or organization of a text." (Fairclough 2003, p. 216, cited in Aman, 2005, p. 35). The figure 1 below is the generic structure of Obama's Cairo speech 'A new beginning', and the figure 2 is its paragraphs. (numbers of paragraphs are taken from Obama's Cairo speech 'A new beginning' at the 'official' White House website).

The figure 1. The generic structure of 'A new beginning'



The figure 2. The paragraphs of 'A new beginning'

No	Contents	No. of paragraphs	Paragraphs
1	Thanks for the hospitality	1	[1]
2	Introduction	3	[2], [3] & [4]
3	Aims of coming and giving the speech	2	[5] & [6]
4	Obama's recognition and understanding about Islam	4	[7], [8], [9] & [10]
5	America and Islam	4	[11], [12], [13] &

			[14]
6	Introducing the problems between America and Muslim world	4	[15], [16], [17] & [18]
7	1. Violent extremism	9	[19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25], [26] & [27]
	2. The situation between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world	12	[28], [29], [30], [31], [32], [33], [34], [35], [36], [37], & [39]
	3. The rights and responsibilities of nations on nuclear weapons	3	[40], [41] & [42]
	4. Democracy	4	[43], [44], [45] & [46]
	5. Religious freedom	5	[47], [48], [49], [50] & [51]
	6. Women's rights	3	[52], [53] & [54]
	7. Economic development and opportunity	7	[55], [56], [57], [58], [59], [60] & [61]
8	Conclusion	5	[62], [63], [64], [65] & [66]

From the figure 1 and 2, it can be seen that the generic structure of his speech is well structured. It also can be seen that the longest part of 'A new beginning' is *the issues* that the speaker addressed. This part consists of 43 paragraphs. This is because *the*

issues is the body of the text. From this part (*the issues*), it also can be concluded that the longest part is the first issue 'violent extremism' (nine paragraphs) and the second issue 'the situation between Israel, Palestinians and the Arab world' (12 paragraphs). This may suggest that both are the most important issues that the speaker thinks. Beside both consist more paragraphs, the evidence of the importance is that the speaker put these two issues in the first and the second numbers.

Conclusion

In general, this essay has analysed and discussed Barack Obama's Cairo speech by using CDA framework. However, not all CDA framework and the grammatical features are explained; only the main features which are important and interesting to be looked at such as lexical sets and choice of lexis, modality, cohesion and coherence, and generic structure of text. Based on the analysis and discussion, the choice of lexis may give an impact on the way the listeners think and believe to what the speaker says, to show to the listeners that the speaker understands the religion of his audience, to show his seriousness of making 'a new beginning' with Muslims around the world, to give a good impression of the overall of the speech to the audience, and to appreciate Muslim audience. In modality, by using *will*, the speaker tries to convince the audience by giving promise and the speaker may hope that what he says will be followed up. By using *can*, the speaker uses wants to express ability (or inability), not for permission or request; he asks for permission by using 'let'. By using *must*, the sentences have deontic modality

functions because the speaker tries to speak as objective as possible to indicate general or logical view and he tries to avoid his subjective judgment. In cohesion and coherence, it is well organized which means the speaker tries to make his speech easier to follow by everyone by using additive conjunctions' or 'transition phrases' which have a function 'to list in order'. Lastly, the generic structure of the speech is well structured. Finally further research is still needed to see other grammatical features or CDA framework.

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