"Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Islam in Obama's Cairo Speech: RhetoricsVs Pragmatism"

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Abstract

The present study investigates the representation of Islam in President Obama's Cairo speech. Many researchers consider Obama's speeches to be characterised with a powerful language associated often with rhetoric, a firm and measured delivery that exudes confidence and produces a sense of purpose. Moreover, Obama's speeches have been described to be embedded with certain forms of pragmatism. Hence, the present research incites us to discover the way Islam is represented in Obama's Cairo speech, mainly from the point of pragmatism and rhetoric, contemporaneously with a time empowered by conflict between the United States and Muslims around the world, and what interest and relationship can be found between the West and Islam.The complex relationship between the United States and various Muslim countries led many people from both sides to view each other as adversely hostile to their principles and traditions. To this effect, the researchers try to analyse how far Obama's Cairo speech represents Islam with regard to his rhetorical language form associated with pragmatism, with the assumption that what something 'is' becomes shaped and represented by the use of language within specific language-games.

Key words*:* Discourse, Islam, representation, pragmatism, rhetoric.

1 Introduction

It is clear enough to admit that language is the primary means and medium through which we deliver meanings and discourses. The exploration of meaning through the delivered discourse is not always easy, for meaning can be relational and unstable rather than referential and fixed. Besides, meaning is derived from the *use* of signs in contexts. In this spirit, Derrida undermines the notion of the stable structures of language and considers meaning not to be 'fixed', rather words carry multiple meanings including the echoes or traces of meanings from related words in different contexts (Barker, 2004). Thus, words 'mean' what we use them to do in the context of social practice, and the meaning of any given word is stabilized by social knowledge of what it is used for, when, under what circumstances and so forth ,i.e. signs will depend on the cultural competencies they bring to the text and the context of communication (Barker, 2004).

Derrida considers that there is no original meaning outside of signs, and signs do not possess clear and fixed meanings, i.e. words carry multiple meanings abolishing a stable signified (Barker, 2004). Besides, one of the most influential theories of meaning is that of Wittgenstein. For Wittgenstein meaning is undecidable, i.e.,meaning is put in the context of the pragmatic activities of human beings, andmeanings are temporarily stabilized by social convention for practical purposes in the context of their usage. In this sense, stated by (Barker, 2004),Wittgenstein argues that meaning is a matter of the *use* of words in the context of a language-game. Thus, a meaningful expression is one that can be given a use by living human beings and the rules of language constitute our pragmatic understandings of 'how to go on' in society.

In the present study, the researchers attempt to investigate how far Obama's Cairo speech represents Islam with regard to his rhetorical language form associated with pragmatism. Accordingly, the present research brings together the importance of rhetoric with practical and political form of pragmatism as a tool for a new paradigm, for managing relations between United States and the Muslim world. Thus, meaning is central to the present study with the assumption that what something is becomes shaped and represented by the use of language within specific language games. Therefore, rhetoric and pragmatism take a major part in the present study.

In this perspective, the researchers focus on Obama's Cairo speech as a representative discourse. Barack Obama delivered a major speech on US policy towards Islamon the occasion of his visit to the University of Cairo. The main objective behind Obama's Cairo speech was to attenuate the tension that had escalated during the eight years of Bush administration between the United States and the Islamic world.

In fact, the speech was skillfully delivered and widely received by various TV and radiochannels that made worldwide attention largely attracted. This is not surprising given the fact that Obama's speech is characterized with a firm and measured delivery that exudes confidence and produces a sense of purpose. In this sense, the researchers address the following question: How does Obama's Cairo speech represent Islam with regard to his rhetorical language and pragmatism?

2 Research objective

Based on the attempt to associate rhetorical language form with pragmatism, the present study seeks to reveal the way Obama's Cairo speech represents Islam, and thus, realizes mainly some political motives. Besides, the study focuses on how Obama's speech in Cairo through the use of presidential rhetoric offered a new paradigm, a new beginning, for managing relations between the United States and the Muslim world with respect to the big challenges that are facing both of them.

3 Research methodology

The methodology employed in the research is the analysis of Obama Cairo speech with the emphasis on rhetoric and linguistic strategies as a powerful tool to achieve some political purposes that are part of pragmatism and language games concepts.

4 Theoretical foundation and related concepts

4.1 Discourse

According to Barker (2004),discourse refers to a stretch of text or spoken utterances that cohere into a meaningful exposition. In a more technical way that derives from the work of the historian and philosopher Foucault, discourse is said to 'unite' language and practice and refers to

regulated ways of speaking about a subject through which objects and practices acquire meaning. Foucault historical instance to language develops and generates meaning under specific material and historical conditions (Cited in Barker,2004:54) .

Based on van Dijk's definition, discourse is seen as text in context. In this sense, discourse is seen as "data that is liable for empiric analysis" (Titscher et.al.), with focus being put on discourse as action and process(van Dijk's, 1977: 3 ;Titscher et.al., 1998: 44 cited in Horváth, n.d).

According to van Dijk, discourse usually refers to a form of language use, public speeches or more generally to spoken language or ways of speaking,for instance when we refer to 'the discourse of former President Ronald Reagan'(Van Dijk, 1997).

4.2 Discourse analysis

According to Barker (2004) "Discourse analysis is a form of linguistic investigation that inquires into the workings of stretches of text". Barker (2004) points out that:

> Discourse analysis is interested in naturally occurring text (written) and talk (verbal) that is studied within its global and local context. Naturally occurring discourse is a form of social practice the accomplishment of which is linear and sequential where the constitutive units of discourse may also be productive of larger units. Consequently, discourse analysis is interested in levels or layers of discourse and their relations (P55).

In other words, discourse analysis deals mainly with 'utterances' in a form of sequence of words written orspoken in specific contexts.
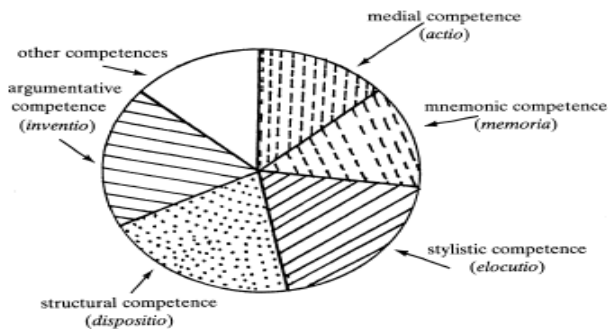
4.3 Rhetoric

Rhetoric is commonly defined as the art of using language to influence or persuade people. In the US, the study of rhetoric is known as composition.In a more organizational way, the major concern of rhetoric of texts was studied for the purposes of providing a model of how to

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structure one's own speeches (Young, 2008). According to Plett, rhetoric originally was a technique that was always characterized by a set of rules. These did not coexist in a random manner, but regularly strove towards logical consistency and structural coherence; thus, rhetoric can truly be termed a science of discourse. (cited in van Dijk, 1985 :59).

Plettargued that classical rhetoric was divided into five parts: *inventio*or the finding of argumentative matter, *dispositio*or the structural arrangement of arguments, *elocutio*or the verbal adornment of the matter, *memoria*or the memorizing of the structured and verbally adorned text, *actio*and *pronuntiatio*or its visual (gesture, facial expression) and auditory (pronunciation) realization (Lausberg, 1960 cited in *van Dijk,*1985 :60). These five parts in their totality constituted the rhetorical competence (or code) of the orator.

Figure.1Rhetorical competence and its subdivisions (Plett, 1985).

Burke (1969) defines rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (1969: 41), or "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (1969: 43).

4.4 Pragmatism

Thefreedictionary defines pragmatismunder the philosophicaltrend as "amovement consisting of varying but associated theories, originally d eveloped by Charles S. Peirce
and William James and distinguished by the doctrine that the meaning of an idea or a propositionlies in itsobservable practical consequences"(cited inthe free dictionary).

Pragmatism in US, as a philosophical tradition and movementthat is based on the work of William James, John Dewey and, more recently, Richard Rorty,takes seriously the human significance of language, and

weds itself to the need for piecemeal practical political change. Whereby language is not thought able to represent the world in ways that correspond to an independent object world, pragmatism is a form of anti-representationalism where no pieces of language are found to line up with or correspond to chunks of reality(Barker, 2004).

In relation to rhetoric, one might characterize much pragmatist thought as specifically being preoccupied with rhetoric (the use of language in a context to have effects). Above all,pragmatists do not radically separate language use from the search for truth, rhetoric from philosophy.They give alsoa special attention to rhetoric or (more narrowly in Rorty's case persuasion) in the public spheres, and connect this rhetorical attention explicitly to their articulation of pragmatism as a philosophical or critical theory (Mailloux, 2011).

In relation to the present study, then, it is important to understand the nature of American pragmatism, political and philosophical, and how Obama speech was practically rhetorical pragmatic. In this context, Hayes, in an attempt to connect Obama to American pragmatist philosophy stated that:

> Pragmatism in common usage may mean simply a practical approach to problems and affairs. But it's also the name of the uniquely American school of philosophy whose doctrine is that truth is pre-eminently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief. What unites the two senses of the word is a shared skepticism toward certainties derived from abstractions – one that is welcome and bracing after eight years of [the] failed, faith-based presidency [of President George W. Bush] (Cited in Mailloux, p.2011).

In this sense, Hayes highlights Obama's political admiration for Abraham Lincoln and, thus, connects him to American pragmatism partly because the war Lincoln oversaw was a significant influence on the earliest philosophical pragmatists (Cited in Mailloux, 2011).

4.5 Context of Cairo Speech

Not long after his presidency, Obama delivered his Cairo speech in Egypt. The essence of Obama's Cairo speech was on relations between

America and the world of Islam. Based on 'dialogue' instead of military intervention, Obama proclaimed a new startor a "New beginning"(the name for his speech). In this spirit, he convicted the widespread of violation and abuse of citizens' rights in many Muslim countries. He underscored dialogue as to be often good to heal the problems of countries, giving special attention to what to say, and what the other side hears. In the same speech, Obama addressed the causes that fuel and sustain extremism. The latter is a common denominator in many societies.

5 Analysis of Cairo speech representation of Islam

The present analysis is conducted through the use of the transcript of Obama's speech in Cairo (President Obama's Speech, 2009)with a focus on key passages that represent Islam world and Muslims.The uses of rhetorical devises in Obama's Cairo speech are countless and largely illimitable to be enumerated in this confined space. However, we can just list a few of them in an attempt to see how Islam is represented in the target speech.

5.1 Representing Islam by the use of reversal and contrast

In order to appeal the Americans' awareness about the real Islam, Obama evoked the fact that Islam is a religion that opposes the dominant negative stereotypes that have been spread since the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

> "Partnership between America and Islam must be based on what **Islam is, not what it isn't.** And I consider it part of my responsibility as president of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear.
>
> The enduring faith of over a billion people is so much bigger than the narrow hatred of a few. **Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism - it is an important part of promoting peace**".

Bythisreversalandcontrast,theaudiencewouldbe more attracted by Obama's speech, thus, much more likely to ponder and reject what Islam is opposing to.

5.2 Representing Islam by the use of Inclusive language

Obama invites his audience to be part of his speech. It is worthy to notice here that even Muslims around the world are connected to his speech with a particular use of certain pronouns which join Islam and Muslims to America. However, Obama underscores the fact that Islam is part of America and not the other way round which evokes its supremacy over the Islamic world. In the following passage he uses the power of inclusive language with extensive use of pronouns 'we', 'our' and 'us' that boost the effect of unity and communion between Islam and America. For example, "all of us", "our families", "our communities", "our God", "these things we share", and "this is the hope of all humanity".

> "So let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America. And I believe that America holds within her the truth that regardless of race, religion, or station in life, **all of us** share common aspirations - to live in peace and security; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love **our** families, **our** communities, and **our** God. These things **we** share. This is the hope of **all humanity**.
>
> I also know that **Islam has always been a part of America's story**. The first nation to recognise my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President John Adams wrote: "The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims".

5.3 Representing Islam by illustrating personal experiences

One of the effective rhetorical technics that Obama used while representing Islam in Cairo speech is the connection with Muslims by using personal experiences.

> "Part of this conviction is rooted **in my own experience**. I am a Christian, but my father came from a Kenyan family that includes generations of Muslims. **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.As a young man, I worked in Chicago communities** where many found dignity and peace in their Muslim faith.

> Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba during the Inquisition. **I saw it first hand as a child inIndonesia**,wheredevoutChristiansworshippedfreely in an overwhelmingly Muslim country".

5.4 Representing Islam by IllustratingQuranic verses

Obama's brilliant speech is intelligently marked by Quran, for Quran is undoubtedly the most accepted speech for all Muslims. Quran is the guiding doctrine for Muslims; thereby, the use of Quranic verses by Obama would pragmatically andbeautifully picturise Islam as a religion of peace and mercy for humanity and, therefore, consolidate positively the conventions between America and the Islamicworld.

> "We have the power to make the world we seek, but only if we have the courage to make a new beginning, keeping in mind what has been written.**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."**The Talmud tells us: "The whole of the Torah is for the purpose of promoting peace."The Holy Bible tells us: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."(Applause).

> There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground. **As the Holy Koran tells us:"Be conscious of God and**

speak always the truth".(Applause).That is what I will try to do today - to speak the truth as best I can, humbled by the task before us, and firm in my belief that the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart.

And when the first Muslim-American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Koran that one of our Founding Fathers - Thomas Jefferson - kept in his personal library.

The Holy Koran teaches that whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind. (Applause).**And whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind.**(Applause).The enduring faith of over a billion people is so much bigger than the narrow hatred of a few. Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism - it is an important part of promoting peace".

6 Interpretation and meaning of the discourse

Messages are communicated through a code that involves connections of meanings along with an organization pattern of the discourse as a whole (Jakobson, 1960). The intended meaning can be detectedcorresponding the addressee and the position he takes in the text. As opposed to the receiver,which is the *actual* destination, the addressee of a text is the position the text constructs as its destination(Thwaites, Davies, aod Mules, 2002, p. 17).

Obama's speech in Cairo transmitted a clear message for both the United States and the Muslim world that relations between the two civilizations are manageable through a new beginning based upon mutual interest and mutual respect. The Cairo speech most importantly symbolised 'a new beginning' for relations between 'the United States and Muslims'(Saul 2009). In this context, the American president Obama addressed the following message.

"I Have come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles --principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings".

However, in a more pragmatic view, Obama's speech holds a view towards the Islamic world by which America achieves its goals and interestswithpractical purposes. Thus, the representation of Islam in Obama's Cairo speech is governed by the argued concept, articulated by Wittgenstein,that meaning is a matter of the *use* of words in the context of a language-game, and meaning is undecidable, i.e., meaning is put in the context of the pragmatic activities of human beings, andmeanings are temporarily stabilized by social convention for practical purposes in the context of their usage(Barker, 2004:119).

7Conclusion

Through Obama's Cairo speech it is ought to be noticed that Islam is represented with much pragmatist thought based upon mutual interest and respect that is intermingled with rhetorical devices. The rationalbehind Obama's Cairo speech is to forge peace between America and Islam and to persuade the Muslim world to create harmony with the United States. Thus, rhetoric renders Obama's Cairospeech successfully effective and represents Islam in a picture that serves the pragmatic objectives of the United States.

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