Discursive Features and Manipulation in Michelle Obama's Speech Delivered at the 2024 Democratic National Convention

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the discursive features (structures and strategies) Former First Lady Michelle Obama (henceforth, the speaker) employs in her political campaign speech in support of Kamala Harris, a presidential candidate, delivered on August 21st, 2024 at the 2024 Democratic National Convention (henceforth, DNC) held in Chicago. Drawing its theoretical insights from Teun Adrianus van Dijk's discourse analytical theory and the descriptive mixed-method research design, the study specifically explores how the speaker deploys language to manipulate her audience and encode her ideologies or/and those of her social group. The findings exude that she employs, in varying proportions, such discursive structures as speech acts, formal structures and deictic expressions. These structures serve to realize the ideological strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. That is, the speaker ideologically polarizes the actors represented in her speech. Four other ideological stances (historian, propagandist, conservative and social democrat) have been discovered in the findings too. To reach her goal, the speaker employs twenty-two discursive strategies including situation description, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, polarization, comparison, allusion, passivization, activization, nominalization, repetition, etc. The study concludes that the speaker deliberately uses the aforementioned discursive features to manipulate or control (the minds of) her audience with a view to making them vote for Kamala Harris who happens to be the invested presidential candidate of the Democratic Party to which she belongs.*

Keywords: *Discourse analytical theory, discursive features, ideology, manipulation, power abuse*

1. INTRODUCTION

Manipulation can be simply defined as a form of domination or power abuse (van Dijk, 2006b). According to van Dijk (2006b, p. 360), manipulation is a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests. By the term "a manipulator", this scholar wants to imply the people (i.e. 'symbolic' elites, such as politicians, journalists, scholars, writers, teachers, and so on) who exercise power or have access to or control over scarce social resources including the mass media and public discourse (ibid., p. 362). As an example of people who exercise power or have access to or control over scarce social resources in social life, politicians often tend to use language to influence, manipulate or control (the minds or mental models of) their audience. In other words, they often deploy discursive features (structures and strategies) to make their addressees believe and do things against their will or against their best interests.

As implied above, manipulation is rife in politics. The term 'politics' is used here to denote "a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who resist it" (Chilton, 2004, p. 1). Acknowledging the foregoing, Osisanwo (2016a, pp. 135-136) submits that "In politics or contest for political positions, candidates often deploy different strategies in order to win, to be in control or in power". It is widely known that, during political campaigns, politicians diligently craft and deploy so many campaign strategies. These campaign strategies include but are not limited to political slogans, political campaign letters, political posters, political interviews, political manifestoes, policy documents, political campaign songs or jingles, political campaign SMS messages, and most importantly political campaign speeches. Political campaign speeches in support of one candidate, for

example, are diligently crafted to appeal to, persuade and most importantly manipulate the electorate to cast their votes for the supported candidate. In such speeches, there is a deliberate attempt to *marketize* the supported candidate to the public by emphasizing his/her good qualities, while at the same time downplaying those of his/her opponent(s).

This paper investigates the discursive features (structures and strategies) Former First Lady Michelle Obama (henceforth, the speaker) employs in her political campaign speech in support of Kamala Harris, a presidential candidate, delivered on August 21st, 2024 at the 2024 Democratic National Convention held in Chicago (henceforth, DNC). Drawing its theoretical insights from Teun Adrianus van Dijk's discourse analytical theory and the descriptive mixed-method research design, the study specifically explores how the speaker deploys language to manipulate her audience and encode her ideologies or/and those of her social group. The current research is guided by the following questions:

- What discursive structures and strategies does the speaker deploy in her speech to manipulate her audience?

- What ideologies do these discursive structures and strategies encode in the speech?

The next section outlines the discourse analytical theory this paper applies. It clarifies such concepts as manipulation, (political campaign) discourse and ideology, and highlights the relationships amongst them.

2. MANIPULATION, (POLITICAL CAMPAIGN) DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY

In his seminal paper entitled "Discourse and Manipulation", van Dijk (2006b) offers a triangulated approach to manipulation. Diversely referred to as a sociocognitive approach (van Dijk, 2000a) or discourse analytical theory (van Dijk, 2006b), the triangulated approach articulates the relationship amongst *cognition*, *society* and *discourse*" (van Dijk, 2000a, p. 5). That is, it assumes that discourse structures and social structures are related, and that this relationship is cognitively mediated. From a sociocognitive perspective, manipulation can be defined "as a form of social power abuse, cognitive mind control and discursive interaction" (van Dijk, 2006b, p. 359). As van Dijk (2006b, p. 360) further explains, "Manipulation not only involves power, but specifically abuse of power, that is, domination. That is, manipulation implies the exercise of a form of illegitimate influence by means of discourse: manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator, and against the best interests of the manipulated."

In Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) in general, and in the sociocognitive approach, in particular, the term "discourse" is defined as a form of language use (van Dijk, 1997b) characterized by three features: form, meaning, and action and interaction (van Dijk, 1997a; 2000b; 2006a). Without dispelling the foregoing Kadhim and Jawad (2020, p. 690) state that "Discourse is a social use of language in a particular context. It contributes to the construction of social reality." Discourse is presumed to enact power relations. And, as we know, politics is about power (or group) relations, struggle for power, domination and resistance. Note that all these social practices are discursively enacted in political discourse including political campaign speeches. Concurring with the foregoing, van Dijk (2006c, p. 728) posits that "politics is one of the social domains whose practices are virtually exclusively discursive." Discourse is also presumed to express and reproduce ideologies. van Dijk (1995b, p. 17) puts this in these terms: "discourse plays a prominent role as the preferential site for the explicit, verbal formulation and the persuasive communication of ideological propositions." According to van Dijk (2000a, p. 8), ideologies are "the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group. This means that ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, for them, and to act accordingly." It is important to emphasize here that: ideologies are localized between societal structures and the structures of the minds of social members. They allow social actors to translate their social properties (identity, goal, position, etc.) into the knowledge and beliefs that make up the concrete models of their everyday life experiences, that is, the mental representations of their actions and discourse. Indirectly (viz., through attitudes and knowledge), therefore, ideologies control how people plan and understand their social practices, and hence also the structures of text and talk (van Dijk, 1995b, p. 21).

It follows from the foregoing to presuppose that a manipulative discourse (e.g. a political campaign discourse) is an ideology-laden discourse wherein someone (the manipulating speaker or writer

presumably) overtly or covertly conveys his/her ideologies or those of his/her social group with a view to getting his/her recipients to act in a desired way. Endorsing the foregoing, Addy and Ofori (2020, p. 1279) submit that: [political] campaign speeches are strategically crafted to convince the electorate of various policies, programs and ideas. Through the speeches, politicians surreptitiously influence and control how their audience receive and perceive the information being given to them. The main intention behind a political message is to legitimize a political position believed to be more credible than the other. To achieve this, politicians carefully package their messages in a manner that can be easily accepted by an audience through the employment of strategies that place the speaker of the message in an in-group position with the audience. In an attempt to prove that ideologies have an underlying structure, van Dijk (2006a) introduces the concept "ideological square" to describe how discourse often emphasizes positive aspects of 'Us' (in-group) and negative aspects of 'Them' (out-group), while downplaying or mitigating negative aspects of 'Us' and positive aspects of 'Them'. We consider this as the overall strategy of discourse here (van Dijk, 1995a). The subsequent analysis demonstrates how the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation is played out in Michelle Obama's speech under scrutiny. But before the analysis proper, let us revisit some previous CDA works on the use of discursive features (structures or/and strategies) in political discourse.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous CDA studies have examined how discursive features are deployed in political discourse to encode ideological effects, manipulate public minds, endorse worldviews or ideologies, create ideologies, sustain unequal power relations or ideological power relations, etc. (Koussouhon and Amoussou, 2018; Amoussou and Aguessy, 2020; Addy and Ofori, 2020; Kadhim and Jawad, 2020; Addae, Alhassan and Kyeremeh, 2022; Allagbé, 2024a and b; Allagbé, Amoussou and Hassane, forthcoming; Allagbé, Amoussou and Ahoutinou, forthcoming, Osisanwo, 2016a). For instance, Koussouhon and Amoussou (2018) investigate Barrack Obama's speech on climate change. From their investigation, the scholars report that Obama employs such discursive resources as topics or semantic macrostructures, local meanings and subtle formal structures (nominalization and passivization) in his speech to achieve 'ideological effects', i.e., to construct preferred mental models in order to sustain an unequal power relationship between rich nations and underdeveloped countries. In the same token, Amoussou and Aguessy (2020) decode the manipulative strategies and ideological features in Donald Trump's speech on the Coronavirus Pandemic. They infer from their analysis that Trump uses such discursive strategies as implicature, generalization, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, membership categorization device, blaming the victims, humanistic strategy, etc., to make his language powerful or manipulate his recipients' minds so as to make them accept, appreciate and endorse his worldviews or ideologies.

In the same token, Kadhim and Jawad (2020) investigate the manipulative discursive strategies Boris Johnson deploys in his speech on Brexit delivered in the UK House of Commons on October 19, 2019, to manipulate the Members of Parliament (MPs). They notice that Johnson employs, in varying proportions, such ideological discursive strategies as polarization, positive self-presentation, number game, national self-glorification, evidentiality, consensus, illustration, authority, implication, presupposition, actor description, hyperbole, negative other-presentation and lexicalization, the most dominant type being hyperbole. They conclude that Johnson's ideology influences the aforementioned strategies he deploys, and that the strategies serve to realize the ideological US-THEM polarization with a view to manipulating the recipients by controlling their minds, beliefs, knowledge and opinions. Addae, Alhassan and Kyeremeh (2022) also explore the role of language in creating ideology and sustaining power as well as ideological discursive structures in five speeches by the first Ghanaian president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. They deduce from their analysis that Nkrumah employs such discursive structures as evidentiality, pronouns, agency, metaphor, intertextuality, rhetorical question, and strong modals of obligation to encode ideologies as well as produce and sustain power and unequal power relations between himself and his audience.

In addition, Allagbé (2024a) analyzes the discourse structures and strategies Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu deploys in his inaugural speech and demonstrates how these structures and strategies encode his ideologies. The scholar reports that the speaker employs in his speech such discursive resources as situation description, implications and presuppositions, paraphrase, positive self-

presentation, display of power, evidentiality, authority, comparison, alliteration, assonance, gradation, idiom, hyperbole, imagery, repetition/anaphora, parallelism, personification, ellipsis, substitution, etc. He concludes that, through his use of the aforementioned discursive features, Tinubu discursively and ideologically appears to be a social democrat committed to uniting Nigerians across the country's political divide. Allagbé, Amoussou and Hassane (forthcoming) too examine the discursive structures and strategies that Nigeria's Former Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo uses in his speech delivered on February 8th, 2018 at the National Security Summit held in Abuja to encode ideological meanings. They argue that the discursive structures and strategies Osinbajo employs are ontologically controlled by underlying personal and social cognitions. From the analysis, the scholars report that the speaker deploys, in varying proportions, such discursive structures as speech acts, sentence syntactic structures and propositional structures. Moreover, they infer that the speaker uses discursive strategies like Actor Description, Examples and Illustrations, Authority, Number Game and Rhetorical Figures. They conclude that he employs the aforementioned discursive structures and strategies to construct and represent his perception of or/and worldviews about the security challenges (e.g. Boko Haram insurgency, kidnapping, murdering, killing, etc.) bedeviling his beloved country, Nigeria, on the one hand, and the efforts his government has made over time to curb these challenges, on the other. However, in his discursive construction and representation, Osinbajo emphasizes his group's properties, while he de-emphasizes those of others.

Allagbé, Amoussou and Ahoutinou (forthcoming) also analyze the discourse properties or structures (speech acts, syntax, lexicon and rhetorical figures) Josep Borrell deploys in his Opening speech delivered on October 10th, 2022, at the European Union Ambassadors' Annual Conference, Brussels, to persuade or discursively or/and cognitively manipulate his addressees with a view to getting them to take action in his own interest. The study also demonstrates how his language represents his (group) attitudes or ideologies. The findings reveal that the speaker employs, in varying proportions, such discourse structures as speech acts and sentence syntactic structures in his speech. They exude as well that the speaker uses both lexical choices and rhetorical figures including repetition; anastrophe; rhetorical question; ellipsis; anaphora; appositive; simile; metaphor, etc., to emphasize his group's values and properties, while de-emphasizing those of out-group members. The researchers conclude that the analysis of discourse properties or structures in Borrell's speech provides an insight into how language is used for discursive or/and cognitive manipulation.

Addy and Ofori's (2020) paper is similar to the ongoing study in that it investigates a political campaign speech; i.e., it analyzes how a Ghanaian opposition leader, Nana Akufo-Addo, uses language in his political campaign speech delivered at the manifesto launch of his party, to create identity and solidarity with the electorate, with the aim of persuading them to accept and support his ideas and ultimately vote for him in the forthcoming presidential election. But it differs from the current research work because it does not examine the discursive resources in a political speech in support of a presidential candidate. The findings suggest that Akufo-Addo employs such strategies as pronouns (*I*, *you*, *our* and *we*) and repetition to create a positive bond, identify and show solidarity with the electorate. The researchers conclude that these strategies aim at persuading voters to endorse Akufo-Addo as the most credible candidate for the position of a president. In the same token, Allagbé (2024b) examines the linguistic features and discursive strategies that Liberia's President Dr. George Manneh Weah deploys in his closing presidential campaign speech delivered on October 8th, 2023, in Monrovia, Liberia, to encode ideological power relations. The researcher notes that Weah uses, in varying proportions, linguistic features like Transitivity, Theme, Modality and Vocative features in his speech. He also notes that the speaker employs such discursive strategies as Actor Description, Comparison, Examples and Illustrations, Number Game, Simile, Allusion, Hyperbole, Personification, Anastrophe, Repetition/Anaphora/Epistrophe, Parallelism, Schemes, Use of Personal Pronouns, Use of Modal Verbs and Modal Adjuncts, Foregrounding, Passivization, and Neologisms and Acronyms in his speech. The scholar concludes that Weah intentionally uses all the aforementioned discursive features to encode ideological power relations with a view to persuading or/and manipulating the electorate to vote for and elect him as a president for a second term on October 10th, 2023.

Finally, Osisanwo (2016a) investigates the discursive strategies, ideological affiliations and discourse structures of political campaign SMS text messages sent to the electorate during the 2015 deanship election in the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan. From his analysis, the scholar suggests that the

SMS messages employ two broad ideological strategies, namely: positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Each of the ideological strategies also has at least five discursive strategies. The discursive strategies deployed, for instance, under the ideological strategy of positive self-presentation include such discourse structures as actor description, authority, categorization/polarization, comparison between Self and Other, consensus, disclaimers, example/illustration, self-glorification, number game and so forth. On the contrary, the strategies under the ideological strategy of negative other-presentation consist of appeal to voters' emotions, appeal to history, and appeal to sentiments. In addition, the scholar infers from his investigation that the messages embody four ideological tenets or stances: propagandist, framist, mediator and reformist. Osisanwo concludes that there are similarities between political campaign discourses in the academic community and the larger society.

The previous CDA studies reviewed above provide an insight into how discursive features are used in political discourse. However, the present article differs from these studies in that it aims to examine how these features are employed in a political campaign speech delivered by a former first lady in support of a (female) presidential candidate, and figure out how they help this speaker reach her intended goals: manipulate her recipients to make them act in a desired way and express her ideologies or/and those of her social group. This kind of political discourse (a political speech in support of a running candidate) has not received, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, an adequate critical linguistic attention. This is the vacuum that the current paper seeks to fill in.

4. METHODOLOGY

The political campaign speech under scrutiny was written and delivered by a woman (Michelle Obama) to support another woman (Kama Harris) vying for a presidential seat in America. It was downloaded from *Time Magazine* (https://time.com/7013289/michelle-obama-2024-dnc-speech-full-transcript) on December 4th, 2024. The speech was chosen for this investigation because this kind of political campaign speech, as indicated in the previous section, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, has not received an adequate critical linguistic attention. Though it obviously has no overall topic, the speech topically foregrounds "Hope is making a comeback", and is highly marked by an informal tenor (the use of lexical items like "folks", "y'all", etc., and minor clauses like "No", "No one", etc., shows this). In this speech, the speaker repeatedly asks her supporters to "Do something" to ensure that her supported candidate wins the November election against Donald Trump. The speech is subjected to analysis using van Dijk's discourse analytical theory (van Dijk, 2006b) which assumes that discourse (including a manipulative political campaign speech) is marked by the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 1995a).

Methodologically, the current paper employs the descriptive mixed-method research design. That is, it combines both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative analysis consists in parsing the speech into numerically numbered utterances and propositions, describing the speech acts, formal structures and deictic expressions deployed therein, and presenting the findings thereof in statistical terms. The qualitative analysis, on the contrary, comprises interpreting the quantified discursive resources in context. It also includes a content analysis of the rhetorical features the speaker deploys to convey her message. Due to space limitations, the full speech is not provided here. However, three extracts (**Extracts A, B** and **C**) are purposively drawn from the speech to illustrate the ideologies underlying the speaker's choice and use of discursive features.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section begins with the identification of discursive structures the speaker employs in her speech. Then it presents the discursive strategies she deploys to encode her message. Note that the discussion of the findings (including discursive strategies) is presented in a block form. This is meant to avoid an unnecessary repetition.

5.1. Discursive Structures in the Speech

The discursive structures identified here include speech acts, formal structures and deictic expressions. Let us start with the identification of speech acts.

5.2. Identification of Speech Acts

The speech acts identified in the speech are presented in the table below.

Table 1. *Distribution of speech acts in the speech.*

Speech acts	Utterances	Frequency/ percentage
Representatives (Rep)	3; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32; 33; 34; 35; 36; 37; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45; 46; 47; 48; 51; 52; 53; 54; 55; 56; 57; 58; 59; 60; 61; 62; 63; 64; 66; 67; 68; 69; 70; 71; 76; 77; 78; 80; 81; 84; 85; 86; 87; 88; 89; 92; 93; 94; 95; 98; 104; 105; 106; 107; 108; 109; 120; 121; 124; 128; 132; 133; 134; 135; 136; 140 and 141.	**96 (67.13%)**
Directives (Dir)	49; 50; 65; 72; 73; 74; 75; 79; 82; 83; 90; 91; 97; 99; 100; 101; 102; 103; 110; 111; 112; 113; 114; 115; 116; 117; 118; 119; 122; 123; 125; 126; 127; 129; 130; 131; 137 and 143.	**38 (26.57%)**
Commissives (Com)	-	**00 (00%)**
Expressive (Exp)	1; 2; 4; 5; 6; 96; 138; 139 and 142.	**09 (09.30%)**
Declaratives (Dec)	-	**00 (00%)**
Total		**143 (100%)**

As Table 1 clearly shows, the speaker employs all in all 143 Utterances in her speech. The table indicates too that she deploys, in varying proportions, three out of the five types of speech act: **96 representatives** (**i.e. 67.13%**), **38** directives (**i.e. 26.57%**) and **09** expressives (**09.30%**). As it appears, representatives rank first, directives second and expressives third in the speech. The speaker uses the predominant rate of representatives to describe a situation (the forthcoming November election in the United States of America), involving some background information (Utterances 7-33) which obviously legitimates her choice of a candidate. She also employs representative speech acts to represent Kamala Harris and her deputy, Tim Walz (Utterances 34-67 and Utterances 87-136), Donald Trump (Utterances 71-86), herself and her husband, Barrack Obama (Utterances 140-143). Furthermore, the speaker deploys the identified directives to both summon her supporters and urge them to cast their votes for her candidate. In addition, she employs the expressives to greet her audience and express her appreciation and gratitude.

5.3. Identification of Formal Structures

Table 2 presents the formal structures in the speech.

Table 2. *Distribution of formal structures in the speech.*

Type	Frequency
Clause complex	143
Clause simplex	246
Ranking clause	227
Minor clause	19
Passive structure	05
Foregrounded clause	16

Table 2 suggests that there are 143 clause complexes in the speech. These clause complexes comprise a total number of 236 clause simplexes: **227** ranking clauses (**i.e. 92.28%**) and **19** minor clauses (**i.e. 07.72%**). The minor clauses found in the speech are Clauses (2; 6; 8; 31vii; 31viii; 52; 58; 61; 75ii; 75iii; 75iv; 76i; 76ii; 77i; 89; 100; 109; 118v and 141). The presence of these minor clauses indicates that the speech contains a spoken mode. The table exudes as well that the speech involves 05 passive clauses (10; 32ii; 50i; 50ii and 95). Surprisingly, agency is suppressed in all the passive clauses. The suppression of agency here surely has an ideological manipulative implication. Likewise, as the table shows, the speech consists of 16 structural elements placed in Thematic position (18; 19i; 39i; 41; 51; 64; 66i; 67ii; 68i; 71; 81iii; 90i; 108; 129; 133 and 140i) While 14 of these elements (18; 19i; 39i; 41; 64; 66i; 67ii; 68i; 71; 81iii; 108; 129; 133 and 140i) are Circumstantial elements, the remainder are dependent clauses (51 and 90i). Like suppressed agency, these foregrounded features serve a given manipulative function. We shall demonstrate all these aspects better in Section 5.2.

5.4. Identification of Deictic Expressions

The deictic expressions found in the speech are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Distribution of deictic expressions in the speech.*

Deictic expressions			Utterances/ Clauses		Frequency/p ercentage
Person deixis	First-person singular (I and its variants 'me and my') and first-person plural (we and its variants 'us', 'our' and 'ourselves')		3; 9ii; 9iii; 11ii; 13i; 14i; 16i; ; 16ii; 18x2; 19ix2; 19ii; 19iii; 20i; 20iix2; 21; 22i; 22ii; 22iiix5; 23ii; 26i; 27i; 33iix2; 34x2; 37x2; 42; 44; 45; 47; 49iix2; 54ii; 55; 56i; (56ii); 56iii; 57i; 57ii; 59i; 59ii; 60ix2; 60iix2; 62; 63; 64; 66ii; 68i; 69i; 70x2; 71; 73i; 75ix2; 75ii; 76ii; 76iii; 77i; 78; 79i; 80x2; 82; 83; 84ii; 86ix2; 86ii; 87x2; 90i; 90ii; 90iii; 91i; 91ii; 93; 96; 98i; 99x2; 101iix2; 102; 103x3; 104ii; 110x3; 107; 111; 112ii;113x3; 114; 115; 116ii; 117ix2; 117ii; (117iii); 118i; 118ii; 118iix2; 118iv; (118v); 120; 121x2; 122; 126; 129; 130; 131x2; 132x2; 133x2; 134x3; 135x3; 136i; 136ii; 137ix2; 137iix2; 137iii; 137iv; 140ix2; 142iix2; 143.		**152 (27.84%)**
	Second-person (you and its variants 'you and your')		1; 4; 9i; 11i; 17i; 22ii; 23i; 31i; 31ii; 31iii; (31iv); (31v); 31vix3; 32i; 49iix5; 79i; 108; 112iii; 112iv; 120; 123iix3; 125i; 125ii; 126x3; 128; 136i; 138; 142ix2; 142ii.		**40 (07.33%)**
	Third-person ('it' and its variant 'it'; 'she' and its variant 'her', and 'they' and its variant 'their')		7ii; 9ii; 12; 17ii; 22iii; 23iix2; 24i; 26i; 26iix2; 29; 30; 31vi; 33ii; 35ii; 36; 37; 38x2; 39i; 39iix2; 40; 41; 43; 44x2; 46; 47; 48; 51; 54i; 66iix5; 67i; 69iiix2; 71; 72iix2; 73iii; 73iv; 74ii; 77i; 78; 81iii; 85; 94; 104iii; 105; 106; 107; 108; 111; 115; 116ix3; 136iii; 142iix4.		**67 (12.27%)**
Social deixis			15; 21; 34; 42; 53; 69ii; 71; 86i; 92; 95; 99; 101ii; 104i; 122; 126; 137iv.		**16 (02.93%)**
Time deixis	*Time expressions*		22ii; 68i; 98i; 103; 117ii; 118ii; 128; 136i; 137iii; 140i; 142ii.		**10 (01.83%)**
	Verb tenses	Present simple	7i; 7ii; 9i; 11i; 12; 13ii; 17ii; 21; 23i; 24ii; 25ii; 31i; 31ii; 31iii; 31iv;31v; 32i; 42; 43; 44; 45; 46; 47; 48; 49ii; 50i; 50ii; 51; 54i; 56i; 56ii; 56iii; 57i; 57ii; 59i; 59ii; 60i; 60ii; 62; 63; 64; 66i; 67ii; 68i; 68ii; 69i; 70; 72iii; 73ii; 74ii; 77iii; 78; 79ii; 80; 81i; 81ii; 81iii; 84i; 84ii; 85; 86ii; 88; 90i; 91ii; 93; 95; 97ii; 97iii; 97iv; 97v; 97vi; 98i; 104ii; 105; 106; 108; 110; 111; 112ii; 112iii; 112iv; 113; 115; 116i; 117i; 118i; 118ii; 121; 124; 125; 130; 131; 132; 133; 134; 135; 137iv; 138; 140i; 140ii; 142i; 142ii.		**101 (18.50%)**
		Present continuous	9ii; 9iii; 11ii; 15; 16i; 69ii; 73iii; 75ii; 92; 94; 96; 97vii; 98ii; 118iii; 118iv; 128.		**16 (02.93%)**
		Simple future	25i; 31vi; 54ii; 55; 69iii; 76iii; 87; 99; 101ii; 102; 103; 104iii; 107; 122; 136ii.		**15 (02.75%)**
		Present perfect	10; 13i; 16ii; 17i; 18; 32ii; 53; 66ii; 67iii; 90iii; 104i; 116ii; 117ii; 117iii; 123ii.		**15 (02.75%)**
		Simple past	3; 14i; 14ii; 14iii; 19i; 19iii; 20i; 20ii; 22i; 22iii; 23ii; 24i; 26i; 26ii; 27i; 27ii; 28; 29; 30; 33i; 33ii; 34; 35i; 35ii; 36; 37; 39i; 39ii; 40; 41; 71; 72ii; 86i; 136i.		**34 (06.24%)**
		Present conditional	22ii; 38; 67i; 73iv; 82; 83; 118v; 139.		**08 (01.46%)**
		Imperative	1; 4; 5; 49i; 65; 72i; 73i; 74i; 75i; 77ii; 79i; 90ii; 91i; 97i; 101i; 112i; 119; 123i; 126; 127; 129; 137i; 137ii; 137iii; 143.		**25 (04.58%)**
Place deixis	*Demonstratives*		9ii; 9iii; 13ii; 16ii; 18; 19i; 22iii; 23ii; 30; 32ii; 36; 39i; 42; 45; 53; 67ii; 75ii; 83; 87; 90i; 97v; 142ii.		**22 (04.02%)**
	Verbs of motion		40; 57i; 68iivi; 69ii; 118i; 118ii; 137iii; 140i.		**08 (01.46%)**
Discourse deixis			33i; 34; 66i; 70; 76iii; 77ii; 79i; 82; 86i; 86ii; 98ii; 108; 110; 113; 120; 126; 135.		**17 (03.11%)**
Total					**546 (100%)**

As Table 3 evokes, this speech contains **546** deictic features. Out of this figure, **259 (i.e. 47.44%)** are person deictic features (including "I, you, she, it, we and they" and their variants). The most dominant

person deixis deployed in the speech is the first-person plural pronoun "we" and its variants. This suggests the predominance of in-group ideologies in the speech. There are **224** (**i.e. 41.02%**) time deictic expressions in the speech. The most predominant type is verb tenses. Within this category, present simple predominates. This indicates that the text mainly encodes present actions or events. In addition, the speech includes **30** (**i.e. 05.48%**) place deictic features. Within this category, demonstratives are predominant. The demonstratives include 13 proximal place deictic expressions ('here' [9ii; 19i; 22iii and 36] and 'this' [9iii; 13ii; 30; 42; 45; 53; 67ii; 90i and 142ii]) and 9 distal place deictic expressions ('that' [16ii; 18; 23ii; 39i and 83] and 'those' [32ii; 75ii; 87 and 97v]). Moreover, the speech counts **17** (i.e. **03.11%**) discourse deictic terms. This proves that the text is internally well-organized. Finally, there are **16** (**02.93%**) social deictic terms in the speech. These terms are used to designate the recipients (present or not at the DNC). This suggests that the speech encodes interpersonal meanings.

5.5. Discursive Strategies in the Speech

As it appears in the preceding section, the speaker deploys in her speech such discursive structures as speech acts, formal structures and deictic expressions. These structures serve to encode the ideological strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. That is, the speaker emphasizes Our good or positive properties (actions, values, qualities, etc.), while at the same time de-emphasizing Their good or positive properties (actions, values, qualities, etc.). To that end, she increasingly makes recourse to discursive strategies like situation description, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, polarization, comparison, allusion, passivization, activization, nominalization, repetition, anastrophe, anaphora, ellipsis, expletive, metaphor, rhetorical question, assonance, alliteration, apostrophe, authority, use of personal pronouns, and use of modal verbs and modal adjuncts.

For instance, in the extract below, the speaker employs 38 Utterances for a situation description wherein she increasingly and abundantly appeals to history, emotions, home education and motherhood to manipulate her recipients. In fact, she does so in two subtle ways. First, she establishes a link between what she vaguely terms "Something" and "hope", on the one hand, and between "hope" which she discursively assumes is *dimming* and "grief", on the other. Second, the speaker establishes a link between the mourning of "the dimming hope" and "her personal grief" (the mourning of her late mother). It is noticed in the extract that, in her attempts to control the mental models of her audience, the speaker presents her late mother to her recipients as an embodiment of knowledge (moral values included) and authority figure. In effect, she self-evidently presents her mother to them as a solid argument that legitimates her choice of a candidate, Kamala Harris.

6. EXTRACT A

7i. Something, something wonderfully magical is in the air, 7ii. isn't **it**? **(Rep)** 8. Yeah **(Rep)**. 9i. **You** know, 9ii. **we**'re feeling **it** here in this arena, 9iii. *but* **it**'s spreading [all across this country **we** love] **(Rep)**. 10. A familiar feeling that's been buried too deep for far too long **(Rep)**. 11i. **You** know 11ii. what **I**'m talking about **(Rep)**. 12. **It**'s the contagious power of hope, the anticipation, the energy, the exhilaration of once again being on the cusp of a brighter day **(Rep)**. 13i. The chance to vanquish the demons of fear, division, and hate that have consumed **us** 13ii. *and* continue pursuing the unfinished promise of this great nation **(Rep)**. 14i. The dream that **our** parents and grandparents fought 14ii. *and* died 14iii. *and* sacrificed for **(Rep)**. 15. America, hope is making a comeback **(Rep)**. 16i. *But*, to be honest, **I** am realizing that until recently, 16ii. **I** have mourned the dimming of that hope **(Rep)**. 17i. *And* maybe **you**'ve experienced the same feelings—17ii. **it**'s that deep pit in **my** stomach, a palpable sense of dread about the future **(Rep)**. 18. *And* for **me (Cc)**, that mourning has also been mixed with **my** own personal grief **(Rep)**. 19i. The last time (Cl) **I** was here in **my** hometown was 19ii. to memorialize **my** mother, 19iii. *the woman* who showed **me** the meaning of hard work and humility and decency **(Rep)**. 20i. *The woman* who set **my** moral compass high 20ii. *and* (*The woman*) showed **me** the power of **my** own voice. 21. *Folks*, **I** still feel **her** loss so profoundly **(Rep)**. … 32i. **You** see, 32ii. those values have been passed on through family farms and factory towns, through tree-lined streets and crowded tenements, through prayer groups and national guard units and social studies classrooms **(Rep)**. 33i. Those were the values 33ii. **my** mother poured into **me** until **her** very last breath **(Rep)**. 34. ***Kamala Harris*** and **I** built **our** lives on those same foundational values **(Rep)**. 35i. *Even though* **our** mothers grew up an ocean apart, 35ii. **they** shared the same belief in the promise of this country **(Rep)**.

36. *That's why* **her** mother moved here from India at 19 **(Rep)**. 37. *It's why* **she** taught ***Kamala*** [about justice, about the obligation to lift others up, about **our** responsibility to give more than **we** take] **(Rep)**. 38. **She**'d often tell **her** daughter: ["Don't sit around and complain about things. Do something.] **(Rep)**"

As it appears in the extract above, the token "Something" repeated twice and the Mood tag "isn't it?" in Utterance (7) are deployed for emphatic reasons. While this token suggests the forthcoming November presidential elections which would oppose Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, "hope" simply alludes to the speaker's candidate. Note that the dimming of "hope" and the grief that ensues thereof both have a causal agent, whose identity is intentionally not disclosed here. This suggests "discursive manipulation" (van Dijk, 2006b, p. 361). In addition, the speaker places "A familiar feeling" in Clause (10) and "what" in Clause (11ii) in the subject slot. While the former is a Goal (in a passive structure), the latter is a Verbiage (inverted). This unfailingly denotes the ideological strategies of passivization and anastrophe. Likewise, the voiceless labiodental fricative consonant sound /f/ and the mid-close front short vowel sound /i/ repeated twice in the Goal form alliterative and assonantal patterns in the speech. The speaker also repeats the clause "You know" three consecutive times in Utterances (9; 11 and 32). Notice that "You" is a Senser and "know" is a mental process; a cognitive mental process. The speaker uses this repeated clause structure (an example of anaphora) for manipulative purposes.

Since the token "You" is a second-person deixis; i.e. it serves to directly designate the addressees (physically present or not at the DNC) in this context, the speaker deploys it to act on their minds to make them believe what she is telling them and make them act in her own interest. The same is true for her use of the first-person plural deictic token "we" and its variants "us" and "our" in Utterances (9 and 13), and the social deictic item "America" in Utterance (15). The token "we" functions as an in-group or inclusive pronoun here in that it subsumes both the speaker and her recipients. This in-group pronoun encodes a sense of solidarity or shared responsibility and collective action here. Likewise, the social deictic element "America", which is considered as a Vocative Adjunct (functioning as an apostrophe) here, encodes an interpersonal meaning (Eggins, 2004) in that it is used to directly address all American citizens (present or not at the DNC). Again, the speaker uses the modal adjuncts "to be honest" in Utterance (16) and "maybe" in Utterance (17) to express meanings about honesty and probability respectively. She also employs the lexical item "the woman" repeated three times (two visible and one implied) in Utterances (19 and 20) to foreground the mother or/and authority figure we have evoked earlier. This item points back anaphorically to the referent "my mother" previously mentioned in Utterance (19). This indicates lexical cohesion (Eggins, ibid.). Again, the referent is referred back to with the deictic pronoun "her" in Utterance (21). This suggests endophoric reference (Eggins, ibid.). On the contrary, the speaker employs the deictic pronoun "she" and its variant "her" in Utterances (36; 37 and 38) to point back to Kamala's mother, whom she cogently believes shares the same moral values and beliefs with her own mother. In other words, since both mothers (are presumed to) embody the same moral values and beliefs, the speaker self-evidently presents Kamala to her audience as a morally credible and well-educated person who is ideally qualified for the presidential function. To plainly encode this view, she recursively resorts to the first-person plural pronoun "we" and its variant "our" in Utterances (34 and 37).

Unlike the pronoun "we" and its variant "our" which include the speaker and her candidate, Kamala Harris, the first-person singular deictic term "I" and its variants "me" and "my" in Utterances (16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 33 and 34) she employs refer to herself alone. By deploying these pronouns in the text, the speaker intends to encode her opinions, attitudes, personal cognitions or ideologies therein. Two other social deictic items deserve to be mentioned here: "Folks" in Utterance (21) and "Kamala Harris" in Utterances (34 and 37). Notice that "Folks" is a Vocative Adjunct and "Kamala Harris" is a proper noun (first name + last name). As it appears, the speaker employs this proper noun without any address term. This gives one the impression that she either shares the same social status with the named (or they are close) or both belong to the same age, ethnic or social group (or the same political party). In this perspective, Wardhaugh (2006, p. 272) submits that the use of address terms is influenced by social status, gender, age, family relationship, occupational hierarchy, race and degree of intimacy. Moreover, the speaker uses the Vocative Adjunct to summon her recipients, and by so doing, she encodes interpersonal meanings in her speech (Eggins, 2004). She also deploys the second-person pronoun "You" in Clause (32i) to address her audience. Clause (32ii) is actually a passivized structure, and the agent therein is suppressed or deleted. Note that the audience will have to rely on their mental models

here in order to work out the identity of the deleted agent. This passive clause contains the distal place indexical "those" which is placed before the plural noun "values" to form a nominal group, functioning as a Goal (the subject of the passive). In addition to a Thematized Goal, the speaker foregrounds two Circumstances in the above text: "*And* for me" in Clause (18) and "The last time" in Clause (19i). While the former is a Circumstance of cause, the latter is a Circumstance of location. Both serve to realize experiential meanings in the text (Eggins, ibid.).

In furtherance to the foregoing, in the subsequent extracts (Extracts B and C), the speaker clearly emphasizes the good properties of her candidate and de-emphasizes those of her opponent. This suggests the ideological US-THEM polarization. In Extract B, for example, the discursive structures she employs include speech acts, deictic expressions and formal structures (activization and foregrounding). As it appears, the speaker mainly deploys representative speech acts to depict Self or in-group members (including her candidate, Kamala Harris, herself and her supporters). Her deployment of such social deictic expressions as "My girl", "Kamala" and person deictic items "she"; "you" and "we" and their variants indicates this point. Let us illustrate this with "My girl" and "Kamala". While the speaker uses the social deictic expressions "My girl" and "Kamala" to designate her candidate, she employs the third-person deixis "she" and its variant "her" to anaphorically refer back to her. The analysis of the formal structures clearly shows that the referent "Kamala" (or its reference item) is the subject of all the clauses in which it is used, and so it is the performer of the actions encoded in the clauses (e.g. 42; 43; 44; 49ii, etc.). Surprisingly, all the (stative and dynamic) verbs (e.g. *be; know; show; understand*, *live*, *open*, etc.) ascribed to "Kamala" express only positive deeds. The analysis also evinces that this referent is assigned positive Values and Tokens. The Values are "more than ready for this moment" in (42) and "one of the most qualified people ever [to seek the office of the presidency]" in (43); "one of the most dignified—a tribute to **her** mother, to **my** mother, and to **your** mother too" in (44), and the Tokens are "**your** story" in (46); "**my** story" in (47) and "the story of the majority of Americans trying to build a better life" in (48). In addition, the speaker employs two Circumstances (66i and 67ii) in Thematic position to foreground experiential meanings related to her candidate. As it appears, all the identified linguistic resources serve to encode the speaker's hidden intention: manipulate the mental models of her audience with a view to winning their consent.

Unlike in Extract B wherein the speaker represents her candidate positively, in Extract C, she completely downplays Donald Trump's good properties. The discursive structures she deploys here, like in Extract B, include speech acts, deictic expressions and formal structures. The representative speech acts which serve to describe Trump, for instance, suggest accusation; i.e. he is accused of making people fear the Obamas, substituting real ideas and solutions with ugly, misogynistic, racist lies and not being democratically conscious. To emphasize all these negative properties, the speaker recursively employs such nominalized verbs as "doubling down on" (74ii), "cutting" (75ii) and "taking away" (75iii), "Shutting down" (76i), "banning" (76ii), "Demonizing" (77i), "Going" (79ii; 80 and 81i) and "Doing" (84i). She also deploys the modal verbs "would" (82 and 83) (note that Clauses [82 and 83] are rhetorical questions) and "must" (87i) to encode obligation; i.e. to indicate that Americans need to avoid such a candidate at all cost as electing him as the next president of America will lead to the deconstruction of the democratic heritage their forefathers have passed over to them. The repeated lexical item "no other choice" (88 and 89) is meant to emphasize obligation as well.

7. EXTRACT B

42. **My girl**, Kamala Harris, is more than ready for this moment **(Rep)**. 43. **She** is one of the most qualified people ever [to seek the office of the presidency] **(Rep)**. 44. And **she** is one of the most dignified—a tribute to **her** mother, to **my** mother, and to **your** mother too **(Rep)**. 45. The embodiment of the stories (Vb) **we** tell ourselves about this country **(Rep)**. 46. **Her** story is **your** story **(Rep)**. 47. **It**'s **my** story **(Rep)**. 48. **It**'s the story of the vast majority of Americans trying to build a better life **(Rep)**. 49i. Look, 49ii. *Kamala* knows, [like **we** do, that regardless of where **you** come from, what **you** look like, who **you** love, how **you** worship, or what's in **your** bank account, **we** all deserve the opportunity to build a decent life] **(Dir)**. 50i. All of our contributions (G) deserve to be accepted 50ii. and valued **(Dir)**. 51. Because *no one* has a monopoly [on what **it** means to be an American] **(Rep)**. 52. *No one* **(Rep)**. 53. *Kamala* has shown **her** allegiance to this nation, [not by spewing anger and bitterness, but by living a life of service and always pushing the doors of opportunity open to others] **(Rep)**. 54i. **She** understands 54ii. that most of **us** will never be afforded the grace of failing forward **(Rep)**. 55. **We**

will never benefit from the affirmative action of generational wealth **(Rep)**. 56i. *If* **we** bankrupt the business 56ii. (**we**) *or* choke in a crisis, 56iii. **we** don't get a second, third, or fourth chance **(Rep)**. 57i. *If* things don't go **our** way, 57ii. **we** don't have the luxury of whining or cheating others [to get further ahead] **(Rep)**. 58. No **(Rep)**. 59i. **We** don't get to change the rules, 59ii. *so* **we** always win **(Rep)**. 60i. *If* **we** see a mountain in front of **us**, 60ii. **we** don't expect [there to be an escalator waiting to take **us** to the top] **(Rep)**. 61. No **(Rep)**. 62. **We** put **our** heads down **(Rep)**. 63. **We** get to work **(Rep)**. 64. In America (Cl), **we** do something **(Rep)**. 65. (*Crowd chants: "Do something!"*) **(Dir)** 66i. *And* throughout her entire life (Cm), that's 66ii. what (Ph) **we**'ve seen from Kamala Harris, the steel of **her** spine, the steadiness of **her** upbringing, the honesty of **her** example, and yes, the joy of **her** laughter and **her** light **(Rep)**. 67i. **It** couldn't be more obvious: 67ii. Of the two major candidates in this race (Cm), only **Kamala Harris** truly understands the unseen labor and unwavering commitment 67iii. that has always made America great **(Rep)**.

8. EXTRACT C

68i. Now (Cl), unfortunately (Cm), we know 68ii. what comes next (Rep). 69i. We know 69ii. folks are going to do everything 69iii. they can [to distort her truth] (Rep). 70. My husband and I, sadly, know a little something about this (Rep). 71. For years (Cx), Donald Trump did everything in his power [to try to make people fear us] (Rep). 72i. See, 72ii. his limited, narrow view of the world made him feel threatened by the existence of two hardworking, highly educated, successful people 72iii. who happen to be Black (Dir). 73i. Wait, 73ii. I want to know: 73iii. Who's going to tell him [73iv. that [the job (G) he's currently seeking] might just be one of those "Black jobs"]? (Dir) 74i. Look, 74ii. it's his same old con: 74iii. doubling down on ugly, misogynistic, racist lies as a substitute for real ideas and solutions that will actually make people's lives better (Dir). 75i. Look, 75ii. because cutting our healthcare, 75iii. taking away our freedom to control our bodies, 75iv. the freedom to become a mother through IVF like I did—75v. those things are not going to improve the health outcomes of our wives, mothers, and daughters (Dir). 76i. Shutting down the Department of Education, 76ii. banning our books—76iii. none of that will prepare our kids for the future (Rep). 77i. Demonizing our children [for being who they are and loving who they love]—77ii. look, 77ii. that doesn't make anybody's life better (Rep). 78. Instead, it only makes us small (Rep). 79i. And let me tell you this: 79ii. Going small is never the answer (Dir). 80. Going small is [the opposite of what we teach our kids] (Rep). 81i. Going small is petty, 81ii. it's unhealthy, 81iii. and quite frankly (Cm), it's unpresidential (Rep). 82. So, why would any of us accept this from anyone seeking our highest office? (Dir) 83. Why would we normalize that type of backward leadership? (Dir) 84i. Doing so only demeans 84ii. and cheapens our politics (Rep). 85. It only serves to further discourage good, big-hearted people from wanting to get involved at all (Rep). 86i. America, our parents taught us better than that 86ii. and we deserve so much better than that (Rep). 87i. That's why we must do everything in our power [to elect two of those good, big-hearted people] (Rep). 88. There is no other choice than Kamala Harris and Tim Walz (Rep). 89. No other choice (Rep).

9. CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the discursive features (structures and strategies) Former First Lady Michelle Obama employs in her political campaign speech in support of Kamala Harris, a presidential candidate, delivered on August 21st, 2024 at the 2024 DNC held in Chicago. It has drawn its theoretical insights from van Dijk's discourse analytical theory and the descriptive mixed-method research design. With this, it has specifically explored how the speaker deploys language to manipulate her audience and encode her ideologies or/and those of her social group. The study has yielded some important findings. For instance, the findings reveal that the speaker deploys, in varying proportions, such discursive structures as speech acts, formal structures and deictic expressions in her speech. These structures serve to encode the ideological strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. This is to say, the speaker emphasizes Our good or positive properties (actions, values, qualities, etc.), while at the same time de-emphasizing Their good or positive properties (actions, values, qualities, etc.). Four other ideological stances emerge from these findings as well. These stances include historian, propagandist, conservative and social democrat.

To reach her goal, the speaker increasingly makes recourse to discursive strategies like situation description, positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, polarization, comparison, allusion, passivization, activization, nominalization, repetition, anastrophe, anaphora, ellipsis, expletive,

metaphor, rhetorical question, assonance, alliteration, apostrophe, authority, use of personal pronouns, use of modal verbs and modal adjuncts. In addition, she increasingly resorts to history, emotions, home education and motherhood. With this, she is able to provide substantial background information which serves to legitimate her choice of a candidate, and she self-evidently presents this choice (or voting for this choice) to her recipients as the only way out for America if it truly intends to preserve its democratic heritage. No wonder she abundantly emphasizes Donald Trump's bad properties with the sole intention to manipulate her audience (i.e. their mental models [beliefs, knowledge, opinions and attitudes]) and make them act in her own interest. In a bid to appeal to Americans (including her supporters) to vote for her candidate, the speaker exclusively employs directive speech acts; i.e. she suggestively and metaphorically exhorts them to act in a desired way:

110. This is up to us, all of us, [to be the solution that we seek] (Dir). 111. It's up to all of us [to be the antidote to the darkness and division] (Dir). 112i. Look, 112ii. I don't care 112iii. how you identify politically—112iv. whether you're a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or none of the above (Dir). 113. This is our time [to stand up for what we know in our hearts is right] (Dir). 114. To stand up, not just for our basic freedoms but for decency and humanity; for basic respect, dignity, and empathy; for the values at the very foundation of this democracy (Dir). 115. It's up to us [to remember what Kamala's mother told her: "Don't just sit around and complain. Do something.]" (Dir) 116i. So if they lie about her—116ii. and they will—116iii. we've got to do something (Dir). 117i. If we see a bad poll—117ii. and we will—117iii. we've got to put down that phone 117iv. and (we've got to) do something (Dir). 118i. If we start feeling tired, 118ii. if we start feeling that dread creeping back in, 118iii. we gotta pick ourselves up, 118iv. throw water on our face, 118v. and what (should we do?)? (Dir) 119. (*Crowd chants: "Do something!"*) (Dir)

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