



CRAFTING INFLUENCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF REPETITION AND PARALLELISM IN THE SPEECHES OF BARACK OBAMA AND WINSTON CHURCHILL

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Abstract

This research paper offers a comparative look at how Barack Obama and Winston Churchill used the rhetorical devices of repetition and parallelism. This study shows how both leaders use these techniques to move, persuade, and unite their audiences. Even though, they faced difficult situations because they lived in different times. This research paper focuses on two special techniques: repetition and parallelism. This research paper closely analyzes a selection of their speeches using Aristotle's Rhetorical theory and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. It shows how Winston Churchill used language to give people courage during war. This study also shows how Barack Obama used it to bring hope and unity in difficult times. Both leaders used repetition and parallelism, but in their own unique ways, shaped by their time, style, and goals. This study also highlights the distinct ways each speaker used these tools, shaped by their personal style and historical moment. By comparing their strategies, the research sheds light on the enduring power of language in leadership. This study sheds light on how carefully crafted words can inspire nations and build trust.

Keywords: *Barack Obama, Winston Churchill, Parallelism, Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Persuasion.*

Introduction

Words have great power, and leaders use language to inspire and influence people. The way they articulate, the words and phrases they choose, and how they structure their speeches play a key role in shaping public opinion. The effective use of language by political leaders is the focal point of this research paper. Discourse here refers not only to words themselves but also to the context, situation, and setting in which they are used. It shows how speeches advertise ideas, build authority, and influence audiences (Fairclough, 2003). Political discourse is shaped by who is speaking, to whom, on what occasion, and for what reason (Van Dijk, 2002).

To capture attention, political speeches are carefully planned with rhetorical devices (Osborn & Osborn, 1988). Among these, "Repetition" and "Parallelism" are especially effective. Parallelism repeats similar structures in parts of a sentence or multiple sentences (McGuigan, 2008), while repetition repeats words or phrases to make ideas clear (Literary Devices, 2017). Political leaders use these techniques to connect emotionally and emphasize key ideas (Charteris-Black, 2014). This study focuses on Barack Obama and Winston Churchill.

Barack Obama, born August 4, 1961, was the 44th president of the United States, serving from 2009 to 2017. As the first African-American president, he made history. Before that, he served as a senator for Illinois and state senator. Obama became known for his powerful rhetorical devices, especially repetition and rhythm (Mendell & Wallenfeldt, 2025). Winston Churchill, born November 30, 1874, was Britain's Prime Minister during World War II (1940–1945,



1951–1955). He spent over 60 years in Parliament, strongly supported the British Empire, and believed in free-market policies (Wikipedia contributors, 2024).

Both Obama and Churchill are remembered as influential speakers who guided their people through difficult times using repetition and parallelism. This research analyzes how these techniques made their words meaningful and persuasive.

Research Question

1. How do parallelism and repetition work in the speeches of Barack Obama and Winston Churchill to make them emotionally engaging and more persuasive?
2. How do Barack Obama and Winston Churchill use these rhetorical techniques in different ways in their speeches?

Research Objectives

1. To analyze how rhetorical techniques like parallelism and repetition helped Barack Obama and Winston Churchill persuade their audiences.
2. To compare how repetition and parallelism are used in the speeches of both leaders Barack Obama and Winston Churchill.

Significance Of the Research Paper

This study helps us understand how Obama and Churchill used language to influence and unite people. It shows how rhetorical techniques can guide nations through crises and bring hope during difficult times. By comparing their speeches, we learn how language can solve problems and persuade audiences. The study is also useful for speechwriters and communicators, as it highlights how repetition and parallelism can be applied effectively in our own communication.

Literature Review

Political leaders use speeches to impress people, alter opinions, and encourage action. Some speeches are remembered for a long time because of the way leaders use language. Two important rhetorical techniques that make speeches strong are repetition and parallelism. Repetition means saying the same words again and again to give strength, while according to The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, parallelism occurs when clauses, phrases, or sentences have similar grammatical patterns (Preminger & Brogan, 1993).

Language is not only for communication; it also shows and builds power. Fairclough (1995) explains that repetition and parallelism help leaders spread ideas and influence thinking. He argues that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) studies how texts, language, and communication are tied to power and ideologies. CDA helps us see how ideas gain acceptance by analyzing language use (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 132-133). Van Dijk (2006) also highlights how language shapes political ideas and unites people, stating that ideology is central to CDA. Through language, we evolve, share, and spread ideas.

Classical rhetoric also provides insight. Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos explain why repetition and parallelism are persuasive (Aristotle, trans. 1991). Modern research on framing and storytelling also explores how rhetorical techniques shape message understanding (Entman, 1993). Their use depends on time and context. Churchill's speeches during World War II gave strength and courage. His famous "We Shall Fight" repeated the phrase to instill hope and determination (Liu, 2023). Obama's speeches, in contrast, came in a period of new beginnings and hope. In his 2008 victory speech, he repeated "Yes We Can" and used parallel phrases like "Democrat and Republican, Rich and Poor, Young and Old" to show unity and inclusiveness (Janczyło, 2020).

Both Churchill and Obama skillfully used repetition and parallelism, but with different styles and tones shaped by their goals. Many studies analyze their speeches separately: Churchill in historical contexts and Obama in modern contexts, but few compare them directly. Most



research overlooks how both leaders used the same rhetorical techniques in different times and situations. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing their speeches together, showing how repetition and parallelism function across contexts to unite people and inspire action.

Methodology

The comparative and qualitative methods are used in this research. The qualitative approach helped in thoroughly understanding how repetition and parallelism are used in the speeches of both leaders. On the other hand, the comparative method helped in finding the similarities and differences in their speeches. This method helped in how differently and similarly Barack Obama and Winston Churchill used repetition and Parallelism.

Theoretical Framework

This research used two famous ideas to understand the power of language. These theories were developed by great scholar and linguist: Aristotle and Norman Fairclough. The theories of Aristotle and Fairclough are: Aristotle's Rhetoric and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher. He introduced the concept of rhetoric. Aristotle's theory is based on three elements. These elements are Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. Ethos means a speaker can influence the audience more effectively if he is knowledgeable. Pathos means a speech in which a speaker should connect with people's emotions to get them more engaged and motivated. Whereas Logos means a speech in which a speaker should use clear reasons with strong arguments and clear logic to make their message more convincing (Aristotle, 2007). Norman Fairclough was a British linguist. He developed CDA to examine how language, power, and society are connected. Fairclough's CDA explains how words influence people's thoughts and actions (Fairclough, 1995).

Selection of Speeches of the Two Leaders

Barack Obama's two speeches

- i. A More Perfect Union (2008)
- ii. Yes, We Can (2008)

Winston Churchill's two speeches

- i. We Shall Fight on the Beaches (1940)
- ii. Their Finest Hour (1940)

Analysis of Rhetorical Techniques in Speeches

Barack Obama and Winston Churchill delivered their famous speeches during completely different historical periods. Winston Churchill delivered his speeches during World War II. At that time Britain confronted its greatest danger, facing Nazi Germany almost alone. Barack Obama delivered his speeches when America was dealing with social and political changes. Barack Obama and Winston Churchill both used similar language techniques to connect with their audiences, even though their situations were different. The repeating words or phrases have been considered as one of the most important language techniques in these speeches. Another powerful technique they both used is parallelism.

Repetition and Parallelism in Winston Churchill's Speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" (1940)

The influential warfare speech delivered by Winston Churchill has been carefully examined to understand its rhetorical techniques. Different important language patterns have been identified that made this speech so competent during Britain's mournful hour.

One of the most remarkable features is the repeated phrase "We Shall Fight" (Winston Churchill, 1940). This exact phrase is used six times, creating a strong rhythm that stayed in



audiences' minds long after hearing it (Lakoff, 2016). The constant repetition served as psychological reinforcement, making the message plunge deeper into the audience's consciousness (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Each repetition also built up emotions constantly, starting impassively and growing more furious until reaching a powerful climax (Aristotle, trans. 2007).

Another significant repetition is the phrase "I have, myself, full confidence" (Winston Churchill, 1940). These words are carefully chosen to establish Churchill's reliability as a trustworthy leader during difficult times (Higgins, 2017). He took personal responsibility for Britain's fate by including the word "myself", which helped to build strong trust between the government and the scared public (Aristotle, trans. 2007). The repetition of this word is particularly important when many people suspected Britain could survive alone against Nazi Germany.

The statement "If necessary alone" (Winston Churchill, 1940) is another deliberately repeated phrase that served multiple purposes. First, it showed Britain's unflawed determination to continue fighting no matter the conditions (Cannadine, 2020). Second, it honestly confessed the real possibility of having to fight without colleagues, which actually made the promise more believable (Humes, 2012).

The speech also used parallelism that organized complex ideas clearly. The famous sequence "We shall fight ... we shall fight ... we shall fight" (Winston Churchill, 1940) used a technique called anaphora. Anaphora is when sentences begin with the same words (Lakoff, 2016). This created a remarkable pattern that common people could easily follow and remember. Each parallel structure added more emotional force to the message, like crests hitting a beach one after another (Fahnestock, 2011).

Another powerful parallel structure is "Behind this armored ... Nor were the seas" (Winston Churchill, 1940). Churchill made complex warlike situations understandable to civilians by presenting opposite concepts in similar sentence structures (Fahnestock, 2011).

Repetition and Parallelism in Winston Churchill's Speech "Their Finest Hour"

This popular speech by Winston Churchill has been studied to understand how he used words to inspire Britain during World War II. Winston Churchill repeated several words and phrases to encourage ordinary people during the darkest era of Britain.

Churchill repeated the phrases in this speech for good reasons such as; "If necessary for years, if necessary alone"(Winston Churchill, 1940). The phrase told people two important things. First, that Britain would keep fighting no matter how long it took, and second that they would fight alone if they had to. The way the sentence is created made these tough ideas easier to accept. The famous ending line "This was their finest hour" (Winston Churchill, 1940) worked very well. It gave the speech a remarkable finish that ordinary people recalled (Fahnestock, 2011).

Churchill gave two very different pictures of what could happen in the future. He says, "if we can stand up to him, all Europe ... But if we fail, then the whole world..." (Winston Churchill, 1940). He used very powerful words to persuade people's emotions. Here he uses "if we can stand up to him..." and "But if we fail..." This structure is the same in both sentences. That is what makes it parallelism. He put the good and bad future side by side. This helps the audience understand the choice clearly. The structure makes the message easier to remember.

After losing many soldiers in France, people were worried. Churchill wanted to remind them that Britain was still strong. He said they had a big and strong army. That army included their best and most skilled soldiers. For this purpose, Churchill used repeating words like, "We have, ... military force. This force ... our finest troops..." (Winston Churchill, 1940). Churchill



repeats the word “force” two times. First, he says we have a powerful military force. Then, he says this force has the best troops. He is not just repeating for no-reason. Each time, he adds more meaning. First, he says the army is big and strong. Then he says it includes the best soldiers. This builds confidence. Repeating “force” again and again pushes this idea into people’s minds. It gives hope and power at a time when people were scared.

Repetition and Parallelism in Barack Obama’s Speech “Yes We Can”

Barack Obama's famous 2008 speech “Yes We Can” has been studied to understand how he used language to inspire people. The speech is given during his initial run for president and became very important in American politics.

One of the most important things in the speech is how Barack Obama kept saying "Yes We Can" (Barack Obama, 2008) over and over. This phrase worked like the chorus of a song that everyone could remember and say together (Rowland & Jones, 2011). Each time he said these words “Yes We Can,” they became more powerful. The words were simple but strong, and they gave people hope that things could get better.

"We are one people" (Barack Obama, 2008) is another phrase Barack Obama repeated. These words helped bring Americans together by suggesting everyone they shared the same country and dreams (Rowland & Jones, 2011). By saying this many times, Obama made different groups feel connected to each other (Fairclough, 2013). The repetition helped people forget their differences, their racial discrimination and remember what they had in common.

The speech also used parallelism to make ideas clearer. When Obama said "It was whispered ... It was sung," (Barack Obama, 2008) he is showing how good ideas propagate through history (Fahnestock, 2011). The similar beginnings of these sentences made the speech flow smoothly. Another good example is when Obama said "Not as divided ... not as cynical" (Barack Obama, 2008). To show the negative things America could move away from here he used these two similar phrases (Lakoff, 2016). The balanced sentences helped people imagine a better future (Aristotle, trans. 2007). This technique turned negative feelings into positive hopes by showing what could be changed.

Repetition and Parallelism in Barack Obama’s Speech “A More Perfect Union” (2008)

This speech “A More Perfect Union” is about racism. Barack Obama delivered this speech when questions about race were causing problems.

The phrase "This union may never be perfect" (Barack Obama, 2008) is repeated many times in this speech. This phrase is repeated to connect with America's founding documents (Rowland & Jones, 2011). By repeating the language of the Constitution, Obama showed that America's racial problems are part of an extensive part that needed to be worked on (Fairclough, 2013). The repetition of this idea helped structure racial progress as continuing journey rather than something already finished.

Another important repeated phrase is "The anger is real" (Barack Obama, 2008). These words are used to sincerely acknowledge strong emotions on all sides of racial discrimination (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Barack Obama authenticated people's feelings while still calling for unity by saying this phrase several times. This helped audiences feel audible while being asked to move forward together.

This speech also used parallelism very effectively. One example is "For the African-American community ... For the white community" (Barack Obama, 2008). This similar sentence pattern acknowledged Barack Obama to discuss different racial discrimination in a fair and equal way (Fahnestock, 2011). This parallelism helped make delicate racial comparisons without making one race seem more important than another.

Another powerful example is "Serve together, fight together, bleed together" (Barack Obama, 2008). This three-part similar structure created a strong sense of collective American identity (Higgins, 2017). The similar phrases showed that all races have worked and sacrificed for the country equally (Rowland & Jones, 2011). The martial language is especially effective because it recalled people of how Americans of all backgrounds and races have guarded the nation together.

Comparison of Barack Obama and Winston Churchill’s Speeches

When the speeches of Barack Obama and Winston Churchill are compared, important similarities and differences in their language techniques are disclosed.

Several key similarities have been detected in how both leaders spoke. First, Barack Obama and Winston Churchill constantly used repetition at the beginning of sentences. It is a technique called anaphora (Lakoff, 2016). Second, Barack Obama and Winston Churchill built up to powerful endings using parallel sentence structures that generated climaxes in their speeches (Fahnestock, 2011). Third, through their word choices and speaking styles both carefully established their integrity as leaders (Aristotle, trans. 2007).

Similarities in Rhetorical Techniques between Barack Obama and Winston Churchill

Rhetorical feature	Winston Churchill’s Usage	Barack Obama’s Usage	Similarities
Repetition	We Shall Fight...	Yes We Can...	Creates memorable and rhythmic phrases.
Parallelism	We Shall Fight On The Beaches...	We Are One People...	Make speeches more dramatic and emotional.
Building Trust (Ethos)	I Have Myself, Full Confidence...	I Am The Son Of A Black Man...	Make audiences believe in speakers as leaders.
Historical Framing	This Was Their Finest Hour.	A More Perfect Union...	Connects present to historical events.
Listing Ideas Clearly	Lists Military Strategies.	Lists Social Strategies.	Helped audiences understand complex topics...

Important differences between Barack Obama and Winston Churchill have also been noted. Winston Churchill's speeches sounded more like martial commands, using serious and forceful language suitable for wartime (Cannadine, 2020). Obama's speeches had a more hopeful and inspiring tone, applicable for his message of change and unity (Rowland & Jones, 2011). This difference in tone mirrored their different situations.

Another difference is in how they appealed to audiences' emotions. Winston Churchill's speeches mainly targeted audiences' feelings of fear and courage (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Barack Obama's speeches focused more on building trust in him as a leader and hope for the future (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Barack Obama and Winston Churchill both approaches worked



well for their specific purposes. The way they talked about power is also different. Winston Churchill's language focused power in the government and military leadership whereas Barack Obama spread the sense of power, more evenly, among all the citizens (Fairclough, 2013). This showed in how Winston Churchill often said "we" meaning the government, while Obama used "we" to mean all Americans.

Aspects	Winston Churchill's Usage	Barack Obama's Usage	Differences
Power Dynamics	Power centralized in government and military. Leaders and soldiers are the heroes.	Ordinary people are the heroes. Power distributed among citizens.	Churchill's "we" focused on government, Obama's "we" focused on citizens.
Tone	Commanding, martial, and forceful.	Inspiring, hopefully, and unifying.	Winston Churchill led in War, Obama campaigned for change.
Emotional Appeal	Made people feel brave and ready to fight.	Focused on trust and hope.	Churchill motivated rebellion while Obama inspired belief in progress.
Contextual Purpose	Prepared citizens for hard time and sacrifice.	Acknowledged problems while motivating solutions.	Survival vs. Societal change.
Language Complications	Simple but militaristic and strong like battle commands.	Simple but Aspirational.	Churchill's direct command vs. Obama's inclusive vision.

The comparison shows that while the basic tools of good speaking remain the same, great leaders like Barack Obama and Winston Churchill adjust them to fit their specific needs. Winston Churchill's wartime speeches needed to prepare people for sacrifice while maintaining hope whereas, Barack Obama's campaign speeches needed to admitted problems while motivating faith in solutions. Both leaders succeeded by using similar language techniques in different ways suited to their.

Conclusions

This research paper examined how Winston Churchill and Barack Obama used repetition and parallelism to persuade their audiences. These techniques made their speeches both powerful and memorable. Repetition enhanced emotional impact, as seen in Churchill's "We Shall Fight on the Beaches" and Obama's "Yes We Can", which remained in people's minds long after delivery. Parallelism helped to organize complex ideas into clear and effective patterns. Churchill employed it to build momentum, while Obama used it to emphasize themes of unity and progress.

The study also showed how both leaders adjusted their language to fit historical contexts. Churchill inspired collective responsibility and seriousness during World War II, uniting his nation against a common enemy. Obama, speaking in a time of social and political change, focused on hope and the promise of a better future. Despite differences in style and background,



both leaders demonstrated remarkable skill in using language as a tool of leadership and persuasion.

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