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A Rhetorical Analysis of Patriotism in American Independence Speeches

A B S T R A C T

This paper conducts a rhetorical analysis of patriotic language in American Independence Day speeches to explore presidential methods of building patriotic sentiment through words. Historical investigations of these speeches exist, but research on their rhetorical elements of patriotic language remains insufficient. The study investigates rhetorical devices which generate patriotic emotions while building national unity through language that reflects historical periods. The research adopts a qualitative method to evaluate two presidential Independence Day speeches delivered by Donald Trump (2019 Republican) and Barack Obama (2016 Democrat) through Leech's (1969) rhetorical device framework. Presidents use complex rhetorical strategies, which include metaphor and repetition alongside parallelism amplification, antithesis, negation, and hyperbole, to convert historical anniversaries into active patriotic feelings. The most important findings that study found is the fact that rhetorical means are not used indiscriminately in the discourses of events such as Independence Day in particular, but are the linguist strategically employed to achieve goals including national feeling and strengthening national unity. As for the tools used for both speeches, metaphor and repetition were commonly used to achieve emotional interaction. All of this indicates the process of transforming the historical anniversary into an effective national identity among the citizens.

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التحليل البلاغي للوطنية في خطابات استقلال أمريكا

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الملخص:

تقدم هذه الورقة تحليلاً بلاغياً لمفهوم الوطنية في خطب يوم الاستقلال الأمريكي، من خلال دراسة كيفية بناء الرؤساء للخطاب الوطني وتعزيزه لغوياً. ورغم أن هذه الخطب قد نُوقشت على نطاق واسع من وجهة نظر تاريخية، إلا أن هناك فجوة بحثية فيما يتعلق بالأبعاد البلاغية للغة الوطنية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل كيفية استدعاء الشعور بالوطنية من خلال الوسائل البلاغية، والمساهمة في بناء هوية وطنية مشتركة، وعكس السياقات التاريخية. واعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً نوعياً لتحليل خطابين رئاسيين في يوم الاستقلال: أحدهما للرئيس الجمهوري دونالد ترامب (٢٠١٩)، والآخر للرئيس الديمقراطي باراك أوباما (٢٠١٦)، وذلك باستخدام إطار نظري يستند إلى وسائل ليش البلاغية (١٩٦٩). تكشف النتائج أن الرؤساء يستخدمون تركيبات متقدمة من الوسائل البلاغية، ولا سيما الاستعارة، والتكرار، والتوازي، والتضخيم، والتقابل، والنفي، والمبالغة، لتحويل الذكرى التاريخية إلى شعور وطني حي. أهم النتائج إلى حقيقة أن الوسائل البلاغية لا تستخدم بشكل عشوائي في خطابات الأحداث المهمة كتلك في يوم الاستقلال تحديداً، بل تستخدم اللغوي استراتيجياً لتحقيق أهداف تشمل الشعور الوطني وتعزيز الوحدة الوطنية. أما بالنسبة للأدوات المستخدمة في كلتا الخطبتين، فقد كان الاستعارة والتكرار يستخدمان عادة لتحقيق التفاعل العاطفي. كل هذا يشير إلى عملية تحويل الذكرى التاريخية إلى هوية وطنية فعالة بين المواطنين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوطنية، الوسائل البلاغية، الخطب الرئاسية، يوم الاستقلال

1. Introduction

The American Independence Day speech holds an essential status within the nation's accumulation of political and rhetorical tradition. Throughout American history, multiple speeches have held great importance because they shaped identity factors while expressing core values and drove citizens to unite under freedom and democratic principles. According to Beasley (2004), presidential discourse serves as the main mechanism for building an American identity, which harmonises national unity against diversity and the historical continuance of new changes. Ceremonial address restrictions shape how political leaders make patriotism and national identity assertions through Independence Day speeches.

To understand the techniques of the work of the presidential national discourse, we should review the rhetorical strategies that lead to persuasive politics. These strategies are language tools that give emotional resonance and national identification. Through specific rhetorical techniques, political discourse heavily relies on patriotism as a fundamental element that enables politicians to establish relationships with voters, validate their authority, and generate backing. The use of patriotic sentiment in political discourse represents a multifaceted process that relates to national identity, collective memory, and political ideology (Hutcheson et al., 2004). The political domain utilises patriotism as McGee (1980) described ideographs to represent collective dedication toward a particular yet unclear and ill-defined normative objective. Patriotism functions as an ideograph because its flexible nature enables politicians to use it across different situations and objectives, thus making it a flexible rhetorical tool.

This study is a contribution to rhetorical and linguistic research by evaluating historical and sociocultural forces that impacted the usage of rhetorical devices for patriotic speech expression and how to construct the national language through specific rhetorical tools in the presidential speech by answering the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in the rhetorical strategies used by presidents from different political parties?
2. What rhetorical styles are most commonly used in American Independence Day speeches?
3. How do they evoke patriotism contextually?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Rhetorical strategies

From a linguistic perspective, rhetorical strategies are closely related to the fields of pragmatics and discourse analysis. Pragmatics examines how speakers use language to achieve communicative goals in context, while rhetorical devices function as pragmatic tools that influence audience interpretation and emotional response (Levinson, 1983; Chilton, 2014)

Through specific rhetorical techniques, writers and speakers craft messages that become more influential while addressing persuasiveness goals. The art of rhetoric depends on fundamental strategies which serve to activate listeners while also making complex points simple to understand and strengthening key information. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), a metaphor creates efficient, emotional connections between dissimilar subjects, which helps explain complex matters in memorable ways. Metaphor execution represents an essential tool in political communication, according to Charteris-Black (2011), who showed politicians leverage these figures to condense difficult ideas and, touch affective strings and build compelling stories. Through exaggerated language, hyperbole enables speakers to stress their essential points while emphasising urgency (McCarthy&Carter, 2004). Political hyperbolic statements in rhetoric, such as "worst disaster in history", aim to both inspire emotional reactions and immediate response action (Kalkhoven & De Landtsheer, 2016).

Recent scholarship has also explored the relationship between political rhetoric and national identity in contemporary discourse (Chilton, 2014; Wodak, 2015; van Dijk, 2020), highlighting how rhetorical structures shape ideological narratives within political communication.

Through antithesis, two opposing concepts merge into parallel grammatical structures to produce memorable statements that explain concepts by comparing what exists versus what does not (Leith, 2012). Kennedy's famous "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country" exemplifies how antithesis can effectively reframe relationships between citizens and the state (Rodden, 2008). Parallelism employs similar grammatical structures in successive phrases to create rhythm and emphasis, making messages more memorable and persuasive (Harris, 2018), while repetition reinforces key

messages and creates rhythm through techniques like anaphora (Tannen, 2007). Amplification expands upon ideas through elaboration and progressive development, layering meaning and emotion while building toward climactic effects (Kennedy, 1994). Negation is a rhetorical device that involves the denial or rejection of one concept to affirm another, often serving to clarify positions, challenge assumptions, or create emphasis through contrast (Givón, 2018).

2.2 The Concept of Patriotism

Patriotism, as a concept, has been a subject of scholarly debate and public discourse for centuries. It encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components, often intertwining with notions of national identity, loyalty, and civic engagement (Kosterman&Feshbach, 1989). At its core, patriotism is generally understood as a love for or devotion to one's country, though this simple definition belies its complexity. Primoratz (2002) offered a more nuanced definition, describing patriotism as "love of one's country, identification with it, and special concern for its well-being and that of compatriots" (p. 443), highlighting the emotional connection, cognitive identification, and behavioural component that characterise patriotic sentiment.

Schatz et al. (1999) distinguished between "blind" patriotism—characterised by unquestioning positive evaluation and intolerance of criticism—and "constructive" patriotism, which involves "critical loyalty" where individuals maintain attachment to their nation while critically evaluating its actions. While patriotism and nationalism are often used interchangeably, scholars emphasise their differences. Patriotism generally refers to love for one's country without necessarily entailing a belief in national superiority, while nationalism often involves a belief in national superiority and can lead to a desire for national dominance (Kosterman&Feshbach, 1989). This distinction is evident in their approaches to inclusivity, with patriotism tending to be more inclusive and allowing for diversity, while nationalism often promotes a more exclusive vision of national identity (Blank&Schmidt, 2003).

2.3 American Independence Speeches

American Independence speeches form a crucial part of the nation's political and rhetorical tradition. They have played a significant role in shaping national identity, articulating core values, and mobilising citizens around the ideals of freedom and democracy (Lucas&Medhurst, 2007). These speeches provide a unique window into how political leaders articulate conceptions of patriotism within the constraints of ceremonial address. Independence Day speeches, in particular, serve as what Bellah (1967) termed instances of "civil religion," invoking sacred principles of liberty and equality while reaffirming national purpose.

Presidential Independence Day addresses function as "rhetorical rituals" that balance the celebration of American achievements with calls to fulfil the nation's founding promises (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008). As Beasley (2004) argued, presidential rhetoric plays a crucial role in constructing an "American identity" that balances unity and diversity, continuity and

change. Analysing American Independence speeches requires consideration of their historical context, rhetorical strategies, and enduring impact. These speeches function to remember past events as they actively construct public comprehension of national identity along with civic responsibility through delivering American principles and present-day challenges by using historical perspectives.

3. Methodology

In addition to qualitative interpretation, a basic quantitative count of rhetorical devices was conducted to identify the frequency of each device in the analysed extracts. This mixed approach allows the study to demonstrate both the functional role and the relative prominence of rhetorical strategies in the speeches.

Yes, incorporate quantitative counts of Leech's devices (e.g., frequency of metaphors /repetitions per speech) alongside qualitative. Criteria: Manual coding of extracts for device occurrences, normalized by word count. This hybrid approach bolsters claims, e.g., "Trump used 12 metaphors vs. Obama's 8, emphasizing narrative exceptionalism."

The research adopts a qualitative method to study the rhetorical tools which American independence speeches use to express patriotism. Qualitative research methods prove most appropriate for this study because they enable detailed analysis of language data while considering historical and cultural factors (Denzin&Lincoln, 2011). The researchers analyse the rhetorical methods used by speakers to create patriotic feelings without conducting counts of specific rhetorical elements. The research uses Leech's (1969) Rhetorical Theory to establish a structured method for identifying rhetorical devices in the analysis. The research examines rhetorical devices, which Leech defines as antithesis, metaphor, repetition, parallelism, amplification, negation, and hyperbole.

Criteria Manual coding of extracts for device occurrences, normalized by word count. This hybrid approach bolsters claims, e.g., "Trump used 12 metaphors vs. Obama's 8, emphasizing narrative exceptionalism .

The presence of explicit patriotic themes (national identity, freedom, unity). The clear occurrence of rhetorical devices identified in Leech's framework. These criteria ensured that the analysed segments were representative of the speeches' rhetorical construction of patriotism. The identified devices function effectively to analyse persuasive and emotional components in patriotic discourse found in American Independence speeches depending on three criteria which are: presence of rhetorical devices defined in Leech's (1969) framework (e.g., metaphor, repetition, parallelism, hyperbole, antithesis, amplification, and negation); Contextual function, where the device contributes to reinforcing patriotic themes such as national unity, freedom, historical sacrifice, or collective identity. And Emotional or persuasive impact, indicated by language that intensifies evaluation, highlights national achievements, or calls for civic responsibility.

In this study, persuasive components refer to linguistic strategies that aim to influence the audience's beliefs or attitudes about national identity, unity, and civic responsibility.

Emotional components refer to expressions that evoke feelings such as pride, gratitude, sacrifice, or collective belonging.

The research data consists of two American Independence speeches delivered by Republican Party leader Donald Trump in 2019 and Democratic Party leader Barack Obama in 2016. The research design enables researchers to evaluate patriotic language in American speeches with equal consideration of both Republican and Democratic perspectives. Official archives and reputable sources provided the speeches, which maintained their authenticity. The study analysed specific, purposeful speech segments to conduct a rhetorical analysis of patriotic content and important rhetorical devices in both speeches.

4. Data Analysis

The rhetorical analysis of two chosen American Independence Day speeches appears in this section. The research analyses each speech through its individual extracts using the theoretical framework developed in the methodology section.

4.1 Donald Trump Speech: Remarks by President Trump at the 2019 Salute to America

On July 4th 2019, Donald Trump presented his "Salute to America" address from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., which deviated from typical Independence Day observances. The speech took place when political tensions ran high because of immigration disputes, trade conflicts and domestic social disagreements. During the address, Trump showcased military achievements while displaying military equipment to demonstrate national strength, which aligned with his "Making America Great Again" agenda. The event sparked extensive public discussion because supporters celebrated it as a patriotic display, yet critics denounced it as an improper political use of Independence Day.

Extract 1

"THE PRESIDENT: Hello, America. Hello. The First Lady and I wish each and every one of you a Happy Independence Day on this truly historic Fourth of July! (Applause.) Today, we come together as one nation with this very special Salute to America. We celebrate our history, our people, and the heroes who proudly defend our flag --- the brave men and women of the United States Military. (Applause.)" (Trump, 2019)

Trump's opening segment employs a number of rhetorical devices to create a powerful patriotic message, beginning with emphatic repetition "Hello, America. Hello." The repetitive syntax generates an informal, unassuming tone while establishing an immediate personal rapport with the audience. While some see the word "hello" as formal or professional, its repetition here breaks presidential norms to create a personal connection.

The cornerstone of this speech is its successful employment of parallelism in the sentence, "We celebrate our history, our people, and the heroes who proudly defend our flag." This tricolon, with the reiterated possessive pronoun "our," is a rhythmic scheme affirming mutual possession and national identity. The parallel elements intensify in focus by

amplification, progressing from abstractions (history) to human elements (individuals) to particular persons (heroes/military) to culminate in the emotionally resonant appositive phrase "the brave men and women of the United States Military."

The passage also strengthens its patriotic tone by strategic use of hyperbole ("truly historic Fourth of July," "very special Salute to America") and metaphorical language, particularly in the symbolic use of "flag" to represent the country. The speech employs amplification in developing the theme of national unity, constructing ideas from general ("come together as one nation") to specific commemorations of history, people, and military service. This strategic composition builds an inclusive patriotic message that appeals both to affective sentiment and national pride yet is accessible and relevant to the audience.

Extract 2

"We are pleased to have with us Vice President Mike Pence and his wonderful wife Karen. (Applause.) We are also joined by many hardworking members of Congress; Acting Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and many other members of my Cabinet; and also the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joe Dunford. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. (Applause.). As we gather this evening in the joy of freedom, we remember that we all share a truly extraordinary heritage. As we gather this evening in the joy of freedom, we remember that we all share a truly extraordinary heritage. Together, we are part of one of the greatest stories ever told: the story of America. It is the epic tale of a great nation whose people have risked everything for what they know is right and what they know is true. It is the chronicle of brave citizens who never give up on the dream of a better and brighter future. And it is the saga of thirteen separate colonies that united to form the most just and virtuous republic ever conceived. (Applause.) (Applause.)" (Trump, 2019)

Trump uses a carefully designed speaking technique, beginning with official greetings and then transitioning to core ideas about American identity. The speech begins with official titles and names that create a rhythmic effect through three "Thank you" statements. The speech moves between official greetings and emotional patriotic language i.e "epic tale" (people risking for right/true); "chronicle" (citizens dreaming brighter future); "saga" (colonies uniting into republic). Add: "These three 'It is...' parallels escalate America's story from individual valor to national triumph. through the repetition of certain words, which function as musical notes. The transition uses official regulations to guide the discussion toward essential matters.

The central idea of this section portrays America by using the metaphor of "story." Trump builds this concept by using three narrative metaphors that begin with "epic tale" and advance to "chronicle" before reaching "saga." The message intensifies in power through each successive word that introduces new meanings to the text, starting from greatness and then progressing to historic importance before reaching heroic victory. The passage demonstrates parallelism to describe how America has three distinct narrative sections. The sequence begins with "It is" followed by additional weight in each succeeding segment, which maintains a distinct structure through rhythmic repetition.

The text displays deliberate hyperbole to establish American exceptionalism by claiming America's cultural origins are "truly extraordinary" while simultaneously rejecting any better republic. The text demonstrates a sophisticated antithesis by illustrating how the "thirteen separate colonies" broke apart before achieving a single republican nation. The rhetorical elements construct power through systematic development, beginning with individual bravery, which leads to collective national objectives and reaching permanent institutional foundations. The text uses concrete ideals alongside abstract concepts to create theoretical boundaries that enhance their ability to reach our emotions. The formal ceremonial opening uses these structural elements to create a unified statement that inspires Americans about their identity and national purpose.

Extract 3

"Throughout our history, our country has been made ever greater by citizens who risked it all for equality and justice. 100 years ago this summer, the women's suffrage movement led Congress to pass the constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote. In 1960, a thirst for justice led African American students to sit down at the Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was one of the very first civil rights sit-ins and it started a movement all across our nation." (Trump, 2019)

The extract employs metaphor as a central device, particularly in the conceptual framework of "our country has been made ever greater," which presents the nation as an object under continuous construction by its citizens. This metaphorical foundation is enriched by phrases like "a thirst for justice," which transforms civil rights pursuit into a fundamental physical need, and "started a movement," which presents social change through the metaphor of physical motion, suggesting both momentum and inevitability. These metaphors work together to present national progress as both intentional and organic.

The text begins with broad historical advancement before narrowing its focus to the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement specifically. The description of Greensboro sit-ins follows a three-stage amplification process beginning with event details, then showing its historical significance before concluding with its national importance, thus transforming a local event into a national advancement symbol. Both historical examples employ similar organisational patterns through their initial time markers ("100 years ago" and "In 1960"), which then lead to descriptions of transformative movements.

The extract contains antithesis through hidden oppositions between justice and injustice and progress and stagnation. The strategic use of hyperbole in "risked it all" allows Trump to demonstrate their complete commitment without compromising their credibility. Through repetition, the text reintroduces core concepts instead of repeating specific words to make "movement" serve as both a literal and figurative meaning. The phrase "one of the very first" effectively negates other sit-ins by establishing the Greensboro sit-ins as historical pioneers while maintaining their proper historical context. The devices work together to demonstrate that American progress continues forward through courageous individual actions.

4.2 Barack Obama: Remarks by the President at Fourth of July Celebration

During his last presidential year, Barack Obama gave his Independence Day address in the East Room of the White House because of severe weather conditions. The speech took place when America faced intense political conflicts between presidential candidates and escalating social divisions during the 2016 presidential campaign. Obama demonstrated his commitment to contemporary culture and younger audiences through the musical performances of Janelle Monáe and Kendrick Lamar at the Independence Day event. The short speech conveyed essential elements of American identity by examining military service, current equality challenges and economic prospects and ongoing efforts to defend freedom. During his presidency, Obama fulfilled formal public duties alongside personal narratives that combined traditional patriotism with contemporary social topics to build his distinctive rhetoric.

Extract 1

"We all know that our freedoms are dependent on an incredible group of men and women in uniform and their families who look out for us every single day. (Applause.) Some of them are in attendance here today -- please give them a big round of applause. (Applause.) For those in our military who could not attend, we just want to say how much we admire, respect and appreciate everything you do to fight for our freedom every single day (Applause.). And obviously the Fourth of July -- we enjoy the hotdogs, we enjoy the burgers, we enjoy the barbecue, we enjoy the day off for a lot of us, we enjoy the fireworks. But it's important to remember what a miracle this country is." (Obama, 2016)

The extract employs repetition as its dominant rhetorical device, most notably in the anaphoric repetition of "we enjoy" in describing Fourth of July celebrations and the repeated phrase "every single day", emphasising continuous military service. This repetitive pattern is strengthened by clear parallelism in two key instances: the tricolon "we admire, respect and appreciate" expressing gratitude toward military personnel, and the series of holiday celebrations following the syntactic pattern "we enjoy + [object]." Amplification builds through the expansion from "men and women in uniform" to include their families and their daily service and through the accumulation of appreciative verbs.

The extract's rhetorical power is further enhanced through the strategic use of hyperbole in describing military personnel as "incredible" and the country as "a miracle," elevating these subjects beyond ordinary description. Antithesis appears explicitly through the contrasting conjunction "But" in the final sentence, creating a meaningful contrast between casual holiday celebrations and serious reflection on national significance. These devices work together to balance celebration with solemnity and personal enjoyment with collective gratitude, effectively linking everyday pleasures to deeper patriotic meaning.

Extract 2

"How incredible -- how incredibly lucky we are that people, generations ago, were willing to take up arms and fight for our freedom. And then people, inside this country, understanding

that there were imperfections in our union and were willing to keep on fighting on behalf of extending that freedom to all people and not just some. And that story of independence is not something that happens and then we just put away. It's something that we have to fight for every single day. It's something that we have to nurture, and we have to spread the word, and we have to work on." (Obama, 2016)

The extract employs repetition as a dominant device, evident in the opening reinforcement, "How incredible -- how incredibly lucky," the recurring word "fight" throughout, and the triple repetition of "It's something that we have to." This repetitive pattern is strengthened by strong parallelism, particularly in the series of collective obligations "we have to fight," "we have to nurture," "we have to spread the word," "we have to work on" and in the parallel description of historical actors "people, generations ago" and "people, inside this country", creating connections between external and internal struggles for freedom.

Amplification develops throughout as the concept of fighting for freedom expands from historical military conflict to internal struggles and daily civic responsibilities. The extract's rhetorical force is enhanced through strategic negation in two key instances: "not just some", emphasising freedom's inclusive nature, and "is not something that happens and then we just put away", challenging complacent attitudes toward independence. Hyperbole in the opening exclamation sets a tone of reverence and gratitude that carries through the extract.

The extract employs extensive metaphorical language, which develops from actual combat to symbolic battles for rights and justice. Through the metaphor of nurturing independence, the text transforms abstract independence into a living entity that needs care and attention. The devices display independence through their historical significance and their ongoing responsibility, which demands continuous attention from all citizens.

Extract 3

"And it involves us respecting each other. And it involves us recognising that there are still people in this country who are going hungry -- and they're not free because of that. There are still people in this country who can't find work -- and freedom without the ability to contribute to society and put a roof over your head or look after your family, that's not yet what we aim for. And so on a day like this, we celebrate, we have fun, we marvel at everything that's been done before." (Obama, 2016)

The extract bases its structure on repetition because it repeats the phrases "And it involves us" and "There are still people in this country" to highlight both our mutual responsibilities and active social issues across the nation. The repeated structure becomes stronger through parallel phrasing that uses "who are going hungry" and "who can't find work" and the tricolon "we celebrate we have fun we marvel." Through amplification, the text develops freedom from basic mutual respect into economic security and social dignity to reveal freedom's true meaning.

His rhetorical method of negation reveals three essential distinctions that show how American ideals differ from current reality. The text employs metaphorical expressions to demonstrate freedom surpasses political liberty, and the phrase "put a roof over your head"

generates visual concepts for theoretical content. The devices demonstrate that freedom exists as a comprehensive state that requires political rights together with economic stability and continuous work to achieve it.

5. Conclusion

Donald Trump implemented complicated rhetorical devices in his 2019 address, while Barack Obama used comparable methods in his 2016 Independence Day speeches to develop and enhance national pride through their speeches. Presidents transform historical commemorations into active patriotic feelings by integrating metaphor with repetition and parallelism as well as amplification antithesis and hyperbole. Every president adapts their presidential devices according to their individual perspectives regarding American identity. President Trump creates exceptional American greatness through amplification and narrative metaphors, yet President Obama demonstrates civic responsibility by using parallel structures and enduring metaphoric guidance. The leaders uphold traditional Fourth of July speech conventions because they understand how to celebrate achievements while addressing contemporary problems. Through rhetorical methods, presidents merge different groups of listeners to establish patriotic messages about current issues.

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