

Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes in Barack Obama's Winning Speech 2012

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Abstract: The findings offer a comprehensive exploration of the diverse elements shaping a nation's identity. Key themes such as independence, freedom rights, and diversity emerge as fundamental pillars driving collective determination towards common objectives. The study highlights the unifying force of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, alongside the significance of historical loyalty in facilitating societal progress. Additionally, it delves into the limitations of hope and dreams in resolving conflicts, emphasizing the importance of active engagement in problem-solving. Optimism towards the future, grounded in civic responsibility and dedication to voters, is identified as vital for fostering positive societal narratives. Moreover, the study addresses the role of military strength and global influence in shaping national identity and discusses political polarization, acknowledging its complexities within contemporary contexts. Ultimately, the findings underscore the pivotal role of values and ideologies in shaping a nation's trajectory, reflecting both local dynamics and political trends on the global stage. Furthermore, there is thought about the limitations of the power of hope and dreams (4,3%) in overcoming deadlock or conflict situations, as well as the importance of active responses to the problems faced. An optimistic (17,4%) view of the future and belief in prosperity are also emphasized, along with values such as service, dedication, and responsibility to voters. Additionally, mythological (21,7%) values also emerge, including myths of unity in crisis and collaborative leadership. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on loyalty (26,1%) to history, the sustainability of mission and vision, and the importance of upholding commitments considered as the foundation of a nation.

Key Words: Connotative; Denotative; Myth; Roland Barthes; Speech

Introduction

In the midst of social life, humans convey language both directly and indirectly. Language can also be conveyed in several ways, such as through conversations, interviews, speeches, advertisements, or letters or texts. That way, language is not only done in social society but can also be conveyed to the political realm. Susanti (2019, p. 1) conveyed that speaking is the process of changing the form of thoughts/feelings into a form of speech. There are elements of communicators and communicants in communication. Language becomes a powerful weapon for communicators to provide messages that have implied meanings in them. One way to convey political narratives to a large audience is through political rhetoric. Speech is also referred to as rhetoric.

Political rhetoric is seen as the art of speaking systematically and logically arranged and logical where the presentation is rational and conveys facts that occur in social life that are general in nature and have social value. According to Harsoyo (in Sulistyarini & Zainal, 2020, p. 2), rhetoric is a science that has rational, empirical, general, and accumulative properties. Similar to Tarigan (in Susanti, 2019, p. 10) mentions three general purposes in communication, namely telling and reporting (to inform), entertaining and entertaining (to entertain), persuading, inviting, urging and convincing (to persuade). In the world of politics, communicators can convey their narratives both in text and oral form with themes and topics such as victory speeches for their election as president, national speeches, and speeches conveying aspirations regarding the current political and social situation. In this case, it provides a variety of views in interpreting the message conveyed. Hence,



understanding the language of the message contained in the speech can be interpreted and understood properly as intended by the speaker. The importance of studying the implied meaning contained in a speech text. In this case, semiotics is a good tool to understand and understand the intent and purpose that the speaker wants to convey to a wide audience.

Semiotics is a branch of science that studies signs and meaning in a system. In the context of linguistics, semiotics discusses the signs of language and how they produce meaning. Ambarini and Umaya (2018, p. 27) asserted that "cabang ilmu yang berurusan dengan tanda, mulai dari sistem tanda, dan proses yang berlaku bagi penggunaan tanda pada akhir abad ke-18". It is also added that "semiotics is an action (action), influence (influence), or cooperation of three aspects including sign (sign), object and interpretation, (Ambarini & Umaya, 2018, p. 73). Semiotics is applied to various fields, including literature, visual arts, mass media, and popular culture. The use of semiotics is relevant because it can open up a deeper understanding of the signs that exist in a phenomenon, text, or work of art. Semiotics makes a major contribution in revealing the complexity of meanings contained in signs. In addition, Hill and Bevis cited that "Saussure suggested that semiotics is divided into two parts, namely the signifier and the signified" (in Simamora & Pamungkas, 2022, p. 158). Semiotics helps decipher and analyze layers of meaning that may not be immediately apparent. This can open up richer and deeper horizons of interpretation.

In the context of cultural and social aspects, semiotics can serve as an effective analytical tool. By understanding the signs that represent values, norms, and symbols in a society or subculture, researchers can comprehend the complex dynamics that shape cultural and social identities. In semiotics one of the eminent scholars, Roland Barthes, developed a theory regarding this semiotics. This was articulated by Hasbullah (2020, p. 119), who stated that "Roland Barthes developed two levels of signs that allow for the production of multi-level meanings, namely the denotation and connotation levels." Furthermore, it was developed that "Barthes prioritized three things that are central to his analysis, namely Denotative, Connotative, and Myth" (Maulana, 2011, p. 199). In denotative meaning, it can be interpreted as meaning that is contained within the actual meaning. In this regard, it can be interpreted that "denotation is a signifier explaining how the signifier and signified relate in reality, which is about specific meaning in a sign called the signified picture (real). In giving meaning, denotation uses clear and objective language" (Isnaniah & Agustina, 2020, p. 355). Thus, denotative meaning can be interpreted as signs and how those signs are given their true or actual meaning. Denotative meaning reveals meanings that are clearly visible to the naked eye, meaning denotative meaning is the actual meaning. Roland Barthes explains that denotation is the first sign, wherein the meaning is generally known in society.

Meanwhile, in the connotative meaning, which is the second position in the semiotic realm according to Roland Barthes, it is explained that "connotation is a signifier explaining how the signifier and signified relate to inexplicit, indirect, and uncertain meaning, or it can be called meaning aspect one or some texts based on feeling in the scope of speaker and listener; Connotation has a subjective meaning related to someone's emotion" (Isnaniah & Agustina, 2020, p. 355). Another definition is provided by Septiana (in Putri et al., 2022, p. 378) stating that "the connotation is a word that has another meaning behind it or a meaning related to a word and it is figurative." Furthermore, the third stage, namely myth in semiotic research, according to can be interpreted as "Barthes states in his theory that myth is a development of the hidden connotations of objects in the signification process. The connotation marking system becomes ideology in society, which is called myth" (Putri et al., 2022, p. 379). Further explained by Halik (in Isnaniah & Agustina, 2020, p. 357) that "The meaning of myth is formed by majority power which gives certain Connotation to certain things consistently so in a long time it becomes cultural meaning."

Semiotic research in understanding meaning within a text is highly valuable. This is because the function of semiotics, which conveys a message and sign, holds significance different from its literal meaning, and it is hoped that listeners can comprehend the message. Mudjiyanto and Nur (2013, p. 73) described semiotics is based on the idea that "the basic idea of semiotics is message and code. The only way a message can be sent from one person to another is by using code." Furthermore, it is explained in more detail that "communication semiotics emphasizes the theory of sign production, one of which assumes the existence of six factors in communication, namely sender, receiver of the code (sign system), message, communication

channel, and reference (topic of discussion), and emphasizes the theory of signs and their understanding in a particular context" (Mudjiyanto & Nur, 2013, p. 74).

In his speech, Obama emphasized the power of democracy, attributing his success to the strategic use of both verbal and nonverbal communication, which, when purposefully employed in a social context, can surpass the influence of physical power (Alweldi, 2024). This is one indicator of the selection of Obama's speech in the current study. Jehadu et al. (2022) investigated Obama's speech to Congress on February 20, 2010, with Critical Discourse Analysis, and they revealed three dimensions involved: the structures such as genre, framing, background/ foregrounding, and presupposition; the sentence level includes topicalization, agency, deletion/ omission, insinuation, connotation, register, and modality; ideology dimension covers opening, content, and closing. Widiatmika et al. (2020) reported Obama's winning speech in 2008 utilizing Rhetorical Schemes, and they discovered three schemes consisting of phonological, morphological, and syntactical. However, the investigation of semiotic analysis using Roland Barthes's theory regarding Obama's winning speech in 2012 is still infrequent. Thus, this study tries to assist readers in understanding semiotics and their meanings within it and in describing how often semiotics are used in society's lives. To fill the gap, the current study aims to examine the following research questions:

1. What semiotic signs and their meanings, according to Roland Barthes, are present in the content of Barack Obama's victory speech in 2012?
2. How often are semiotics used in the meanings of denotation, connotation, and myths found in the content of Barack Obama's victory speech in 2012?

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive analysis with content analysis techniques. Qualitative descriptive research "aims to explain a particular social condition" (Morissan, 2019, p. 28). The selected research method was to pursue accurately and systematically the existing validity facts. In this case, recording, inference, and analysis of critical discourse analysis and semiotics in the content of Barack Obama's victory speech in 2012 were conducted. In connection with the above, the method used in this study was content analysis method based on the theory of Krisanjaya and Yuniseffendri in relation to the semantic field providing meaning contained in the text. "Things discussed in semantics are the nature of meaning, types of meaning, meaning relations, meaning changes, and other things related to language meaning" (Krisanjaya & Yuniseffendri, 2019, p. 122). The connection of meaning studied by semantics is what makes semantics one part of linguistics. In addition, in the field of semiotics, the content analysis method used was based on Roland Barthes' theory, which examined three aspects: denotative meaning, connotative meaning, and myths.

This research was conducted by reading the entire text of Barack Obama's 2012 speech and analyzing each sentence systematically, then categorizing it into semiotics with denotative, connotative meanings, and also the myths contained within the connotative meanings found. This study was a semiotic study using Roland Barthes' theory, which provided an in-depth understanding of denotative and connotative meanings that were found in the speech text. As for the data collection technique, it was done through observation and note-taking techniques. Sudayanto (in Ningsih & Ridwan, 2023, p. 5) depicted that "observation technique is the process of observing language usage in detail." This was implemented because this research used video as research material. Additionally, the "note-taking technique is a data collection technique by taking notes of the results of observing data on data cards" (Kurniawati in Ningsih & Ridwan, 2023, p. 5).

In this study, data analysis was conducted by collecting all findings obtained through the process of observation and note-taking techniques. After all the data were gathered, the researcher conducted data analysis to answer the questions in the problem formulation. Aligned with Ningsih and Ridwan, (2023, p. 5) found regarding data analysis, which is "related to systematically testing something to determine its parts, relationships between parts, and overall relationships."



Results and Discussion

Results

In Barack Obama's 2012 victory speech, data with semiotic meanings were found in a total of 49 phrases containing elements of denotation and connotation, with indications of mythical meanings found in 29 phrases. The results of the conducted research are elaborated as follows:

Table 1 The Recapitulation Data Result of Barack Obama's 2012 Victory Speech

No	Denotation	Connotative	Myth	
1	More than 200 years	Historical values referring to the history of independence.	-	
2	Own destiny	Values of unity and the spirit of nation-building.	The value of independence and freedom rights.	
3	the spirit	Values of resilience and rising together, providing motivational meaning and strengthening the spirit of facing challenges together.	Spiritual awakening and strengthening determination to achieve common goals.	
4	the great heights of hope	Providing inspiration and hope for growth together.	Providing value of revival and hope for the nation.	
5	rise or fall together	Unity and shared responsibility of a nation.	-	
6	journey has been long	Providing the value of unity for national development and instilling hope for progress.	-	
7	picked ourselves up	Values of resilience and rising from adversity.	-	
8	you made your voice heard	Values of freedom of speech and expressing one's choices.	-	
9	you made a difference	Values of change for the future.	-	
10	congratulated him	Values of unity and instilling mutual spirit.	-	
11	work together	Values of cooperation for a progressive America.	Providing a new perspective that skin color differences do not hinder cooperation.	
12	America's warrior	happy	The value of defending and safeguarding America together leads to the nation's progress.	Providing a perspective to encourage all communities to join together in nation-building.
13	our very eyes	The value of optimism towards a bright future.	-	
14	All of you are family	The value of kinship for all communities.	-	
15	believing all the way to every hill, to every valley	The value of economic status equality.	-	
16	plenty of fodder	The value of equal information dissemination, ensuring uniformity and no reduction in information content.	-	
17	a rope line in a high school gym	The value of readiness to face future challenges and providing hope and fighting spirit.	-	

18	saw folks working late at a campaign office	The values of cooperation, hard work, and hope for change.	-
19	the deep patriotism	The values of patriotism and optimism for collective struggle.	-
20	or a roof over their head	The value of struggle, obtaining protection, and providing a sense of security.	-
21	It's important	The value of equality and considering the nation's development interests.	Providing value of importance for a nation's progress and change.
22	Our liberty	The values of ideology, freedom of speech, and gender and racial equality.	Providing ideological and racial values.
23	our children	Carrying meaning for the next generation's future in the hands of young people.	Societal assumptions about young people being unreliable in leadership.
24	to pass on a country	Providing a sense of safety and comfort for the population. Ensuring security.	-
25	respected and admired	The value of diversity.	The value of diversity in ethnicity, race, culture, and religion.
26	of war to shape a peace	The values of peace and tranquility aimed at the nation's development.	-
27	a tolerant America	The values and attitudes of accepting or respecting differences, whether ethnic, cultural, religious, or political views.	-
28	pledges to our flag	The values and actions of commitment or oath, while "flag" refers to a national symbol.	-
29	hopes and dreams won't end all the gridlock	The values of optimism, belief, and enthusiasm in facing challenges.	About the limitations of the power of hope and dreams in overcoming deadlock or conflict situations.
30	I have listened to you	The value of listening to or paying attention to conversations or opinions from others.	-
31	the future that lies ahead	Values of optimism, anticipation, and uncertainty about the future, with hope and positive belief.	Creating an image of optimism and belief in the future.
32	voted for action	Values such as decision-making, active participation, and emphasis on concrete steps.	Emphasizing the importance of active responses to situations or issues faced.
33	You elected us to focus on your jobs, not ours	Values of responsibility towards public service. Elected leaders affirm that they are chosen to focus on public work, not their own personal or political interests.	Emphasizing values such as service, dedication, and responsibility towards voters.
34	more wealth than any nation	Economic values and the prosperity and welfare of the people.	The view that great economic success and prosperity can be achieved.
35	what makes us rich	Factors and contexts of material, spiritual, or abundance wealth in various aspects of life.	Myths that may be related to the concept of wealth or richness
36	most powerful military	Implies strength in national resilience such as military strength aspects in terms of technology, personnel, equipment, and strategic capabilities.	Reflect the concept of high military power, such as the myth of global domination and absolute security.



37	makes us strong	Refers to physical strength, emotional strength, or other aspects of strength.	Myths of physical, mental, emotional, and social strength.
38	Hold together the most diverse nation on Earth	Reflects the challenge or responsibility to maintain unity in a highly diverse country.	Myths of unity as the highest goal, harmony in diversity, and leaders as the guardians of unity.
39	this spirit at work in America	Specific spirit values are actively operating in America.	Myths of national spirit, American success, and independence and freedom in social interactions.
40	leaders from every party and level of government have swept aside their differences to help a community	Leaders and government levels are engaged in governance activities. As well as cooperation values in collaborating with other parties and overlooking existing differences to work together.	The displayed mythological values are myths of unity in crisis and collaborative leadership.
41	rebuild from the wreckage of a terrible storm	Provides values of rebuilding and restoring something that has been damaged for the recovery of the country's condition.	The presence of values of resilience and resurgence, solidarity in difficulties, and hope and change.
42	this incredible daughter of his	That the discussed young girl has very impressive or extraordinary qualities or characteristics, showing admiration or awe towards her.	-
43	little girl could be our own	This little girl has the potential to be part of our family or personal life, showing a sense of connection or emotional involvement with the girl.	-
44	keep the promise of our founding	Refers to a commitment to uphold the principles or values underlying the formation of a country or organization.	The value of loyalty to historical roots, the sustainability of mission and vision, as well as struggle and dedication.
45	You can make it here in America if you're willing to try	Values of optimism and enthusiasm to achieve success, fulfill dreams, or reach specific goals.	Sustainability and obligation to uphold promises or commitments considered as the foundation or essence of a group or nation.
46	We're not as cynical as the pundits believe	The belief that the group's views are not fully reflected in the skeptical views expressed by experts or commentators.	The value of optimism or belief higher than perceived by analysts or commentators.
47	a collection of red states and blue states	Describes the political divisions between these regions based on identified common political preferences.	Reflecting political tendencies among nations. It also refers to a deep understanding of political polarization in America.
48	with your help and God's grace	Refers to the belief that achieving something requires human support and divine sustainability.	Reflecting values of belief in the power of collaboration between human efforts and spiritual influences in achieving

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the greatest nation on earth

Refers to geographical size, economic wealth, geopolitical influence, or a combination of these factors.

success or accomplishments.

Reflecting confidence in the excellence and success of the nation in various aspects, as well as certain values or ideologies that place this nation in a highly special and outstanding position in the world.

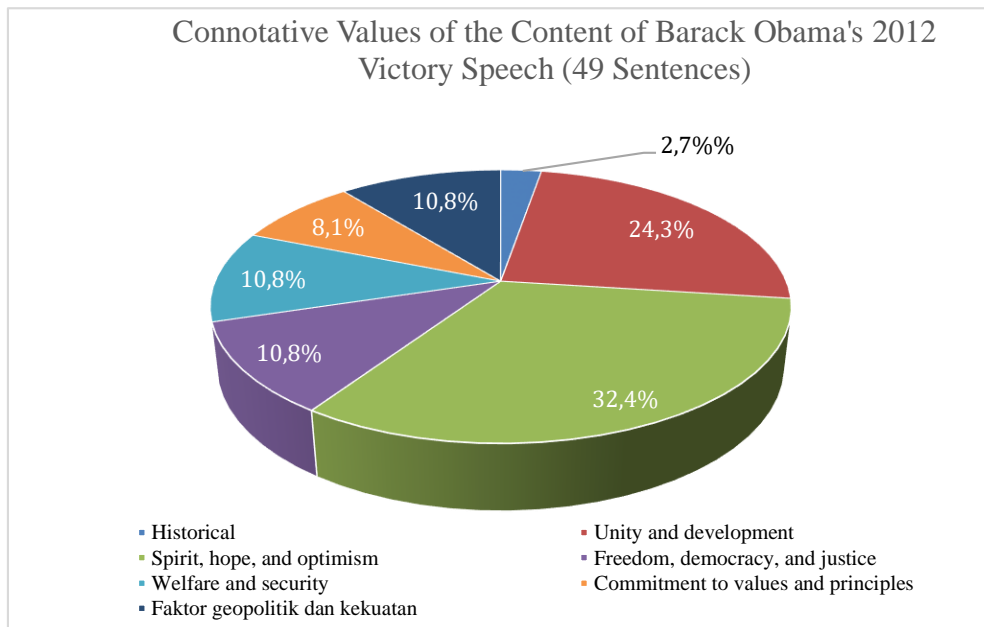


Figure 1: Percentage of denotative values in the content of Barrack Obama's 2012 speech.

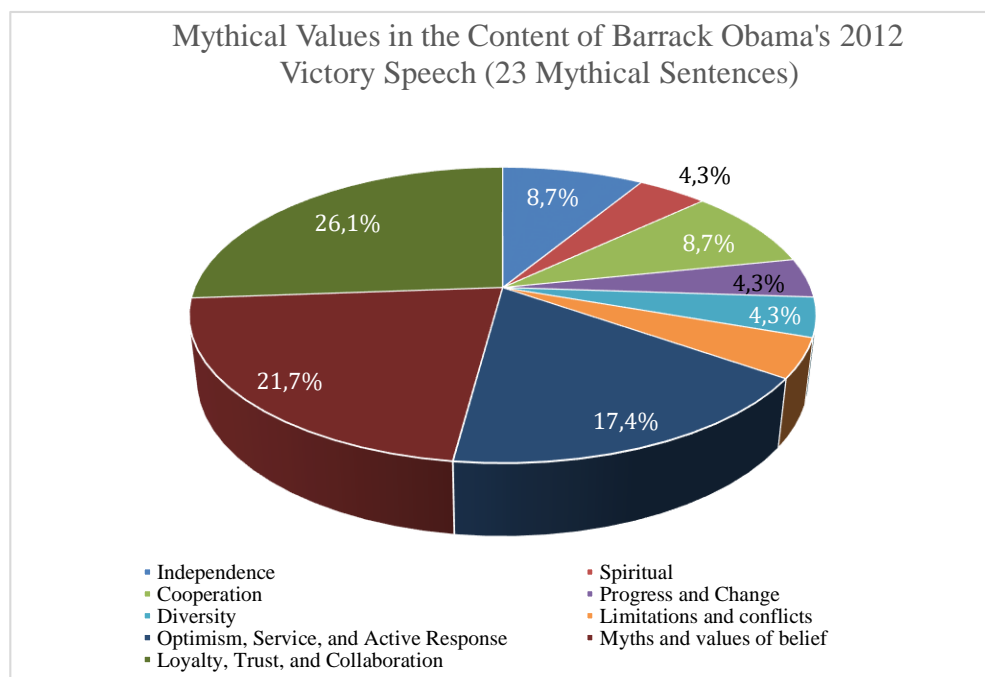


Figure 2: Percentage of mythical values in the content of Barrack Obama's 2012 speech.

Discussion

The findings of the current study on Obama's speech in the framework of semiotic analysis and distinctly from Alweldi (2024), who unveiled Obama's speech under the Fairclough theory in macro analysis (semantic macrostructures) and microanalysis (local semantics) with the results covering that language was strategically used in social and political contexts to align the audience with the speaker's future goals while emphasizing Obama's focus on prioritizing the audience's needs. Jehadu et al. (2022) revealed diversely that Obama's speech mainly pointed to the structure form, with the genre and framing as the major aspects. Meanwhile, Widiatmika et al. (2020) found Obama's speech employed rhetorical schemes to offer vivid examples and reinforce his message, illustrating past and future situations to depict America's challenges and prospects while also supporting his previous points and providing a detailed description of the nation's condition.

Conclusions

Based on the presentation of findings outlined in the table above, it can be concluded that this summary reflects the diversity (4,3%), strength, and aspirations that underlie a nation's identity. Independence (8,7%), freedom rights, and conflict resolution emerge as key pillars in building determination towards common goals. The diversity of ethnicity, race, culture, and religion is considered a unifying force, while loyalty to history and mission creates a solid foundation for change and progress (4,3%).

The result provides a clear picture that values such as independence (8,7%), freedom rights, spiritual awakening (4,3%), and determination to achieve common goals are crucial foundations for a nation. This provides a sense of revival and hope for the community and demonstrates that differences in skin color do not hinder cooperation and nation-building together. Furthermore, there is thought about the limitations of the power of hope and dreams (4,3%) in overcoming deadlock or conflict situations, as well as the importance of active responses to the problems faced. An optimistic (17,4%) view of the future and belief in prosperity are also emphasized, along with values such as service, dedication, and responsibility to voters. Additionally, mythological (21,7%) values also emerge, including myths of unity in crisis and collaborative leadership. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on loyalty (26,1%) to history, the sustainability of mission and vision, and the importance of upholding commitments considered as the foundation of a nation.

An optimistic view of the future, grounded in active belief and responsibility to voters, is an important element in creating positive myths. Meanwhile, the limitations of hope and dreams are acknowledged as reality, prompting caution in facing difficult situations or conflicts. Then, military strength and global domination become factors shaping a nation's identity and position in the world. There are also myths of political polarization in America, reflecting the complex challenges in the current political landscape.

Finally, the excellence and special position of a nation are not only understood as material achievements but also as representations of values and ideologies that distinguish that country. This conclusion confirms that every value expressed in the summary plays an important role in shaping a nation's identity, determination, and direction. Thus, it indicates that these values are not only local but also reflect political trends and beliefs in the power of collaboration between human efforts and spiritual influences in achieving success. It also portrays a profound understanding of political polarization and belief in a nation's excellence in various aspects, as well as the values or ideologies that distinguish that country in the eyes of the world. The investigation of the current study is still limited to the aspect of semiotic analysis and only to one sample of Obama's speech. Hence, the findings are hard to generalize and can be explored more in other theories and speeches in future studies.

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