

Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics
Volume [16] 2023, Pp. 75-86

**TRANSITIVITY SELECTIONS IN PRESIDENTIAL
DISCOURSE: A STUDY OF OBAMA AND TRUMP**

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the application of Halliday's theory of transitivity in the political discourse of the two US presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The paper aims to identify and explain how the two presidents made use of processes of transitivity in their announcements on the killing of Bin Laden and Baghdadi, respectively, and what that implies. The objectives are twofold: First is to find out the type of transitivity processes employed by Obama and Trump. Second is to reveal the communicative implications in the use of the processes. The study employs Halliday's theory of transitivity and the data included the full oral announcements of the two presidents. From the analysis, it was found that the two presidents used the transitivity processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. The findings show that material and relational processes dominate the other processes, which indicates that both announcements are concerned with actions and characterization of violence. Mental processes indicated that Trump used cognition more than Obama did. It was also found that the presidents used less behavioral and least existential processes.

Keywords: Transitivity Selections, Political Discourse, Halliday'S Functional Grammar

1. Introduction

The 'war on terror' started after the terrifying act of 9/11. During the Bush Administration, America, launched a military operation on Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime. It also launched a military operation against Al Qaeda hiding in Pakistan (Wright, 2003). The 'war on terror' escalated during the Obama administration. In Afghanistan, America deployed tens of thousands of troops against the Taliban insurgency. In Pakistan, the Pakistani armed forces, with the help of America, conducted military operations against the Taliban insurgents who were hiding along the border with Afghanistan. The efforts

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resulted in eliminating Osama Bin Laden, the head and founder of Al Qaeda.

During the Trump administration, fighting continued in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the radicals managed to capture more areas in Arab region especially after Arab Spring which resulted in the collapse of some states there. ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), a radical organization operating in Iraq and Syria, announced Caliphate. Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi announced the Caliphate (Islamic State) and declared himself as the self-proclaimed Caliph (Georges, 2020).

The current study selected two important presidential speeches delivered immediately after the killing of the two most wanted enemies of the United States. The presidential talks are very important as they signify the triumph of the United States on their enemies. No previous study has attempted to compare and analyse the two addresses from a linguistic point of view. The study attempts to describe how the two presidents used transitivity processes to present and convey the messages in their announcements about the killing of Bin Laden and Al- Baghdadi. This will enable the language user to better understand the intentions of the speakers in such addresses. The paper begins by quantitatively analyzing the common transitivity processes employed by both presidents and attempts to throw light on the intentions about Transitivity processes selections.

1.1 Theory: Transitivity System

According to Halliday (1985), there are three major functions of language, namely, the ideational, the textual, and the interpersonal. The ideational function is manifested in the analysis of transitivity. Simpson (1993) is of the view that “transitivity refers generally to how meaning is represented in the clause. It shows how speakers encode their mental picture of reality in language and how they account for their experience of the world around them [...], because it is concerned with the transmission of ideas, is part of the ideational function of language” (p. 88). There are three components of transitivity process: (a) the process itself, (b) participants in the process, and (c) circumstances associated with the process (Halliday, 1994).

Transitivity processes are made up of six major types. The first type is the material processes which are ‘simply processes of doing’ (Simpson, 1993, p. 89). Participants may be ‘agents’, ‘goals’ or ‘beneficiaries’ (Halliday, 1994).

The second type is the mental processes which are processes of ‘sensing’ (Simpson, 1993, p. 91). Mental processes are subcategorized into three types: process of perception (see, hear), processes of reaction (like, fear) and processes of cognition (think, believe). The major participant is the ‘Senser’. The phenomenon is “that which is perceived, reacted to or thought about” (Simpson, 1993, p. 91). The third type is the verbal processes which are ‘processes of saying’ (Simpson, 1993, p. 90). The major participants in this process are

'sayers' or 'targets/ receivers'. The 'verbiage' is the message both sayers and targets exchange. The fourth type is the relational processes, which are "processes of being" (Halliday, 1994, p. 119). Relational processes can be either attributive or identifying. In case they are attributive, the participants are either 'carriers' or 'attributes'. In case they are identifying, the participants are 'token' and 'value.' They may be 'intensive' (x is A); possessive (X has A) or 'circumstantial' (X is at/on A). The fifth type is the behavioral process. It draws aspects from verbal and mental processes. Therefore, sensing and saying are considered as behaviors for verbs like gossip, chat, watch, ponder, listen, grin, smile, etc. The sixth type is called the existential process which posits existence and are headed by the empty particle 'there' as in 'There is no room for negotiation.

2. Methodology

2.1 Data Sources

The data analyzed in this study were essentially oral announcements made by Obama and Trump on the occasion of killing of bin Laden and Baghdadi, respectively. The speeches are then typed in a transcript form in the respected websites. Obama textual Announcement on Bin Laden's Death was obtained from: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead>. Trump's announcement, on the other hand, was obtained from <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/27/773842999/read-trump-statement-on-baghdadis-death>

The rationale behind choosing these specific announcements is that both statements signify a milestone in fighting and defeating America's most wanted enemies.

2.2 Analysis Procedure

Having collected the data from the given websites, a thorough and comprehensive analysis of each and every clause was undertaken according to Hallidayian Systemic Functional Grammar. Each announcement was analyzed individually. To prepare the data for analysis, the texts have been divided into numbered clauses. The process types, the participants and the circumstances were identified. These analyses were reread and peer checked to ensure its completeness. The ratios of choice of types of process was counted by using Excel.

3.1 Findings

This section presents the results of the analysis. The thorough analysis of the two announcements shows that all the processes are invariably recorded occurrence in the data analysed.

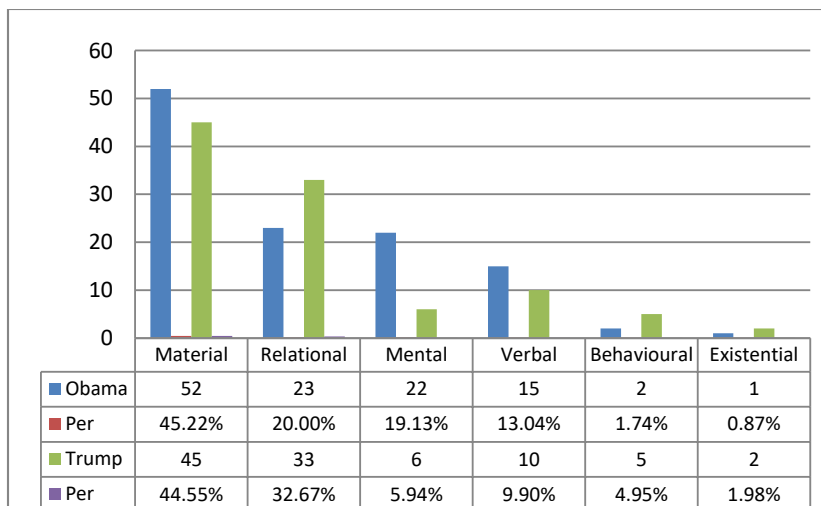


Diagram. 1 Transitivity Verbs

Results in diagram one show that comparatively speaking, the two presidents have adopted the transitivity verbs of "Material" more frequently in the two oral announcements. The frequency of material processes is 52 (45.22%) and 45 (44.55%) in Trump and Obama, respectively. The second process, in terms of the highest occurrence, is the relational with a frequency of 23 (20.00%) by Obama and 33 (32.67%) by Trump. The verbal processes are shown to be equal to 15(13.04%) and 10 (9.90%) by Obama and Trump, respectively. In addition, there is a significant variation in the number of mental processes used by Obama 22(19.13%) and Trump 6 (5.94%). The behavioral and the existential processes show insignificant frequency. That is, both the number of presidents adopted less behavioural processes in their announcement, shown as only 2 (1.74%) and 5 (4.95%) verbs by Obama and Trump, respectively. The least verbs were "existential" and are shown as only 1 (0.87%) and 2 (1.98%) by Obama and Trump, respectively. Having presented the findings of the analysis, the next section discusses the findings.

3.2 Discussion

The study finds that both presidents employed transitivity processes in their announcement. Specifically, the data showed that "material" and "existential" verbs were commonly adopted and there is a predominance of the material process over others

Firstly, material processes are processes of doing, or processes indicating events. These processes are associated with actions and physical events. In Obama speech, material processes are used to indicate force (1), professionalism (2), military competency (3) and accomplishment (4). Meanwhile, material processes in Trump’s speech indicated force as shown in (5) and professionalism as in (6).

1. In Afghanistan, we removed the Taliban government, which had given bin Laden and al Qaeda safe haven and support.
2. and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden.
3. A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability.
4. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden.
5. We obliterated his caliphate, 100 percent, in March of this year.
6. U.S. Special Operations Forces executed a dangerous and daring nighttime raid in northwestern Syria and accomplished their mission in grand style.

Secondly, relational processes are found to be the second highest used processes in the speeches. There are three types of relational processes: attributive, identifying and possessive, of which attributive relational processes are the highest. Obama used attributive relational processes to favorably depict America and to reveal its commitment to the cause and the values they embrace as in (7-10). He does not talk much about the enemy. However, he asserted that Bin Laden was not a Muslim and he is responsible for killing Muslims, too, as in (11, 12).

7. We were united as one American family.
8. We must -- and we will -- remain vigilant at home and abroad.
9. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies.
10. We will be true to the values.
11. Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader.
12. He was a mass murderer of Muslims.

On the other hand, Trump assigns America and Americans the following attributes: 'incredible' in (13), 'very long' in (14), and 'the very best' in (15). He uses relational processes to indicate America's supremacy.

13. The U.S. personnel were incredible.
14. Our reach is very long.
15. You are the very best.

Besides, Trump used relational processes to expose and to negatively characterize the enemy as underlined in (16-20).

16. In some cases, they were very frightened puppies.
17. In other cases, they were hardcore killers.
18. Their murder of innocent Americans — James Foley, Steven Sotloff, Peter Kassig, and Kayla Mueller — were especially heinous.

19. He was a sick and depraved man.

20. Baghdadi was vicious and violent.

Thirdly, mental processes were used more frequently by Obama than Trump. There are four types of cognitive processes: perceptive, cognitive, desiderative and emotive. Trump used only one mental (desiderative) clause as in (21). Using less mental processes may be due to the president's inability or unwillingness to reveal his mentality.

21. Things that we very much want.

Obama, however, used a lot of cognitive verb processes. For example, the verb process 'know/knew' occurs more than five times as represented in (22) and a wide variety of cognitive verbs have been used such as 'learned' in (23), 'determined' in (24), 'understand' in (25), 'tolerate' in (26), 'forgotten' in (27), 'think' in (28), 'reminded' in (29), and 'remember' in (30). The wide use of mental processes indicates the president's attitudes regarding the issues he touched upon in his announcement.

22. If we knew where bin Laden was.

23. we quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al Qaeda –

24. And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action.

25. So Americans understand the costs of war.

26. Yet as a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened.

27. That we have never forgotten your loss.

28. And tonight, let us think back to the sense of unity.

29. But tonight, we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to.

30. Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power.

Finally, Obama used verbal processes to a lesser extent to show power as in (31) and to officially make declaration on the incident to the listeners as in (32).

31. And so shortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda.

32. Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world.

However, Trump used the verbal process only one time to make official declaration as in (33). The other remaining verbal processes are used to communicate his thanks to those who

accomplished the mission and provided logistics and intelligence help as represented in (34).

33. last month, we announced that we recently killed Hamza bin Laden, the very violent son of Osama bin Laden.
34. I want to thank the nations of Russia, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq.

To sum up, the findings reveal that both the presidents employed a language that emphasized tangible actions and relationships, albeit with some variations in the focus.

4. Conclusion

This paper applied Halliday's theory of transitivity to the oral announcements following the elimination of Bin Laden and Al-Baghdadi. It was found that the presidents used all transitivity process. The analysis revealed some significant patterns.

The most frequently employed transitivity process by both President Obama and President Trump was "Material," accounting for 45.22% and 44.55% of the data, respectively. This emphasis on material processes indicates a strong focus on actions and activities related to the elimination operation. The second most commonly used transitivity process was "Relational" with Obama using it in 20.00% of his speech and Trump in 32.67%. This suggests that both presidents sought to link the incident to broader geopolitical or ideological contexts. "Verbal" processes were utilized to a lesser extent, with Obama employing them in 13.04% of his speech and Trump in 9.90%. These processes were employed to signify power and authority in the efforts of eliminating the enemy. A notable disparity between the two presidents is observed in the use of "Mental" processes, with Obama employing them in 19.13% of his speech, while as Trump used them in only 5.94%. This discrepancy suggests that Obama focused more on cognitive and psychological aspects in his announcement. This may indicate a deliberate strategy to engage the audience on an intellectual level, possibly to justify and explain the actions taken. Both behavioral and existential processes were used minimally, with only 1.74% and 4.95% of verbs used for behavioral processes and 0.87% and 1.98% for existential processes by Obama and Trump, respectively. This indicates that both the presidents chose to employ these processes sparingly, suggesting that their primary goal was not to emphasize behavior in their discourse.

In summary, this study underscores the dominance of "Material" and "Relational" processes in the presidential announcements, indicating a strong emphasis on actions, relationships, and connections in the discourse surrounding the elimination of the enemy. Understanding these linguistic choices sheds light on the communicative intentions and strategies of the presidents in conveying the significance of these events in the context of eliminating America's enemies.

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Appendix

Obama Announcement on Bin Laden Death

Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.

It was nearly 10 years ago that a bright September day was darkened by the worst attack on the American people in our history. The images of 9/11 are seared into our national memory -- hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky; the Twin Towers collapsing to the ground; black smoke billowing up from the Pentagon; the wreckage of Flight 93 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreak and destruction. And yet we know that the worst images are those that were unseen to the world. The empty seat at the dinner table. Children who were forced to grow up without their mother or their father. Parents who would never know the feeling of their child's embrace. Nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts.

On September 11, 2001, in our time of grief, the American people came together. We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood. We reaffirmed our ties to each other, and our love of community and country. On that day, no matter where

we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were, we were united as one American family. We were also united in our resolve to protect our nation and to bring those who committed this vicious attack to justice. We quickly learned that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by al Qaeda -- an organization headed by Osama bin Laden, which had openly declared war on the United States and was committed to killing innocents in our country and around the globe. And so we went to war against al Qaeda to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies.

Over the last 10 years, thanks to the tireless and heroic work of our military and our counterterrorism professionals, we've made great strides in that effort. We've disrupted terrorist attacks and strengthened our homeland defense. In Afghanistan, we removed the Taliban government, which had given bin Laden and al Qaeda safe haven and support. And around the globe, we worked with our friends and allies to capture or kill scores of al Qaeda terrorists, including several who were a part of the 9/11 plot. Yet Osama bin Laden avoided capture and escaped across the Afghan border into Pakistan. Meanwhile, al Qaeda continued to operate from along that border and operate through its affiliates across the world. And so shortly after taking office, I directed Leon Panetta, the director of the CIA, to make the killing or capture of bin Laden the top priority of our war against al Qaeda, even as we continued our broader efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat his network.

Then, last August, after years of painstaking work by our intelligence community, I was briefed on a possible lead to bin Laden. It was far from certain, and it took many months to run this thread to ground. I met repeatedly with my national security team as we developed more information about the possibility that we had located bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan. And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice. Today, at my direction, the United States launched a targeted operation against that compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. A small team of Americans carried out the operation with extraordinary courage and capability. No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties. After a firefight, they killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.

For over two decades, bin Laden has been al Qaeda's leader and symbol, and has continued to plot attacks against our country and our friends and allies. The death of bin Laden marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat al Qaeda. Yet his death does not mark the end of our effort. There's no doubt that al Qaeda will continue to pursue attacks against us. We must -- and we will -- remain vigilant at home and abroad.

As we do, we must also reaffirm that the United States is not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam. I've made clear, just as President Bush did shortly after 9/11, that our war is not against Islam.

Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims. Indeed, al Qaeda has slaughtered scores of Muslims in many countries, including our own. So his demise should be welcomed by all who believe in peace and human dignity.

Over the years, I've repeatedly made clear that we would take action within Pakistan if we knew where bin Laden was. That is what we've done. But it's important to note that our counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding. Indeed, bin Laden had declared war against Pakistan as well, and ordered attacks against the Pakistani people. Tonight, I called President Zardari, and my team has also spoken with their Pakistani counterparts. They agree that this is a good and historic day for both of our nations. And going forward, it is essential that Pakistan continue to join us in the fight against al Qaeda and its affiliates.

The American people did not choose this fight. It came to our shores, and started with the senseless slaughter of our citizens. After nearly 10 years of service, struggle, and sacrifice, we know well the costs of war. These efforts weigh on me every time I, as Commander-in-Chief, have to sign a letter to a family that has lost a loved one, or look into the eyes of a service member who's been gravely wounded. So Americans understand the costs of war. Yet as a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened, nor stand idly by when our people have been killed. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies. We will be true to the values that make us who we are. And on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al Qaeda's terror: Justice has been done.

Tonight, we give thanks to the countless intelligence and counterterrorism professionals who've worked tirelessly to achieve this outcome. The American people do not see their work, nor know their names. But tonight, they feel the satisfaction of their work and the result of their pursuit of justice. We give thanks for the men who carried out this operation, for they exemplify the professionalism, patriotism, and unparalleled courage of those who serve our country. And they are part of a generation that has borne the heaviest share of the burden since that September day. Finally, let me say to the families who lost loved ones on 9/11 that we have never forgotten your loss, nor wavered in our commitment to see that we do whatever it takes to prevent another attack on our shores.

And tonight, let us think back to the sense of unity that prevailed on 9/11. I know that it has, at times, frayed. Yet today's achievement is a testament to the greatness of our country and the determination of the American people. The cause of securing our country is not complete. But tonight, we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for

equality for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place.

Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Thank you. May God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.

Trump Announcement on Baghdadi's Death

Last night, the United States brought the world's number one terrorist leader to justice. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead. He was the founder and leader of ISIS, the most ruthless and violent terror organization anywhere in the world. The United States has been searching for Baghdadi for many years. Capturing or killing Baghdadi has been the top national security priority of my administration. U.S. Special Operations Forces executed a dangerous and daring nighttime raid in northwestern Syria and accomplished their mission in grand style. The U.S. personnel were incredible. I got to watch much of it.

No personnel were lost in the operation, while a large number of Baghdadi's fighters and companions were killed with him. He died after running into a dead-end tunnel, whimpering and crying and screaming all the way. The compound had been cleared by this time, with people either surrendering or being shot and killed. Eleven young children were moved out of the house and are uninjured. The only ones remaining were Baghdadi in the tunnel, and he had dragged three of his young children with him. They were led to certain death.

He reached the end of the tunnel, as our dogs chased him down. He ignited his vest, killing himself and the three children. His body was mutilated by the blast. The tunnel had caved in on it, in addition. But test results gave certain immediate and totally positive identification. It was him. The thug who tried so hard to intimidate others spent his last moments in utter fear, in total panic and dread, terrified of the American forces bearing down on him.

We were in the compound for approximately two hours, and after the mission was accomplished, we took highly sensitive material and information from the raid, much having to do with ISIS origins, future plans, things that we very much want. Baghdadi's demise demonstrates America's relentless pursuit of terrorist leaders and our commitment to the enduring and total defeat of ISIS and other terrorist organizations. Our reach is very long. As you know, last month, we announced that we recently killed Hamza bin Laden, the very violent son of Osama bin Laden, who was saying very bad things about people, about our country, about the world. He was the heir apparent to al Qaeda.

Terrorists who oppress and murder innocent people should never sleep soundly, knowing that we will completely destroy them. These savage monsters will not escape their fate, and they will not escape the final judgment of God. Baghdadi has been on the run for many years,

long before I took office. But at my direction, as Commander-in-Chief of the United States, we obliterated his caliphate, 100 percent, in March of this year. Today's events are another reminder that we will continue to pursue the remaining ISIS terrorists to their brutal end. That also goes for other terrorist organizations. They are, likewise, in our sights.

Baghdadi and the losers who worked for him — and losers they are — they had no idea what they were getting into. In some cases, they were very frightened puppies. In other cases, they were hardcore killers. But they killed many, many people. Their murder of innocent Americans — James Foley, Steven Sotloff, Peter Kassig, and Kayla Mueller — were especially heinous. The shocking publicized murder of a Jordanian pilot, a wonderful young man — spoke to the King of Jordan; they all knew him, they all loved him — he was burned alive in a cage for all to see. And the execution of Christians in Libya and Egypt, as well as the genocidal mass murder of Yazidis, rank ISIS among the most depraved organizations in the history of our world. The forced religious conversions, the orange suits prior to so many beheadings, all of which were openly displayed for the world to see, this was all that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi — this is what he wanted. This is what he was proud of. He was a sick and depraved man, and now he's gone. Baghdadi was vicious and violent, and he died in a vicious and violent way, as a coward, running and crying. This raid was impeccable, and could only have taken place with the acknowledgement and help of certain other nations and people.

I want to thank the nations of Russia, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. And I also want to thank the Syrian Kurds for certain support they were able to give us. This was a very, very dangerous mission. Thank you, as well, to the great intelligence professionals who helped make this very successful journey possible. I want to thank the soldiers, and sailors, airmen, and Marines involved in last tonight's operation. You are the very best there is anywhere in the world. No matter where you go, there is nobody even close. I want to thank General Mark Milley and our Joint Chiefs of Staff, and I also want to thank our professionals who work in other agencies of the United States government and were critical to the mission's unbelievable success.

Last night was a great night for the United States and for the world. A brutal killer, one who has caused so much hardship and death, has violently been eliminated. He will never again harm another innocent man, woman, or child. He died like a dog. He died like a coward. The world is now a much safer place. God bless America. Thank you.