

An Analysis of Biden's Withdrawal Letter Using Halliday's Transitivity

Principle

By

Auwalu Lawan

auwallawalyankwashi@gmail.com +2348037819660

MA Student at Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

In non-literary texts, transitivity analyses are used to indicate how language is used to influence people and bring groups' ideologies. As a result, objective interpretations about texts can be reached by conducting transitivity analyses. This paper attempts to make an analysis of Biden's withdrawal letter speech using Transitivity analysis principle. The data were collected from cbs online news. The speech (which is written) is analyzed for detailed examination with quantitative analysis of the frequency and distribution of various transitivity features. The findings reveal a predominant use of material processes, emphasizing physical actions and tangible events. The analysis also shows a strategic use of simple sentences hoping to convey detailed information while ensuring clarity and declarative sentences which indicate the focus for providing clear and direct

information. *The research concludes that Biden uses various stylistics structures in his speech. It recommends that a detail research has to be conducted on the full detail of Biden's withdrawal speech.*

Key words: Transitivity, Political Speech, Joe Biden

I. INTRODUCTION

Based on the theory of meta-functions in the Systemic Functional Grammar developed by MAK Halliday, this paper makes a textual analysis of Biden's withdrawal letter. It makes use of ideational analysis. It aims to explore the stylistics features of the speech.

On January, 20th, 2021, the President-elect of the United States, Joseph Robinette Biden took the oath of office at the Capitol Hill in Washington D.C, which marked his transition from a democratic leader to the 46th U.S. President. After a brief ceremony, his inaugural address was delivered. As the oldest President in American history to be in office, Biden was faced with a variety of thorny issues left by the former President Donald Trump, such as economic recession, wide spread of COVID-19, social chaos and so on. On 21st July, 2024, Biden addressed the nation on his withdrawal from re-election.

Speech is a type of language communicative activity in which the speaker expresses his or her views, attitudes as well as emotions on a particular incident. In order to convince the audience wholly, the speaker always combines his or her verbal language with a variety of paralinguistic behaviours, such as gestures, facial expressions, and body movements. Furthermore, to look it in a different way, speech can be grouped into

different types. For instance, when focusing on the content, speeches can be categorized into political speech, life speech, academic speech, court speech, and even religious speech. And among those kinds of speeches, the political speech has always remained dominant figure in the field of discourse analysis.

Political discourse is an essential component of the 21st century communication landscape that has been devoted much attention to and has been approached from numerous angles. It has even become an academic subject, studied at many University departments, as a sub-field of political sciences. Fairclough (1995) points out that discourse can be regarded as a political practice in his book "Language and Power". In addition, he stressed that political speech was not only a struggle for power, but also a conflict between different ideologies. Wodak (1989) concerns that language scholars should attach great importance to historical background when analyzing political speeches. Lakoff (1990) starts his research from a completely different angle. He uses conceptual metaphor as a main tool to prove that political discourse was a creative thinking pattern rather than a common linguistic phenomenon. In his book "The Language of Politics" Beard (2000) elaborates British political discourses by means of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and put forward some distinctive characteristics about British political speeches as well. When it comes to the 21st century, some

modern scholars have also put forward their own opinions on political discourse analysis. Scholars like Fairclough (1989), Van Dijk (1997), and Wodak (2009). The paper attempts to make stylistic analysis of Biden's withdrawal letter using Halliday's Transitivity principle.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have analyzed inaugural, accepted and rejected speeches through discourse and transitivity analysis. For example, Cabrejas-Penuelas (2023), a Spanish scholar, used an analytical framework for the identification of conceptual metaphors to make a comparative analysis of the economy sections of the 2015 State of the Union Address in the U.S. and the 2015 State of the Nation Debate in Spain. At the end of his paper, he indicated that politicians used metaphors to justify the current policy response to the economic crisis. The later study is on withdrawal letter of Biden using Transitivity analysis principle based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, to analyze how actions and participants are represented in the speech, revealing underlying power structures and agency. The gap between this study and that of Cabrejas-Penuelas lies in their methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, and analytical focuses. The former used analytical method and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory to analyze the data while this study

attempts to use descriptive qualitative method with Transitivity analysis principle.

Amir (2022) examines President Joe Biden's inaugural address using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover persuasive strategies and ideological themes, focusing on rhetorical devices and references to America's heroic past to promote unity and traditional values. In contrast, the present study is on withdrawal letter of Biden using Transitivity analysis principle based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze how actions and participants are represented in the speech, revealing underlying power structures and agency. The gap between this study and that of Amir lies in their methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, and analytical focuses, with Amir's study emphasizing ideological content and rhetorical strategies, while the present study analyzes stylistics structures to understand social realities constructed in Biden's withdrawal speech.

Renaldo (2021) investigates President Joe Biden's ideology in his inaugural speech using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with a focus on presupposition, as proposed by Dijk, at the microstructure level. The study identifies three types of presupposition—lexical, existential, and factive—with lexical presupposition being the most frequent. These presuppositions reveal Biden's ideological stance on immigrants, healthcare, racism,

democracy, and climate change. In contrast, the present study is on withdrawal letter of Biden using Transitivity analysis principle based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, to analyze how actions and participants are represented in the speech, revealing underlying power structures and agency. The gap between this study and that of Renaldo depends in their theoretical frameworks, and analytical focuses, with Renaldo's study emphasizes on presupposition whereas the present study analyze stylistics structures to understand social realities formed in Biden's withdrawal speech.

III METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researcher used mix method (quantitative and descriptive qualitative methods to analyze data. The researcher applied qualitative method because the researcher attempted to analyze the descriptive data based on the transitivity analysis of withdrawal letter. Sugiyono (2013) explains that a qualitative research is a research method based on the philosophy of post positivism, used to examine the condition of natural objects, as opposed to experiments where the researcher is the instrument, the data collection technique is done by triangulation (combined), the data analysis is inductive/qualitative, and the quality research results are more meaningful than generalizations. Qualitative data are data expressed in the form of words, sentences and pictures. In this

study, researcher examined the phenomenon in the use of online news as a communication technology. Since the material is expressed as strings of words, it is classified as qualitative rather than quantitative research. It depends on how the data is analyzed by the researcher to find certain ideological stances of Joe. The objective of this study is to analyze ideological stance by using transitivity analysis in the Biden's withdrawal letter.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ideational meta-function engenders resources for construing our experience of the world around us and inside us; the ideational system at clause rank is called "transitivity. Transitivity is concerned with construing one particular domain of our experience — our experience the flux of 'goings-on', as configurations of a process (of some general type: material, mental, relational), the participants involved in it (actor, goal; senser, phenomenon; carrier, attribute; and so on), and the circumstances attendant on it (cause, location, manner (including means and instrument), accompaniment, and so on). It is a linguistic term that applies to the interaction between participants, processes, and circumstances. They are normally used in analyzing a text in relation to each function in the situation of expression. Halliday (1985) classifies these three processes into five

namely: material, mental, verbal, behavioral, relational, existential. However, Okpanachi (2024) adds one "Ergative"

V THE ANALYSIS

A full sentence is analyzed based on three criteria namely: the participant (which is equivalent to the subject) is the dominant element of a given sentence; the process which is the cornerstone of expression and normally a verb; and circumstance which serves as the context in which sentence is made and it is typically an object. Below are the analyses:

Table 1: Frequency of the Use of Structural Sentence Types

Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Simple	13	1.9
Compound	6	28.5
Compound Complex	2	9.5
Total	21	99.9

The table presents a quantitative analysis of the sentence structures used by President Biden in his withdrawal letter, where its highlights syntactical strategies. Simple sentences appeared 13 times and dominated the speech, suggesting a preference for detailed and nuanced expressions to convey

intricate ideas. Compound sentences were used 6 times which show an effort to link related ideas and emphasize connections, while the least frequent, compound-complex sentences, appeared 2 times reflect occasional use of sophisticated structures for complex ideas. Overall, this syntactic analysis reveals President Biden's strategic use of varied sentence structures to provide depth and clarity, enhancing the coherence and impact of his withdrawal speech.

Table 2: Frequency of the Use of Functional Sentence Types

Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Declarative	20	95%
Exclamatory	1	5%

The functional analysis of President Biden's withdrawal speech highlights his strategic use of sentence types to achieve specific goals. The predominant use of declarative sentences which appeared 20 times indicates his focus on providing clear and direct information about his policies and plans, establishing a solid understanding. The minimal use of exclamatory sentence which appears once and reflects a composed delivery with occasional emotional emphasis on significant points.

Table 3: Summary of Process Types Used in the Speech

Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Material	18	69.2
Mental	4	15.3
Verbal	3	11.5
Relational	1	3.8
Total	26	99.8

The tables indicates that the majority of observed data fall into the material processes category, comprising 69.2% of the total, highlighting a predominant focus on physical activities and tangible events. Mental processes are the second most frequent at 15.3%, suggesting some focus on cognitive activities. Verbal process accounts for 11.5%, indicating a notable presence of communication related activities while relational process has minimal usage with 3.8% emphasizing relationships. Overall, the data suggest a primary concern with physical actions, cognitive activities with less attention given to communication and relationship.

Material Process: This is a process of activeness or doing which is commonly used in reporting events like in sport. It suggests that something is done by someone. We have two participants in material process namely: actor and goal, plus process (verbal group) itself and circumstances as alternative.

Table 4: Frequency of the Use of Verbs in Material Process

<u>Verbal Group</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Verbal Group</u>
<u>Frequency</u>		
have made 1	2	overcome
has 1	2	have protected
have provided 1	1	preserved
Passed 1	2	have revitalized
appointed 1	1	strengthened
do 2	1	has been
could have been done 1	1	will speak
Total	18	

Table 5: Frequency of the Use of Participants in Material Process

<u>Process Types</u>	<u>Actor</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>Beneficiary</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Material (18)	we	8	Nation	2

		Americans	1
		Great Depression	1
		democracy	1
		alliances	1
		millions veterans	1
		together	1
America	2	world	1
		today	1
it	2	President	1
		Reelection	1
I	1	Nation	1
Total			13

From qualitative method, we can understand the above tables with the following explanations: "My fellow Americans" is corresponded to target which trigs to the circumstance, "Over the past three years and a half years". "we" is the actor who initiates the action and "have made" is the material process and "a great progress as a nation" is the goal which recieves the action of the actor and expresses the main aim of the speech.

In the next sentences, we can also have the breakdown of the above tables. "We" is the participant, which uses to emphasise the importance of the speaker. "have made" is the material process and "historic investments in rebuilding our Nation" is the goal which is part of the progress.

He also continues with restating the progress he achieved "we" as the actor, "have provided "Material Process", and "critically needed care to a million veterans exposed to toxic substances" as the Goal which means still there is need of his stay in the power.

Mental Process: It qualifies process of senses, feelings, perceptions and cognitions. Words like smell, taste, love, hate, hears, look, seem, etc are part of mental process. It has sensor, mental process, phenomenon and circumstance as an alternative.

Table 6: Frequency of the Use of Verbs in Mental Process

<u>Verbal Group</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>Verbal Group</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>Verbal Group</u>	<u>Freq.</u>
<u>Freq.</u>					
know	1	believe	2	have to remember	1

Table 7: Frequency of the Use of Participants in Mental Process

<u>Process Types</u>	<u>Senser</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Mental	I	3
Total	3	

In sentence 9, Joe uses mental process to state the reality and hardworking of Americans as the followers. "I" is the sensor, "know" is the mental process, "none of this could have been done without you, the American people" is the phenomenon". However, in sentence 15, Joe uses mental process. "I" is the sensor, "believe" is the mental process, "it is in the best interest of my party and country for me to stand down and to focus solely on fulfilling my duties as President for the remainder of my term" is the Phenomenon. Here he shows that his party concern and the massive support of his country people is ahead of everything which makes him to step down from rerunning in the second term.

Verbal Process: This is a process of saying or speaking. It clarifies that someone has done something. It has sayer, verbal process, target/receiver and verbiage. Words like tell, talk, suggest, highlight, pinpoint, reiterate, utter are used.

Table 8: Frequency of the Use of Verbs in Verbal Process

<u>Verbal Group</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
want to thank	1

let

2

Table 9: Frequency of the Use of Participants in Verbal Process

<u>Process</u>	<u>Types</u>	<u>Sayer</u>	<u>Freq.</u>	<u>Beneficiary</u>
<u>Freq.</u>				
Verbal	I	1	1	Vice President Kamala Harris
1	Let	2	1	those who worked so hard
				Americans people
		Total	3	Total

3

In sentence 17 he uses verbal process, " let" is the verbal process, "me" is the sayer " express my deepest gratitude to all those who have worked so hard to see me reelected" is the Target. He praises those who show kin interest for his reelection.

In sentence 18, "I" is the actor, "want to thank " is the Verbal Process, "VP Kamala Harris" target and " for being an extraordinary partner in all this work" is the verbiage. Here, he explains the role of VP to the Americans and shows his support to her as only option.

Relational Process: This is a process of being. It explains the presence of something. It has three relations with different meaning. There is intensive, circumstantial and possessive. Below are their explanations:

1. Intensive ‘x is a’ it affirms a relationship of sameness between two entities
2. Circumstantial ‘x is at a’ explains the entity in terms of location, time, manner.
3. Possessive ‘x has a’ shows that one entity owns another

Each of these comes in two modes:

- i. Attributive A is an attribute of X. In this mode, there are two participants, namely: carrier and attribute.
- ii. Identifying: A is the identity of X. In this mode, there are two participants, namely: identified and identifier.

Table 10: Frequency of the Use of Verbs in Relational Process

Verbal Group	Frequency
are	1

Table 11: Frequency of the Use of Participants in Relational Process

Process Types	Carrier	Freq.	Identifier	Freq.
Relational (1)	we	1	Uni. States of America	1

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

President Biden's withdrawal letter of 21st July, 2024 was analyzed for its syntactic structure, functional elements and transitivity analysis, revealing insightful details about his actual message. The speech comprised 21 sentences, simple sentences, appeared 13 times and dominated the speech, suggesting a preference for detailed and nuanced expression to convey intricate ideas. Compound sentences used 6 times show an effort to link related ideas and emphasize connections, while the least frequent, compound-complex sentences, appeared 2 times reflect occasional use of sophisticated structures for complex ideas

Functionally, the predominant use of declarative sentences which appeared 20 times with 95% indicates the focus for providing clear and direct information about his policies and plans, establishing a solid understanding. The minimal use of exclamatory sentence which appeared once time and has 5% reflects a composed delivery with occasional emotional emphasis on significant points.

Process is one of the elements of transitivity system. The findings show that there 26 processes in the data. Four processes were identified. The

overall process is material process which has repeated 18 times with 69.2%. It followed by mental process which used 4 times and has 15.3%; verbal process has occurred 3 times and has 11.5% while relational process has occurred 1 time with 3.8% which makes it 99.8 approximately 100 percent. Conclusively, the findings provide a clear indication of his stylistics choices of sentences.

VII CONCLUSION

The conclusions are drawn that those are four types of processes appeared in the data. The dominant process type found in Biden's withdrawal letter was material process with total of 18 occurrences (69.2%) followed successively by the occurrences of mental 4 time and has (15.3%); verbal process accounts for 11.5% with 3 occurrences while the relational process occurred once and has 3.8%. The research concludes that Biden uses various sentences and processes to send a message. It recommends that a detail research has to be conducted on the full detail of Joe Biden's withdrawal speech.

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