Persuasive Speech Acts in Barack Obama's Inaugural Speeches (2009, 2013) and The Last State of the Union Address (2016)

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Abstract

Persuading someone means performing an act by using some form of communication, i.e., language. Language is an essential factor to politicians since Politics is concerned with the power of setting decisions, influencing peoples' attitudes and even controlling their values. As such, political persuasion is an important part of any society where communicators try to convince the others to change their beliefs or behavior in considering a political issue via messages with a sense of free choice. (c.f. Perloff 2003: 34). In this respect, persuasion constitutes a "speech act", that is realized in or by speaking. Previous studies on speech acts were concerned with various types of speech act such as compliment, complaint, greeting, and request etc.; but very little and limited attention has been paid to the speech act of persuasion. The researcher aimed to shed light and determine the role of this speech act in political addressees. Hence, this study has examined and analyzed three selected political speeches of Obama as pieces of discourse with specific aims and intentions based on the adopted model of Bach and Harnish Taxonomy (1979). The data analysis has revealed that President Obama in his speeches used more of sentences that performed constative speech acts than other speech acts where the assertive illocutionary acts are used as a persuasive factor. Such results have proven the important role of persuasive speech acts in political addressees and its impact on the audience' acts.

Keywords: Persuasion, Political discourse, Presidential Addresses, Persuasive Speech Acts

1. Introduction

Persuasion is an ancient Greek term where its main aim is to achieve power in court. Around 350 BC, the art of persuasion was first referred to as a signifier to "rhetoric" in Plato's "Gorgias", but, in fact, it was systematically mentioned and described in Aristotle's "On Rhetoric" (1991:B555b26) where rhetoric is defined as "the ability to see, in any given case, the available means of persuasion". (c.f. Larson1998:2 – 4). Aristotle made a link between communication and persuasion in terms of three main ways of persuasion:

(a) Appeal by reason;

(b) Appeal by ethics; and

(c) Emotional (aesthetical) appeal.

The distinction of these three modes is further mirrored in the threefold division of styles:

(1) Ethos: persuasion through personality and stance ;

(2) Pathos: persuasion through the arousal of emotion;

(3) Logos: persuasion through reasoning.

The word 'persuasion' has been described in different ways, such as influencing, convincing, manipulating or tempting. This was clearly realized in the early definitions of persuasion which focused on how a persuasive message can be powerfully effective. Other definitions of persuasion focused on how the receiver's actions and attitudes may influence the success of a persuasive message. For instance, Fotheringham (1966: 7) defined persuasion "that body of effects in receivers, relevant and instrumental to source desired goals, brought about by a process in which messages have been a major determinant of those effects". In this respect, Fotheringham focused on receivers rather than producers and emphasized the psychological impact of persuasive communication. On the other hand, Scheidel (1967: 1) defined persuasion as "the activity in which the speaker and the listener are conjoined and in which the speaker consciously attempts to influence the behavior of the listener by transmitting audible and visible symbolic". On the basis of these notions, persuasion depends on two aspects: communication and intention to persuade the audience. Robert Cialdini (2007), defined six major principles of persuasion and techniques: reciprocation, liking, commitment/consistency, scarcity, authority, and consensus.

2. Strategies of Persuasion

There are several strategies and ways which lead one party to influence another in finding resolution of a dispute. In other words, a persuasive strategy that is effective and acceptable in one forum may fail in another. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyleca (1969:194) discussed the term 'quasilogical' in terms of both logical and mathematical relations, i.e., they used it for arguments that mark on the structure and wording of argumentation in formal logic or mathematics, but which are not in fact logical in the strict sense.(c.f. Tindale,C.W., 1999: 39). In contrast to quasiological persuasion, there is another category of persuasive strategies named 'presentational 'persuasion which is an important feature in regard to persuasive style.

Jonestone (1989: 147-148) clearly explains its meaning and goal as follows:

Presentational persuasion could be said to be based on the assumption that being persuaded is being moved, being swept along by a rhythmic flow of words and sounds, in the way people are swept along by poetry. The goal of presentational persuasion is to make one's claim maximally present in the audience's consciousness, by repeating it, paraphrasing it, and calling aesthetic attention to it.

The final strategy of persuasion is that of 'analogy'. Its language is used to persuade via stories and other ways of creating analogies where the analogical persuaders convince their audiences leap between prior situations and the current one.

3. Models of Persuasive Process

Numerous attempts and theories emphasized on how communication content influences individual performance. Such conceptualization was enhanced to show how communicated messages can deliberately manipulate and affect human behavior. There are various ways in conceptualizing persuasion process, however, there are two strategies used as indicators to both attitudes and their formation.

The first conceptualization is called the "psychodynamic model of persuasion process". This model is based on the notion that an effective persuasive message must have properties that change the psychological functioning of the individual in a way that his answer would be overt with the recommended behavior of the communicator. Thus, the effective persuasion is the change of the individual's internal psychological structure which affects the psychodynamic relationship between the internal processes that reveals overt behaviors and eventually leads to intentional acts made by the communicators.

The second concept is the "social and cultural variables" which determine the way people embrace new ideas and things. In fact, what determine the direction of the individual's behavior are the sociocultural factors found in an individual background. Undoubtedly, there are various ways which conceptualize persuasion process; however, both the psychodynamic and the sociocultural strategies seem to be more linked to the attitudes and their formation.

Depending on the communication process, creating, modifying or reinforcing attitudes and behaviors is the main goal of the message sender, and in this respect, the audience are the only ones who decide to evaluate, to accept or to reject that message. The late 1940s through the 1960s, a research on persuasion and attitude change was first led by Carl Hovland of Yale University. Hovland and colleagues attempted to find out what influences the success or failure of persuasion via asking 'Who says what to whom and with what effect' and studied three variables realized in persuasion: (a) the communicator, (b) the communication, and (c) the audience. Moreover, four steps in the persuasion process have been realized namely: attention, comprehension, acceptance and retention. Thus, on these bases and on the three factors mentioned above, Carrel Hovland and his colleagues made the persuasive communication model. It is called K.A.P scale where "**K"** refers to knowledge, i.e.**,** the aim is to know to what extent the audience were affected and how much the receiver's knowledge is affected by the information given to him which would affect his opinion on a specific issue.

"A" represents forming or changing attitudes whereas **"P"** refers to practice, i.e., achieving change in the receiver's behavior and adopting the desired behavior. It is worth noticing that there are different barriers to a model of persuasive communication such as language, lack of trust, educational, and inconsistency with beliefs (c.f. Belch& Belch, 1990):

The Persuasive Communication Model

Factors related to source: Source specialization Source credibility Source status Audience love to the source	Attention Understanding	 Knowledge
Factors related to message: Arrangement of ideas Organization of arguments One-side or both sided Stating conclusion	 Emotional acceptance	 Attitudes
Factors related to audience: Audience characteristics Hostility Social withdrawal Richness of fantasy Self-esteem	 Persuasion	 Practice

4. Persuasion in Political Discourse

Language is the most ancient and powerful device of persuasion; in fact, it is a form of social practice. It is easily to be realized in relation to social and cultural identity, to the notion of prestige and solidarity and to the different factors that influence language attitudes and varieties performed by users of a particular language (c.f, Chilton, 1998, Fairclough, 2001). Moreover, it is the most influential tool used for interaction or transaction in different situations especially in political environment.There is an inherent relationship between language and politics since the time of Aristotle as he explained that relation in the following way:

… that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech.

(Politics, 1, 2)

Chilton (2004:3), defined politics as " a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it". In other words, politicians usually use language and power to persuade the public either to take political actions or make political decisions. It is evident that specific features characterize the political speeches as a type of discourse. This is clearly shown through linguistic manipulation in a political

discourse.

The term "discourse" has been discussed thoroughly by many scholars, but since it is a broad term many definitions covered many disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, literary and cultural studies, anthropology, linguistics, etc. In Foucault's work (1972) [1969] discourse is a rather 'slippery notion' but he uses it to refer to the verbal traces left by history and to a certain way of speaking. Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to:

> *Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern.*
>
> *(Weedon, 1987: 108)*

Foucault's work presented the terms 'discursive practices' and 'discursive formation' for the analysis of the ways particular institutions seek in establishing orders of truth ,i.e., 'reality' in a given society. In contrast with Foucault's notion of discourse, Wittgenstein's "language games"(1967) and Austin's "speech acts"(1962) consider "discourse" a "linguistic action" is undertaken by social actors in a specific context ruled by social rules, norms and conventions. On the other hand, Wodak (2007: 581) distinguished between "discourse" and "text" on an abstract level. He pointed out that "discourse" is related to commonalities of knowledge and structures whereas "text" is a unique realization of a discourse. Another definition of political discourse is that presented by Chilton's (2008: 226) as "the use of language to do the business of politics and includes persuasive rhetoric, the use of implied meanings, the use of euphemisms, the exclusion of references to undesirable reality, the use of language to arouse political emotions and the like". Whereas according to Van Dijk (1997:12) discourse is identified by its actors or authors, viz., politicians. He emphasized that both text and talk are the core of studying the political discourse of professional politicians or political institutions. According to Cobb and Kuklinski (1997) persuasion pervades politics.It is considered a natural factor that the political persuasion is all pervasive. In other words, politicians try to persuade for the goal of supporting one policy option over another. Similarly, interest groups intend to persuade the mass public and difficulties to gain support to their goals and programs.

5. Pragmatic Prospects of Persuasion

As it has been mentioned earlier, research on persuasion has traditionally been the interest of rhetorical and psychological approaches whereas studies of this phenomenon in pragmatics are not common and most of them focused on different fields such as advertisements and courtrooms. The reason for this consideration is that the language material in both advertisement and court has persuasive characteristics useful for analysis of persuasion strategies. On the basis of Cicero's classical oration and Aristotle's ethos, Hugh Rank (1988:10) presented a persuasive framework consisting of five components for different types of persuasive discourse: 'attention-getting', 'confidence – building', 'desire – stimulating', 'urgency stressing'; and 'response- seeking'.

Hardin (2001) presented his persuasive analysis to discourse in Spanish language advertising by combining the findings of both Rank's (1988) and Leech' (1966). The study was based on three main persuasive goals: (a) 'memorability', (b) 'force', and (c) 'participation'. In other words, the aim was to make the audience remember the message, then force this factor in terms of the emotional and logical appeals which would eventually strengthen the message. Other studies dealt with the power of persuasive techniques in the courtroom. One of these studies was Barkley and Anderson's (2008) who realized that the persuasive effect of arguments lies in what is said and when they are said.

From the perspective of pragmatics and social psychology, Taillard (2002) clarifies the interaction of both pragmatics and social psychology in persuasion and outlines a model for it. When a speaker wishes to persuade a listener to take a certain action, the listener can either accept or reject the speaker's suggestion. The issue of being persuaded or not depends on the 'state'. In other words, for conducting efficient communication, speakers need sufficient information about the social meaning of the linguistic forms or the knowledge of the social rules for language use. Dell Hymes (as cited in Panlston & Bruder, 1967, p.56) pointed out "communicative competence must include not only the linguistic forms of the language but also knowledge of when, how, and to whom it is appropriate to use these forms". Following the perspective, Schmidt and Richards (1980) explained the role of pragmatics as the study of how utterances used in interaction, particularly the relationship between sentences, the context and the situation in which utterances are applied. Cutting (2002, p.187) summarizes the role of pragmatics as "the written maxims of conversation that speaker follows in order to cooperate and be socially acceptable to each other".

One of the main aspects of pragmatics is 'speech acts' which was first introduced by Austin (1960) in his search for exploring ways of regarding language as a form of action. Since one of the main goals of communication is to be understood, another important goal is needed that is how to affect the audience's beliefs , desires, and actions. Hence, it is the core of what pragmatic theorists are interested in; whereas analyzing how attitudes change is made would be the focus of social psychologists. Various types of speech acts have been investigated in terms of functions and uses of the language such as 'imitation', 'refusals', 'apologies', congratulations', ' persuasion' and so on. Pragmatically, the persuasion target interprets the information to be communicated with a particular persuasive intention, i.e., speech acts are frames with conventional meaning or intent (Goffman 1974). In this respect, Robin Lakoff (1982) presented the best definition of persuasion as "the nonreciprocal attempt or intention of one party to change the behavior, feelings, intentions, or viewpoint of another by communicative means."(c.f. Hardin, 2010:155). In the same realm, Searle (1969) regarded persuasion as a directive speech act in which the speaker intends to make the hearers perform some form of action.

In 1979 a new insight to the theory of speech acts was presented by Kent Bach and Robert Harnish '*Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* '. Although their study was based on the framework of speech acts presented by Austin, Searle and Grice, Bach and Harnish attempted to unify the previous conceptions but with further innovations. In fact, they were greatly interested in the discussion of Grice's intention-based and inferential view of communication

where the speech act is recognized by the hearer's interpretation to the speaker's communicative intention. This is definitely affected by the mutual contextual beliefs of both speaker and hearer via the shared context of utterance, or by the utterance itself (Bach and Harnish, 1979: 3, 5, 61). What Bach and Harnish focused on is that speech acts can be easily misinterpreted due to the differences in cultural background and how that would affect the speaker's performed illocutionary act. In other words:

Illocutionary speech act is communicatively successful only if the speaker's illocutionary intention is recognized by the hearer. These intentions are essentially communicative because the fulfillment of illocutionary intentions consists in hearer's understanding. Not only are such intentions reflexive. Their fulfillment consists in their recognition.

(Bach and Harnish, 1979: 15)

In their theory, Bach and Harnish argue about a series of inferential steps that are involved in understanding an utterance as a type of speech act: the direct and indirect speech acts. This was realized in Speech Act Schema (SAS) which is an organization in the brain that concerns some information one already has which enables one to decode a speech act. Hence, they have developed taxonomy of types of the illocutionary acts that to be distinguished by the expressed attitude. In this respect, four major categories of communicative illocutionary acts were entitled as 'constatives', 'directives', 'commissives' and 'acknowledgments' where statements, requests, promises and apologies are examples. In fact, the terms 'constative' and 'commissive' were Austin's terms whereas 'directive' is Searle's; moreover, they adopted the term 'acknowledgment', over Austin's 'behabitive' and Searle's 'expressive', for apologies, greetings, congratulations etc.. Then, the communicative illocutionary acts are (Ibid, Chapter3):

1. Constatives such as affirming, alleging, answering, attributing, claiming, etc.;

2. Directives such as advising, admonishing, asking, etc.;

3. Commissives such as agreeing, guaranteeing, inviting, etc.; and

4. Acknowledgments such as apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, etc.

Bach and Harnish distinguished between 'communicative illocutionary acts' and the category of 'conventional illocutionary acts'. The former are those acts performed with certain communicative intentions which must be recognized by the hearer for a successful act, whereas the latter determines and produces facts of institutional nature. As persuasion is more concerned with the speaker's intention to affect his / her addressee's conduct, feelings, opinions, etc. by means of communication, then, both the social relationship and the 'face' or 'self-image' are affected in the socio-cultural system. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) considered the speech act of persuasion as a face threatening act (FTA) since it is an imposition on the hearer by threatening his / her negative face. (c.f. Searle 1969, , Lakoff, 1982, Banerjee and Carrell 1988).

6. Data Analysis

This study is mainly concerned with the analysis of President Obama's inaugural speeches (2009), (2013) and his last speech to the State of the Union Address (2016). The scripts were taken from The White House website. Based on the literature review, the data will be interpreted pragmatically where sentences and phrases are analyzed to examine the persuasive act through examining instances of persuasion the persuader attempts to achieve in his speech. The adopted model for analysis is based on Bach and Harnish (1979) speech act framework which is classified into 'constatives', 'directives', 'commisives', and 'acknowledgments'. Each type has subcategories, as have been mentioned above, and upon which the statistical analysis is based. The total number of speech acts in the three of Obama speeches is (649) speech acts where statistically the highest proportion is accounted for constative acts with 72% out of the total. Next is that of directives with 15%.Both commissive and acknowledgement acts represent the least account in the data with 7% and 4% respectively. Each speech act has already subcategories which have variable presence in the data. This can be seen in the following figure:
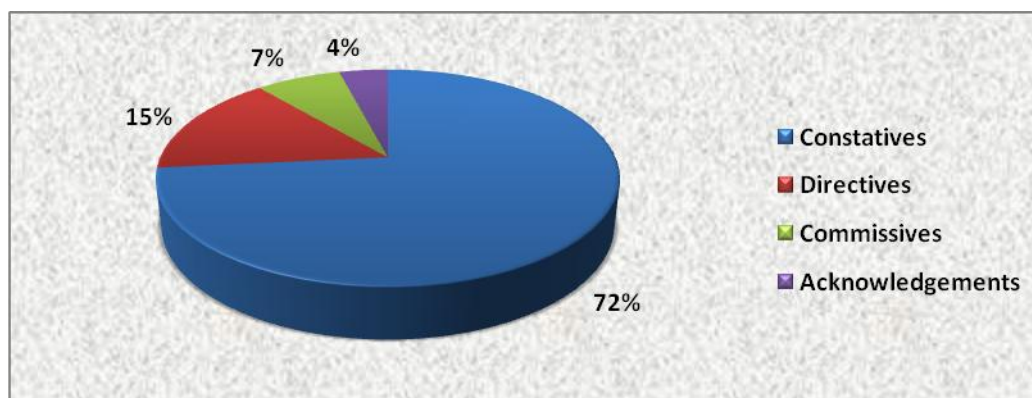

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of Speech Acts in the data

6.1 Obama's Inaugural Speech 2009 Analysis

On Tuesday, January 20, 2009, as the first African-American president Barack Obama was elected and became the 44th President of the United States. That was a very historical moment in the history of the country as a new era of leadership and communication started. President Obama addressed the nation in front of almost two million in attendance which set a record for any event held in Washington, D.C. Most of style analysts have found that his speech was written and read in a way that has not been seen in Inaugural addresses since 1996. "A New Birth of Freedom" was the theme for Barack Obama's inauguration based on Abraham Lincoln's famous and memorable statement. Through the analysis of his speech, 60 % of the sentences and phrases contain constative speech acts which represent the highest account among other speech acts found in the data. Hence, this reflects the language power of persuasion that the addresser intends to convey to the addressees to take one side or the other, i.e., the intention of the addresser, can be understood only within its context (cf. Fairclough,

2001). Less presence in the data was to the other types of speech acts as follows: directives 20%, commissives 15% and acknowledgements 5% out of the total (151) speech acts in Obama's Inaugural speech (2009).

Within the constative speech acts, both assertive and informative acts have been realized with a considerable occurrence than the rest subcategories. Assertives account for 60.44% whereas informatives account for 37.36% respectively and hence, they are the highest proportions of persuasive acts as shown in Figure 2:
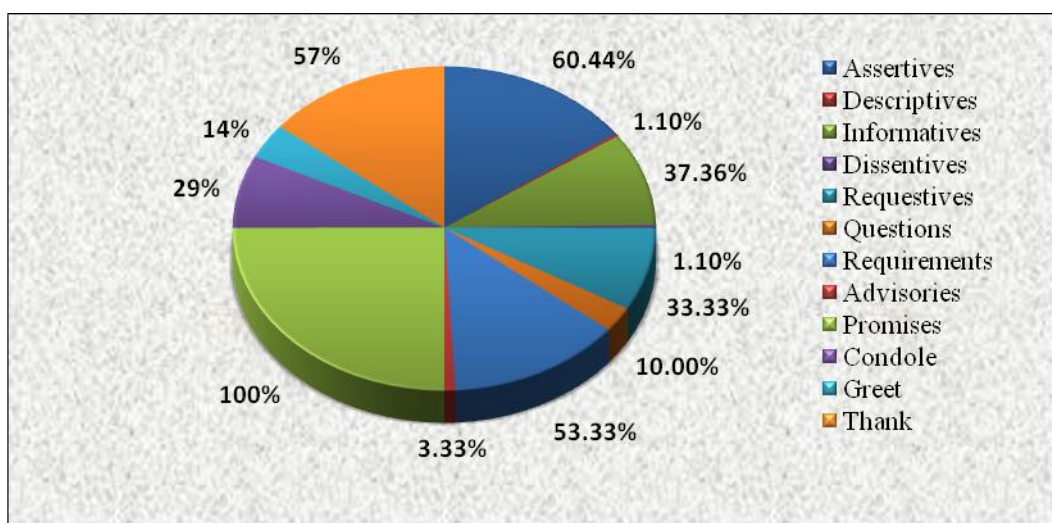

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of Illocutionary Acts in Obama's Speech 2009

To have a better understanding, let's consider the following extracts as examples of assertive and informative speech acts taken from Obama's Inaugural Speech (2009):

At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forebears, and true to our founding documents.(par. 3)(assertives)

So it has been; so it must be with this generation of Americans. (par.4) (assertives)

The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness. (par.8)(assertives)

Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly, our schools fail too many -- and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.(par. 5) (Informatives)

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth. (par. 22) (Informatives)

In the examples above, Obama has asserted his vision for a new America with a new spirit that appreciates the sacrifices of the ancestors to reach the goal of progress for the nation. He has also used the persuasive tactics of asserting his belief in the equality factor of men and women to convince the addressees that this is one of the axes of the new era. By this, he is motivating people and specially the new generation to be part of success in different areas. On the other hand, and in order to be more effective and persuasive, he enhanced his speech with informative acts to remind the audience with major issues and hence intentionally directing them to apprehend what is needed to be accomplished. In directive acts usually speakers intend to get the hearers to do something. The analysis of the data revealed that among the subcategories of directive speech acts, both requirement and requestive acts carry the highest account with 53.33% and 33.33% out of the total (30) instances of directives acts. Obama used his language tactics to make the audience agree with his perspectives concerning different issues indirectly such as those of responsibility, education, how to face hurdles and danger, etc. The following are examples:

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift. (par. 13)(requirement)

What is demanded, then, is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility -- a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task.(par. 30)(requirement)

So let us mark this day with remembrance of who we are and how far we have traveled.(par. 32)(requestives)

America: In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come.(par.34)(requestives).

The least used speech acts in the data were, as mentioned above, commissives and those of acknowledgements. Obama tried to persuade the Americans with his futuristic plans through the promise acts as in:

They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America: They will be met. (par.7) (promise).

We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We'll restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will

transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. (par.13) (promise).

6.2 Obama's Inaugural Speech 2013 Analysis

After four years of being elected as the first African American president of the United States of America, Obama was elected again for another four years. On Monday, Jan. 21, 2013, President Obama delivered his second inaugural speech with difference from his first speech. The focus of the first speech was on the need for national unity and on a new era of responsibility that should be considered by every American towards them, to the Nation and to the world. In 2013, Obama focused on a number of critical topics such as gender equality, same sex marriage, immigration and economy, but still the message of "We are all in this together" is the governing theme of unity or what he called "collective action."

Based on the adopted model of analysis, the most common speech act found in Obama's speech 2013 is that of constatives representing 62.2% out of the total acts performed in the data (98). The least speech acts are directives 18.4%, commissives 16.3%, and acknowledgements 3.4% respectively as shown in Figure (3). The difference in percentages of conststive speech acts in the second inauguration is of no great deal than those of the first inauguration. But the difference is shown in the emphasize on assertive acts and less on informative ones which account 75.4% and 19.6% respectively whereas only 5.5% accounts for concessive acts out of the total instances of constatives in the data.
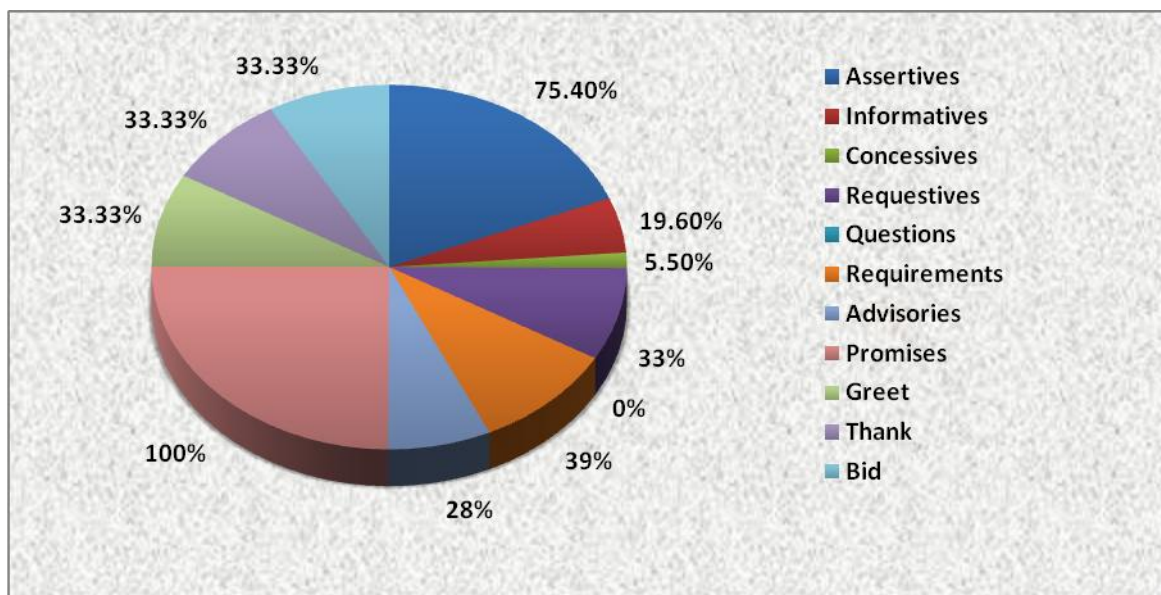

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of Illocutionary Acts in Obama's Speech 2013

Obama in his second inaugural speech extensively used assertive speech acts to make the audience certain and sure about his intention to continue what he has started four years earlier in reforming the country in different aspects. On the other hand, informative acts were only used for refreshing the memory of the audience of the past events and also of

what has been accomplished in his first presidential era and what is left to do in the following years ahead. The following are some examples extracted from his speech:

Together, we discovered that a free market only thrives when there are rules to ensure competition and fair play (par.7)(assertives)

We cannot mistake absolutism for principle, or substitute spectacle for politics, or treat name-calling as reasoned debate. We must act, knowing that our work will be imperfect. (par.24)(assertives)

For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they've never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth. The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob. They gave to us a republic, a government of, and by, and for the people, entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed. (par.3)(informatives)

This generation of Americans has been tested by crises that steeled our resolve and proved our resilience. A decade of war is now ending. An economic recovery has begun. America's possibilities are limitless, for we possess all the qualities that this world without boundaries demands: youth and drive; diversity and openness; an endless capacity for risk and a gift for reinvention. (par.11)(informatives)

The findings of the data analysis shows that requirement acts account 39% out of the total directives speech acts used in Obama's speech whereas requestive and advisorie acts amount to 33% and 28% out of the total speech acts respectively. This indicates that in the second inauguration, Obama intended to be more persuasive in motivating and urging the Americans to respond to his requests, requirements and to take his advices into consideration so as to reach the desired goal of change:

Together, we determined that a modern economy requires railroads and highways to speed travel and commerce, schools and colleges to train our workers. (par.6)(requirements)

It is now our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers began. (par.22)(requestives)

Let us, each of us, now embrace with solemn duty and awesome joy what is our lasting birthright. With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication, let us answer the call of history and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom. (par.27)(requestives);(advisory)

Different from the first inaugural speech, Obama has lessened the tone of promise in his second inauguration. This was shown clearly with only 16 instances as a strategic intention to convince the audience of his perseverance to work hand in hand with people for a better life:

For our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and daughters can earn a

living equal to their efforts. Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well. Our journey is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote. Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country. Our journey is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know that they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm. (par.22)(promise)

6.3 President Obama's 2016 State of the Union Address

On January 12, 2016 in the chamber of the United States House of Representatives, President Obama gave his 2016 State of the Union address. In fact, no U.S president since Gerald Ford has given a final State of the Union address at the end of his term. It was likely the last State of the Union Address of Obama's presidency being addressed to the 114th United States Congress. Obama's presidency is scheduled to end on January 20, 2017. In his speech, he embellished the statistical record of his presidency by selective omissions and painted a hopeful portrait of the nation after seven years of his leadership, with a reviving economy despite inequality at home and terrorism in the world. What distinguishes this final speech is his acceptance of responsibility for falling far short of that goal.

Most of the persuasive utterances contained constative speech acts in Obama's final State of the Union Address reflecting 79.5 % out of the total speech acts (400). It is worthy to note that a very considerable gap between the constative instances and the other speech acts is revealed in the findings: directives 13%, commissives 3%, and Acknowledgements 4.5%. The persuasive actions acted by the speaker within the consataive speech acts varies in presence, i.e., assertives 49.6%, informatives 21%, confirmatives 17%, descriptives 7.5%, dissentives 1.88%, predictives 1.5%, suggestives 0.9%, and assentives and suppositives 0.31% respectively. As it is shown from the data analysis, the first three subcategories carry the most frequent use.
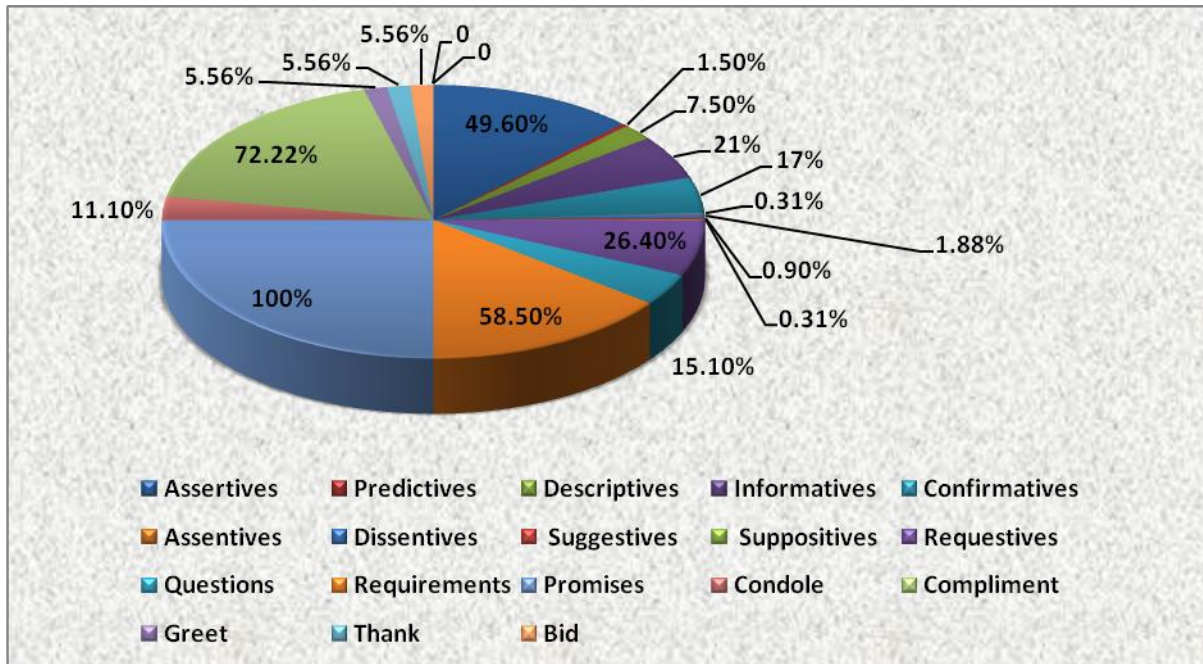
Figure 2. Percentage distribution of Illocutionary Acts in Obama's Speech 2016

In contrary to the inaugural speeches (2009) and (2013), his speech was rather loose and humorous, and even cerebral although it was profound. Among several instances of his speech, Obama raised questions and argumentative statements to enhance his persuasive tools for convincing the audiences with his main aim of what is left to be achieved.

But for my final address to this chamber, I don't want to just talk about next year. I want to focus on the next five years, the next 10 years, and beyond. I want to focus on our future. (par. 5) (assertives).

Anyone claiming that America's economy is in decline is peddling fiction. (par. 17) (assertives).

Tonight marks the eighth year that I've come here to report on the State of the Union. (par. 1) (informatives)

America has been through big changes before -- wars and depression, the influx of new immigrants, workers fighting for a fair deal, movements to expand civil rights. Each time, there have been those who told us to fear the future; who claimed we could slam the brakes on change; who promised to restore past glory if we just got some group or idea that was threatening America under control. (par. 7) (informatives)

Let me tell you something. The United States of America is the most powerful nation on Earth. Period. Period. It's not even close. It's not even close. It's not even close. We spend more on our military than the next eight nations combined. Our troops are the finest fighting force in the history of the world. No nation attacks us directly, or our allies, because they know that's the path to ruin. (par.42) (confirmatives)

What sounds interesting is that requirement acts within the directive speech acts representing 58.5% are intensely used more than those in the two inaugural speeches. This persuasive act works in accordance with the requestive acts to motivate the audience for change and reformation to be taken during Obama's final stage of presidency. See the following extracts:

It's up to us, the United States of America, to help remake that system. And to do that well it means that we've got to set priorities. (par. 46) (requirements)

If this Congress is serious about winning this war, and wants to send a message to our troops and the world, authorize the use of military force against ISIL. Take a vote. Take a vote. (par. 50) (requestives)

Moreover, Obama challenged the American people to focus on "four big questions" about the economy, technology, security and democracy. They echo the most famous State of the Union addresses in history, which historically known as the "Four Freedoms" delivered by President Franklin Roosevelt in his speech 1941. The data findings revealed 15.1% question acts were accounted out of the total directive speech acts. Those questions:

First, how do we give everyone a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy? (par. 12)

Second, how do we make technology work for us, and not against us -- especially when it comes to solving urgent challenges like climate change? (par. 13)

Third, how do we keep America safe and lead the world without becoming its policeman? (par. 14)

And finally, how can we make our politics reflect what's best in us, and not what's worst? (par. 15)

In case of commissive speech acts, they were the least in the data and similarly those of acknowledgement speech acts. Yet within the latter and what makes a difference from the inaugural speeches is the heavy use of compliments with 72.22% out of the total (18) instances. This shows a very interesting change in the persuasive style Obama uses in his final speech for the sake of raising sympathy in the heart of the Americans, as in the following examples:

It's the son who finds the courage to come out as who he is, and the father whose love for that son overrides everything he's been taught. (par.83) (acknowledgements)

7. Findings and Discussion

This study focuses on identifying and marking the speech act of persuasion through a comparative investigation to Obama's inaugural speeches (2009, 2013) and his final speech to the State of the Union (2016). The results have shown a marked use of multiple persuasive speech acts with a total number (649) where some of them may be a medium for another in the same utterance. Constative speech acts prevailed over other speech acts representing (72%) out of the total whereas directives (16%), commissives (8%) and acknowledgements

(4%) comprise the least respectively. The results of the analysis are represented in Figure (4):
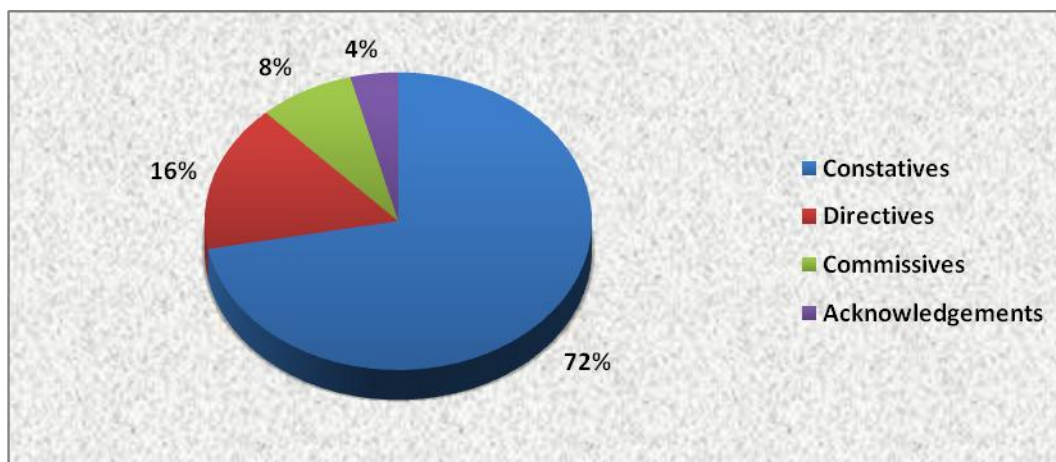

Figure (4). The Comparative Analysis of Speech Acts in Obama's Speeches (2009, 2013 & 2016)

The comparison of the three speeches presents that assertives is the most frequent illocutionary act found in the data. It is an overwhelming factor that dominates Obama's addresses and more specifically maintaining the fore factor of persuasion. In his first inaugural speech (2009), assertive acts accounted (60.44%) as the emphasis was on persuading the Americans with the new policy that differs from the previous presidential strategies and hence, affirming his image and seeking their sympathy for persuasive ends, i.e., achieving his goal of a "new era of responsibility", and end to plutocracy through messages of change, hope and unity. As Obama was elected for the second time in 2013, an excessive usage of assertive acts has been realized comprising (75.40%) of the total constative speech acts which emphasizes his intention of persuading people with the theme "Faith in America's Future". This reveals the intention to evoke the patriotism of the Americans to work hand in hand for achieving the pending goals and also manifesting ways to overcome any hurdles faced his previous presidential years. He also indirectly affirms, encourages and, hence, persuades the people to cooperate with him as the reasonable politician who can lead the nation for a better future in different aspects. Interestingly, assertive acts were also found in the last speech to the State of the Union (2016) representing 49.60% out of the total speech acts. As it is his last address to the state of the Union as a President of the United States of America, Obama tried to affirm key elements on what he intends to achieve in the rest of his term in a lasting legacy. He framed his remarks around four big questions that as a country has to answer including economy, technology, security, and America's political divide.

Next to the assertive, informative acts were used as another technique for persuading the audience which varied from one speech to another. In the first inauguration, informatives comprised 37.36% out of the total which is used higher than in both other speeches. Moreover, the comparison between the speeches revealed the use of confirmative illocutionary acts which is only realized in his speech (2016). This is due to the fact that since

only one year is left for Obama as a President, he strategically emphasized and encouraged the Americans with their important role to be the core of the reforming procedures. The following chart sums the comparison between the three speeches:
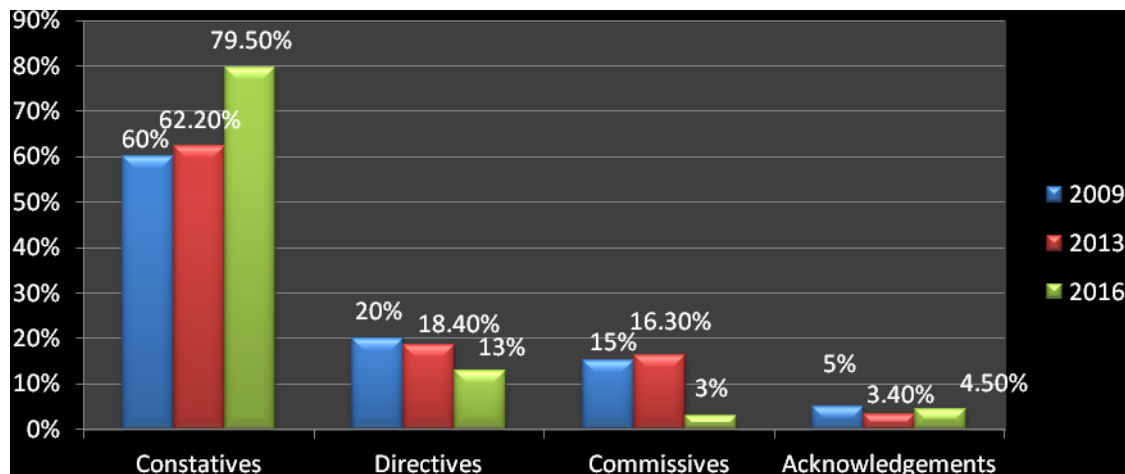

Figure (5). The Comparative Analysis of the Speech Acts in the data

8. Conclusion

Political and Presidential language played an important role in enhancing the power of persuasion. This study has shown that Obama has directly and indirectly influenced the audience via using various speech acts where in some cases more than one illocutionary act is found in one utterance. Although the time frame of the three selected presidential speeches of Obama differed (2009, 2013 & 2016), and eventually several existing challenges might have been increased and new ones might have been raised, they were all dominated by the constative and hence assertive speech acts. In addition, the study aimed at providing an understanding of persuasion in political speeches through the use of persuasive speech acts and emphasizing that they are not used in an arbitrary way but as an effective way to achieve a special political purpose. Therefore, the Speech Act Theory is a very practical and applicable framework in analyzing presidential speeches where no utterance in them lacks one type or speech acts or the other.

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