

Interpersonal Meaning in Michelle Obama's Political Campaign Speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention

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Abstract

This paper examines how Former First Lady Michelle Obama (henceforth, the speaker) deploys language in her political campaign speech in support of Kamala Harris, a presidential candidate, delivered on August 21st, 2024 at the 2024 Democratic National Convention (henceforth, DNC) held in Chicago, to encode interpersonal meaning. Guided by theoretical underpinnings (Mood and Appraisal) from Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth, SFL) and the descriptive mixed-method research design, the study specifically analyzes the interpersonal resources the speaker employs in her speech to negotiate social relations and construe feelings as well as a relationship of solidarity. The findings reveal that she uses, in varying proportions, Mood features (Mood, Modality and Adjunct). They also indicate that the speaker employs, in varying proportions, Appraisal features (Attitude, Engagement and Graduation) to construe feelings in her speech. The study concludes that the speaker deliberately makes use of the aforementioned interpersonal resources to influence or persuade and manipulate her recipients with a view to getting them to act in her own interest; i.e. vote for her candidate, Kamala Harris, whom she depicts positively, while she at the same represents her opponent, Donald Trump, exclusively in negative terms. While this analysis has demonstrated how the speaker deploys interpersonal resources to interact and bond with her recipients, unveiling the stance she takes towards what she communicates to them, including the two vying candidates, it has not explored how she uses language to encode ideational (experiential and logical) and textual meanings. Future research can look at these aspects.

Keywords: Appraisal, Ideology, Interpersonal Resources, Mood, Political Campaign Speech.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political campaign speeches are widely known for their persuasive or/and manipulative function. That is, such speeches are diligently crafted with the sole intention to win the consent of potential voters or appeal to them. Prominent or experienced politicians vying for a political post (presidential, parliamentary, etc.) or supporting another political figure in an election are aware of this fact. Therefore, when they write their campaign speeches, they painstakingly tailor them, ensuring that these speeches suit their set goals, context and most importantly (the taste of) their audience. However, it is not sufficient for a politician to have a well-crafted speech and expect it, *de facto*, to appeal to the audience. This is to say, in addition to having a well-crafted speech, the politician must ensure that the speech is para-linguistically delivered or rendered in such a way that it arouses the recipients' emotions. It follows from this to argue that politics is a social or discursive practice,

par excellence, wherein appeal to emotions (and other sources including history, authority, etc.) is deliberate and this ultimately serves a given ideological manipulative purpose.

On August 21st, 2024, Former First Lady Michelle Obama (henceforth, the speaker) delivered a speech at the 2024 Democratic National Convention held in Chicago to rally support for Kamala Harris, the invested candidate of the DNC vying for the presidential seat. A cursory look at this speech indicates that the speaker deliberately appeals to history, emotions, home education and motherhood to influence or persuade and manipulate (the minds of) her recipients with a view to getting them to act in a desired way; i.e. cast their votes for her candidate, Kamala Harris at the expense of her opponent, Donald Trump. To reach this goal, she employs interpersonal resources to negotiate social relations and construe feelings that she shares with them.

In a bid to coax her recipients to accept her candidate and subsequently vote for her, the speaker construes a sense or relationship of solidarity with them. This paper examines how she deploys language in her political campaign to encode interpersonal meaning. It draws its theoretical underpinnings (Mood and Appraisal) from Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth, SFL). The current research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What interpersonal resources does the speaker deploy in her speech to negotiate social relations and construe feelings?
2. To what extent do these resources encode interpersonal meaning in the speech?

The next section outlines the theories this paper applies. It clarifies such concepts as interpersonal meaning, Mood and Appraisal.

2. Theoretical Framework

As stated earlier, this paper draws its theoretical underpinnings- Mood and Appraisal- from SFL. Mood and Appraisal theories are claimed to account for how language is deployed to encode interpersonal meaning. In SFL, language is presumed to simultaneously encode three strands of meaning (Textual, Interpersonal and Ideational) (Eggins, 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Halliday and Webster, 2009; Thompson, 2013; Fontaine, 2013; Bloor and Bloor, 2013; Martin and Rose, 2003; Martin and White, 2005). Interpersonal meaning, by definition, denotes how language is used to enable users to participate in communicative acts with other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings, attitudes and judgments (Bloor and Bloor, 2013, p. 13). Without dispelling the foregoing, Martin and White (2005, p. 7) submit that “Interpersonal resources are concerned with negotiating social relations: how people are interacting, including the feelings they try to share.” Interpersonal meaning is realized by the system of Mood, and this system comprises three constituents: Mood, Modality and Adjunct.

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 142), “The Mood is the element that realizes the selection of mood in the clause; and it is also the domain of agreement between Subject and Finite.” Concurring with the foregoing, Eggins (2004) holds that Mood refers to the Mood types of indicative (declarative and interrogative) and imperative. Each Mood type actually performs a given speech role or function (Thompson, 2013). For instance, the Mood structure of declarative is used to give information (e.g. *Kamala Harris is an experienced political figure*). Likewise, the Mood structure of interrogative is deployed to request information from someone. There are two types of interrogative: yes/no and Wh-interrogatives (e.g. *Are you Michelle Obama’s candidate?* vs. *Who is Kamala Harris?*). On the contrary, the Mood structure of imperative is employed to get someone to do something.

We can distinguish between suggestive and jussive (or regular) imperatives (e.g. *Let me show you my candidate* vs. *Show me your candidate*). We can also distinguish between interrogative and modulated interrogative, and imperative and modulated imperative. A modulated interrogative, unlike an interrogative, is an interrogative that contains a modal operator (e.g. *Who will you vote for?* vs. *Who are you voting for?*). Likewise, a modulated imperative, unlike an imperative, includes a modal verb (e.g. *Would you mind showing me your candidate?* vs. *Show me your candidate*). Modulated interrogatives and modulated imperatives, as it appears, tend to mark politeness. While it is true that each Mood type performs a specific function, there is no one-to-one correlation between a Mood type and a given function. That is, a Mood type can be used to encode a speech function for which it is not destined (e.g. *This is our time to stand up for what we know in our hearts is right*. Obviously, this is a declarative clause. But this clause is not used here to give information; it is rather used to require that the recipients act in a given way. So its function is an indirect request).

Modality simply denotes the “attitudinal” features of language. That is, it is concerned with a speaker’s attitudes towards and opinions about the events and situations around him/her (Simpson, 1993, p. 47). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1999, p. 526) cited in Fontaine (2013, p. 120), “modality is a rich resource for speakers to intrude their own views into the discourse: their assessments of what is likely or typical, their judgments of the rights and wrongs of the situation and of where other people stand in this regard.” There are two types of Modality: epistemic (Modalization) and deontic (Modulation). Fontaine (2013, p. 121) clearly points out the difference between the two types of Modality. She states that epistemic modality is a kind of connotative meaning relating to the degree of certainty the speaker wants to express about what s/he is saying or the estimation of probability associated to what is being said, while deontic modality is also a kind of connotative meaning but, in contrast to epistemic modality, it relates to obligation or permission, including willingness and ability. Modality is expressed by modal auxiliary verbs (e.g. *can, could, shall, should, may, might, will, would*, etc.), lexical items (usually adverbs such as *probably, luckily*, etc.) or groups which function as modal adjuncts (e.g. *by all means, at all cost*, etc.).

Adjunct, according to Matthiessen, Lam and Teruya (2010, p. 46) is an “Interpersonal clause element that does not have the potential to become Subject (in contrast to a Complement) and which is realized by an adverbial group or a prepositional phrase.” Eggins (2004) distinguishes between three broad classes of Adjunct:

1. Circumstantial Adjuncts: Add experiential content to the clause, by expressing some circumstance relating to the process represented in the clause. They are usually

expressed by either prepositional phrases or adverbial groups. They may refer to time (probed “when”), place (where), cause (why), matter (about what), accompaniment (with whom), beneficiary (to whom) and agent (by whom).

2. Modal Adjuncts: Add interpersonal meaning to the clause. That is, they add meanings which are somehow connected to the creation and maintenance of the dialogue. They can do this either by impacting directly on the MOOD element (by adding some qualification to the Subject/Finite), or indirectly, by merely adding an expression of attitude or by making attempt to direct the interaction itself. There are four types of Modal Adjunct, namely:

- i. *Mood Adjuncts:* are the clause elements which express probability (e.g. *perhaps, maybe, probably, etc.*), usuality (e.g. *sometimes, usually, etc.*), intensification or minimization (e.g. *really, absolutely, just, somewhat, etc.*), presumption (e.g. *evidently, presumably, obviously, etc.*) and inclination (e.g. *happily, willingly, etc.*).
- ii. *Polarity Adjuncts:* are Yes and No and conversational alternatives (yea, yep, na, nope, etc.), which may function as ellipsed clauses and analyzed as Polarity Adjuncts or which may occur in unstressed initial position, introducing a clause and analyzed as Textual Adjuncts.
- iii. *Comment Adjuncts:* function to express an assessment of the clause as a whole. They typically occur in the clause initial position, or directly after the Subject, and are realized by adverbs.
- iv. *Vocative Adjuncts:* function to control the discourse by designating a likely “next speaker”. They are identifiable as names, where the names are not functioning as Subjects or Complements, but are used to directly address the person named.

3. Textual Adjuncts:

Add meaning to the organization of the message itself. There are two kinds:

- a. *Conjunctive Adjuncts:* are expressed by conjunctions. They function to provide linking relations between one clause and another. They express the logical meanings of elaboration, extension and enhancement.
- b. *Continuity Adjuncts:* include continuative and continuity items frequent in casual talk, such as *well, yea, oh, etc.* These items function to introduce a clause, and signal that a response to prior talk is about to be provided.

According to Martin and Rose (2003, p. 25), “Appraisal is concerned with evaluation- the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned.” In other words,

“APPRAISAL is a system of interpersonal meanings. We use the resources of APPRAISAL for negotiating our social relationships, by telling our listeners or readers how we feel about things and people (in a word, what our attitudes are)” (ibid., p. 26). It can also be considered as an “Interpersonal semantic system concerned with the resources for appraising— for assessing meanings through the enactment of appreciation, judgement, affect or graduation” (Matthiessen, Lam and Teruya, 2010, p. 55). Concurring with the foregoing, Martin and White (2005, pp. 35-36) state that appraisal includes three interacting domains— ‘attitude’, ‘engagement’ and ‘graduation’. They further submit that attitude is concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of things. It is divided into three regions of feeling, ‘affect’, ‘judgment’ and ‘appreciation’. Affect deals with resources for construing emotional reactions. Judgment is concerned with resources for assessing behavior according to various normative principles. Appreciation looks at resources for construing the value of things, including natural phenomena and semiosis (as either product or process). Concerning engagement, Martin and White claim that it deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. As they (ibid., p. 36) further explain.

Broadly speaking engagement is concerned with the ways in which resources such as projection, modality, polarity, concession and various comment adverbials position the speaker/writer with respect to the value position being advanced and with respect to potential responses to that value position— by quoting or reporting, acknowledging a possibility, denying, countering, affirming and so on.

In addition, these scholars hold that graduation attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred. Before applying these theories to the political campaign speech under scrutiny, it is expedient to revisit some previous works which have examined interpersonal meaning in political discourse.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Extant scholarly studies have investigated how interpersonal resources (Mood and Appraisal features) are employed in political discourse to convey sociopolitical ideologies, realize engagement, encode semiotic contents, construe emotions with a view to influencing or manipulating the audience, etc. (Siyon and Zhongwen, 2018; Ziliwu, 2020; Mohammed, 2024; Firmansyah, 2019). For example, Ziliwu (2020) examines how Les Brown employs language in his speech to realize engagement. The scholar reports from his findings that the speaker uses more heterogloss (81.10%) than monogloss (18.90%) to express denial, statement and acceptance. Within the category of heterogloss, the speaker deploys contraction more than expansion, suggesting thus that he conveys propositions

and proposals that contain definite and firm meanings in order to motivate his listeners. Unlike the foregoing, Mohammed (2024) studies two speeches by Ban Ki-Moon: his acceptance speech delivered in 2006 and his *adieu* speech delivered in 2016 after leaving his post of Secretary General of the United Nations, to figure out how this speaker uses language to construe emotions. The findings reveal that the speaker employs a positive appraisal for positive emotions and negative appraisal for negative emotions. His deployment of both types of appraisal surprisingly complies with a social norm: politeness. That is, Ki-Moon observes politeness in his two speeches, and this marks a shift in tone noticeable in his choice of words and grammatical structures.

In the same token, Siyou and Zhongwen (2018) conduct a contrastive analysis of speeches delivered by Xi Jinping and Donald Trump on the World Economic Forum in 2017 and 2018 respectively. That is, they examine how Jinping and Trump employ language in their speeches to realize interpersonal function; i.e. how they use interpersonal resources to coordinate, affect, judgment and appreciation. The findings exude that the speech-writers deploy both positive and negative words in their speeches. They tend to express their joy, pride and confidence, adopt positive attitude to express their firm beliefs and views, give the audience confidence and expectation, and inspire their morale and determination to face future challenges. However, when both speakers talk about world issues including nuclear weapons, terrorism, migration, etc., they sound negative as they criticize these social practices, highlighting their negative influence. The scholar points out at this stage that both speakers use heterogloss more than monogloss, dialogical contraction more than dialogic expansion with a view to expressing the determination of the two countries to face difficulties and their ability to solve them. He also observes that both leaders deploy strength or weakness of force and sharpening or blurring to mark different levels of meaning-evaluation. He concludes that Jinping's speech is rooted more in the perspective of mankind in that it calls on all the countries of the world to unite in order to shoulder emerging economic difficulties together, whereas Trump only speaks to the United States (US), promoting its achievements since he took office and calling on other countries to cooperate with the US and invest therein. This suggests that Trump advertizes the US and promotes the concept "America first".

Firmansyah's paper (2019) is similar to the current study in that it combines Mood and Appraisal theories to uncover how Donald Trump uses emotional language in three of his campaign speeches to influence his addressees. It differs from this study in that it applies an additional theory called the prototype scenario theory. All these theories are applied to political campaign speeches delivered by a vying candidate, whereas the current paper applies the theories to a political campaign

speech in support of another candidate. The findings suggest that Trump employs, in varying proportions, Mood features (Mood, Modality and Adjunct). The analysis of Mood shows that he predominantly deploys declarative clauses. He employs these clauses for three functions: 1) to explain and describe the state of affairs in the material world, 2) to encourage his audience to hope, and 3) to convince his audience. These functions are also substantiated by other Mood structures including imperatives, for instance. Moreover, the analysis of Modality indicates that only 51 (i.e. 32%) instances of the data contain modality. This implies that the dominant 68% are expressed using positive or negative polarity system without any modality. Note that a cursory look at the selected modality features exudes that the speaker prefers Modulation over Modalization. The analysis of Appraisal indicates that 93 out of 158 sentences encode Appraisal features. The 93 sentences comprise 70 sentences of graduation, 21 sentences of attitude and 2 sentences of engagement. Again, the 70 sentences of graduation embody both force (50 sentences) and focus (20 sentences). And the modes of intensification deployed include repetition (lexical and structural) and maximization. The scholar concludes that all the aforementioned interpersonal resources mark the language style of Trump.

The articles reviewed above provide an insight into how interpersonal resources are employed to express interpersonal meaning in political discourse. This insight is useful and in fact informs the current study. The reviewed papers clearly indicate that there is a paucity of studies that combine Mood and Appraisal theories to analyze how politicians use language to negotiate social relations and construe feelings. This is the gap this study intends to fill in.

4. METHODOLOGY

This article employs a mixed-method research design to examine how the speaker deploys language in her political campaign to encode interpersonal meaning. The data used for this investigation is a political campaign speech in support of another candidate downloaded from *Time Magazine* (<https://time.com/7013289/michelle-obama-2024-dnc-speech-full-transcript>) on December 4th, 2024. Guided by theoretical underpinnings from SFL, the speech is subjected to analysis. The analysis comprises two stages. First, after parsing the speech into numerically numbered clause complexes and clause simplexes, the Mood features (Mood, Modality and Adjunct) therein are duly described, classified and quantified. The quantified features are further discussed qualitatively with a view to demonstrating how the speaker uses language to negotiate social relations. Next the article draws on content analysis to figure out the Appraisal features (Attitude, Engagement and Graduation) encoded in the speech. These features are then presented and discussed in such a way that articulates how the speaker employs

interpersonal resources to construe feelings as well as a sense or relationship of solidarity. Due to space limitations, the full speech is not provided here. But some textual snippets or extracts are given where necessary to substantiate what is said.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The analysis begins with the identification of the Mood features the speaker employs to negotiate

social relations in her speech. Then it displays the Appraisal features she deploys to construe feelings as well as a sense or relationship of solidarity therein. To avoid an unnecessary repetition, the discussion of the findings (including Appraisal resources) is presented in a block form.

5.1 Identification of Mood Features in the Speech

The Mood features identified in the speech are Mood, Modality and Adjunct. These features are displayed in the tables below.

Table 1: Distribution of Mood types in the speech

Mood type	Clause	Frequency/percentage
Declarative	2; 3; 6; 7i; 8; 9i; 9ii; 9iii; 10; 11i; 11ii; 12; 13i; 13ii; 14i; 14ii; 15; 16i; 16ii; 17i; 17ii; 18; 19i; 19ii; 19iii; 20i; 20ii; 21; 22i; 22ii; 22iii; 23i; 23ii; 24i; 24ii; 25i; 25ii; 26i; 26ii; 27i; 27ii; 28; 29; 30; 31i; 31ii; 31iii; 31iv; 31v; 31vi; 31vii; 31viii; 32i; 32ii; 33i; 33ii; 34; 35i; 35ii; 36; 37; 38; 39i; 39ii; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45; 46; 47; 48; 49i; 49ii; 49iii; 49iv; 49v; 49vi; 49vii; 49viii; 50i; 50ii; 51; 52; 53; 54i; 54ii; 55; 56i; 56ii; 56iii; 57i; 57ii; 58; 59i; 59ii; 60i; 60ii; 61; 62; 63; 64; 65; 66i; 66ii; 67i; 67ii; 67iii; 68i; 68ii; 69i; 69ii; 69iii; 70; 71; 72i; 72ii; 73i; 74i; 74ii; 75i; 75ii; 75iv; 75v; 76i; 76ii; 76iii; 77i; 77iii; 78; 79ii; 80; 81i; 81ii; 81iii; 84i; 84ii; 85; 86i; 86ii; 87; 88; 89; 90i; 90iii; 91ii; 92; 93; 94; 95; 96; 97ii; 97iii; 97iv; 97v; 97vi; 97vii; 97viii; 98i; 98ii; 99; 100; 101ii; 101iii; 101iv; 102; 103; 104i; 104ii; 104iii; 105; 106; 107; 108; 109; 110; 111; 112ii; 112iii; 112iv; 113; 114; 115; 116i 116ii; 116iii; 117i; 117ii; 117iii; 117iv; 118i; 118ii; 118iii; 118iv; 119; 120; 121; 122; 123ii; 124; 125i; 125ii; 126; 127; 128; 129; 130; 131; 132; 133; 134; 135; 136i; 136ii; 137iv; 140i; 140ii; 141; 142ii.	218 (88.62%)
Interrogative	7ii; 73iii-73iv; 118v.	03 (01.22%)
Modulated Interrogative	82; 83.	02 (00.81%)
Imperative	1; 4; 5; 49i; 72i; 73i; 74i; 75i; 77ii; 79i; 90ii; 91i; 97i; 101i; 112i; 123i; 137i; 137ii; 137iii; 138; 139; 142i; 143.	23 (09.35%)
Modulated Imperative	-	00 (00%)
Total		246 (100%)

Table 2: Distribution of Modality types in the speech

Modality type	Clause	Frequency/percentage
Epistemic	Verbal: <i>would</i> (22ii; 38); <i>can</i> (25i; 69iii; 136ii); <i>will</i> (31vi; 54ii; 55; 76iii; 97viii; 104iii; 107; 116ii; 117ii). Adjunctive: <i>to be honest</i> (16i); <i>maybe</i> (17i; 31viii); <i>still</i> (21; 97ii; 105); <i>even</i> (22i; 35i); <i>in fact</i> (26ii); <i>always</i> (29; 59ii; 67iii); <i>The belief that</i> (31i); <i>often</i> (38); <i>never</i> (54ii; 55; 79ii); <i>only</i> (67ii; 78; 84i; 85; 105; 120; 121); <i>truly</i> (67ii); <i>sadly</i> (70); <i>just</i> (73iv; 108; 114; 129); <i>actually</i> (73iv); <i>quite</i> (81iii); <i>frankly</i> (81iii); <i>simply</i> (124); <i>sure</i> (136ii).	49 (79.03%)
Deontic	Verbal: <i>would</i> (67i; 82; 83); <i>must</i> (87); <i>can</i> (99; 101iv; 102; 103; 122); <i>need</i> (125ii; 130; 131); <i>could</i> (129).	13 (20.97%)
Total		62 (100%)

Table 3: Distribution of Adjunct types in the speech

Adjunct type	Clause	Frequency/percentage
Circumstantial	3; 4; 7i; 9iix2; 9iii; 10; 16i; 18x2; 20i; 21; 22ii; 22iii; 23ii; 26ii; 27ii; 28; 29; 30; 31viii; 32ii; 33iix2; 34; 35i; 36x3; 37; 39ix2; 39iix3; 40; 41x2; 42; 43; 45; 48; 49iii; 49viii; 51; 53; 56ii; 57ii; 60i; 62; 63; 64; 66i; 66ii; 67ii; 68i; 68ii; 69iii; 70; 71x3; 72ii; 73iv; 75iv; 76iii; 77i; 82; 85; 86i; 86ii; 87x2; 92; 94; 97iii; 97iv; 97v; 97vii; 98i; 102; 103; 104iii; 107; 110; 111x2; 112iii; 112iv; 112iv; 113; 114; 115; 116i; 118iii; 118iv; 120; 121; 122; 123x2; 124; 126;	117 (44.83%)

Adjunct type		Clause	Frequency/ percentage
		129; 130; 131; 132; 133x2; 134; 135; 136i; 136ii; 137i; 137iii; 140i; 140ii; 142i; 142ii.	
Modal	<i>Mood</i>	<i>to be honest</i> (16i); <i>maybe</i> (17i; 31viii); <i>still</i> (21; 97ii; 105); <i>even</i> (22i; 35i); <i>in fact</i> (26ii); <i>always</i> (29; 59ii; 67iii); <i>The belief that</i> (31i); <i>often</i> (38); <i>never</i> (54ii; 55; 79ii); <i>only</i> (67ii; 78; 84i; 85; 105; 120; 121); <i>truly</i> (67ii); <i>sadly</i> (70); <i>just</i> (73iv; 108; 114; 129); <i>actually</i> (73iv); <i>quite</i> (81iii); <i>frankly</i> (81iii); <i>simply</i> (124); <i>sure</i> (136ii).	35 (13.41%)
	<i>Polarity</i>	<i>Yeah</i> (8).	01 (00.38%)
	<i>Comment</i>	<i>unfortunately</i> (68i); <i>luckily</i> (108)	02 (00.77%)
	<i>Vocative</i>	<i>Chicago</i> (6); <i>America</i> (15; 86i); <i>My girl</i> (42); <i>folks</i> (21; 99; 101iv); <i>Kamala and Tim</i> (104i); <i>y'all</i> (108; 128; 136i; 142i).	12 (04.60%)
Textual	<i>Conjunctive</i>	<i>but</i> (9iii; 16i; 22iii; 90i; 97i; 105; 142ii.); <i>and</i> (13ii; 14ii; 14iii; 17i; 18; 31iv; 31v; 39ii; 40; 44; 50ii; 66i; 79i; 81iii; 84ii; 86ii; 103; 104ii; 107; 116ii; 117ii; 117iv; 118v; 136ii; 137ii; 137iii.); <i>so</i> (21; 28; 39i; 59ii; 82; 97ii; 98i; 99; 116i; 122; 126; 130.); <i>if</i> (22ii; 25ii; 31i; 31ii; 31iii; 31vii; 56i; 57i; 60i; 116i; 117i; 118i; 118ii; 123ii.); <i>that</i> (24ii; 25i; 27ii; 49iii; 54ii; 73iv; 104iii.); <i>then</i> (31viii; 40); <i>though</i> (35i); <i>That's why</i> (36; 87); <i>It's why</i> (37); <i>regardless where</i> (49iii); <i>or</i> (49vii; 56ii); <i>Because</i> (51; 101ii; 128); <i>throughout</i> (66i); <i>instead</i> (78); <i>as</i> (90i; 137iv); <i>whether</i> (112iv); <i>before</i> (140i).	88 (33.72%)
	<i>Continuity</i>	<i>Yeah</i> (141); <i>Yes</i> (92); <i>No</i> (58; 61; 100; 109).	06 (02.29%)
Total			261 (100%)

As Table 1 shows, the speaker deploys a total number of 246 clauses: 227 ranking clauses (i.e. 92.28%) and 19 minor clauses (i.e. 07.72%). The minor clauses identified in the speech are Clauses (2; 6; 8; 31vii; 31viii; 52; 58; 61; 75ii; 75iii; 75iv; 76i; 76ii; 77i; 89; 100; 109; 118v and 141). The presence of these minor clauses reveals that the speech contains a spoken mode. A cursory look at the table further indicates that the speaker selects four out of the five types of Mood: 218 (i.e. 88.62%) declarative clauses, 03 (i.e. 01.22%) interrogative clauses, 02 (i.e. 00.81%) modulated interrogative clauses and 23 (i.e. 09.35%) imperative clauses. As it appears, declaratives rank first, imperatives second, interrogatives third and modulated interrogatives fourth in this speech. The predominance of declaratives suggests that the speech is mainly concerned with sharing information. To be specific, the speaker uses declarative clauses to encode three major functions: 1) describe a situation (i.e. the state of affairs of the presidential elections) and explain how this situation is tied to the very nature of the United States of America (i.e. America, as a nation, is more than ever threatened or its democratic heritage is more than ever threatened, and by extension, the future of all Americans is more than ever menaced) (Clauses 7i-38); 2) legitimate self (Clauses 42-67iii; 92-109 and 140i-142) and delegitimate others (Clauses 68i-89) and 3) convince and appeal to the audience to act in her interest (Clauses 110-119).

Like declaratives, the speaker employs imperatives to express her gratitude (Clauses 1; 4; 5; 138 and 142i) to, summon or direct the attention of her recipients (Clauses 49i; 72i; 73i; 74i; 75i; 77i; 97i; 101i; 112i; 123i and 126), get them to do something for her

(79i; 90ii; 91i; 137i; 137ii and 143) and pray for them (Clause 139). The three interrogative and two modulated interrogative clauses found in the speech align perfectly with the foregoing. For instance, the interrogative “isn’t it?” in Clause (7ii) is a Mood tag. The speaker uses this tag to signal that she is explicitly requesting something from her audience. She also deploys the two modulated interrogatives to request a certain emotional reaction from her audience: “82. *So* (Aj), *why* (Wh/Ac) *would* (Fml) *any of us* (S) *accept* (P) *this* (C) *from anyone seeking our highest office* (Ac)? 83. *Why* (Wh/Ac) *would* (Fml) *we* (S) *normalize* (P) *that type of backward leadership* (C)?”

Table 2 suggests that the speaker employs 62 Modality features: 49 (i.e. 79.03%) epistemic and 13 (i.e. 20.97%) deontic. As it appears, epistemic modality predominates over deontic modality. The predominance of epistemic modality indicates that the speech contains a less authoritarian tenor. Out of the 49 epistemic modality elements, only 14 are encoded in verbal operators including “would”; “can” and “will”. The presence of these operators evinces that the speaker expresses probability and usuality in her speech. On the contrary, 35 epistemic modality features are realized by Mood Adjuncts including “to be honest”; “maybe”; “still”; “even”; “in fact”; “always”; “in fact”; “The belief that”; “often”; “never”; “truly”; “only”; “sadly”; “just”; “actually”; “quite”; “frankly”; “simply” and “sure”. Like modal operators, these Mood Adjuncts express probability and usuality. In addition, they convey intensification or maximization, presumption or inclination. Unlike epistemic modality, the use of 13 deontic modality features exudes that the speaker expresses obligation or permission including willingness

and ability in her speech. These features are exclusively encoded in modal verbs including “would”; “must”; “can”; “need” and “could”.

Table 3 evinces that the speaker employs a total number of 261 Adjuncts: 117 (i.e. 44.83%) Circumstantial Adjuncts, 50 (i.e. 19.16%) Modal Adjuncts and 94 (i.e. 36.01%) Textual Adjuncts. As it is obvious, Circumstantial Adjuncts outnumber the other types. These Adjuncts express experiential meanings in the speech (Eggs, 2004). Next to Circumstantial Adjuncts come Textual Adjuncts. Within this category, Conjunctive Adjuncts predominate over Continuity Adjuncts. This suggests a written mode. On the contrary, the presence of the 06 Continuity Adjuncts indicates a spoken mode. Likewise, the use of Modal Adjuncts points to the suspected spoken mode. In this category, Mood Adjuncts occupy the first position. As stated earlier in the preceding paragraph, these Adjuncts express probability and usuality, intensification or maximization, presumption or inclination in the speech. They are followed by Vocative Adjuncts. The Vocatives found in the speech are “Chicago”; “America”; “My girl”; “folks”; “Kamala and Tim” and “y’all”. The speaker deploys these Vocatives to address her recipients (present or not at the DNC) directly. Surprisingly, none of the Vocatives includes an address term. This exudes an informal tenor. Finally, though Comment and Polarity Adjuncts exist in a very low proportion in the speech, they add to the interpersonal dimension therein.

5.2 Identification of Appraisal Features in the Speech

As mentioned in the preceding section, the speaker employs, in varying proportions, Mood features (Mood, Modality and Adjunct). These Mood features indicate how she uses language to negotiate social relations. For instance, the analysis of Mood suggests that she mainly deploys declarative clauses to realize three major functions: 1) describe a situation (i.e. the state of affairs of the presidential elections) and explain how this situation is tied to the very nature of the United States of America (i.e. America, as a nation, is more than ever threatened or its democratic heritage is more than ever threatened, and by extension, the future of all Americans is more than ever menaced) (Clauses 7i-38); 2) legitimate self (Clauses 42-67iii; 92-109 and 140i-142) and delegitimize others (Clauses 68i-89) and 3) convince and appeal to the audience to act in her interest (Clauses 110-119). The remaining Mood types (Imperatives, Interrogatives and Modulated Interrogatives) align with and reinforce these functions. Apart from Mood features, the speaker deploys Appraisal resources to construe feelings. These resources include Attitude (Affect, Judgment and Appreciation), Engagement and Graduation.

In the very beginning of her speech, the speaker encodes a positive attitude by asserting that “3. We (S) got (F/P) a big night (C) ahead (Ac).” Note that her use

of the first-person plural pronoun “We” is inclusive here. That is, this pronoun serves to designate both the speaker and her recipients. Elsewhere, the speaker employs the token “let us” in (90ii; 91i; 137i and 137ii). This suggests a sense of solidarity or shared responsibility. Again, the speaker’s use of the epithet “big” expresses her appreciation of the entity “night” that she describes. In the same token, the speaker foregrounds a positive attitude by acknowledging that “7i. Something, something wonderfully magical (S) is (F) in the air (Ac), 7ii. isn’t (Fn) it (S)?”. Here, she mentions the lexical item “something” twice for emphatic reasons. However, she modifies the item with the attribute “wonderfully magical” with a view to arousing her recipients’ emotions. She also employs the Mood tag “isn’t it?” to explicitly signal that she is expecting a certain emotional response from them. While the term “something” obviously looks vague, the recipients naturally find it easy to infer its meaning in context. The speaker further depicts the expected emotional response in terms that construe a blend of emotions: positive and negative. Positive emotions are encoded in these nominal groups: “the contagious power of hope”, “the anticipation”, “the energy”, and “the exhilaration of once again being on the cusp of a brighter day” in (10), “The dream that our parents and grandparents” in (14) and “hope” in (15). Note that the nominal groups in (10) are presented to the audience in a gradual way. This somewhat evinces graduation. The nominal groups, as it appears, express the speaker’s optimism, patriotism or sense of responsibility and most importantly her being historically conscious or conservative. On the contrary, the nominal group “The chance to vanquish the demons of fear, division, and hate that” in (13) encodes negative emotions. This nominal group unfailingly construes the speaker’s fear; a fear that she intends to share with and instill in her audience:

10. A familiar feeling that (S)’s (F) been buried (P) too deep (Ac) for far too long (Ac)... 12. It (S)’s (F) the contagious power of hope, the anticipation, the energy, the exhilaration of once again being on the cusp of a brighter day (C) (Dec). 13i. The chance to vanquish the demons of fear, division, and hate that (S) have (F) consumed (P) us (C) (Dec) 13ii. and (Aj) continue (F) pursuing (P) the unfinished promise of this great nation (C) (Dec). 14i. The dream (C) that our parents and grandparents (S) fought (F/P) (Dec) 14ii. and (Aj) died (F/P) (Dec) 14iii. and (Aj) sacrificed for (F/P) (Dec). 15. America (Av), hope (S) is (F) making (P) a comeback (C) (Dec).

From Clause complexes (16-38), the speaker further deploys a gamut of interpersonal resources to encode two cardinal or fundamental values: home education and motherhood. The speaker evokes home education to connote that she and her candidate are well-brought up by their parents, mainly by their mothers. She also evokes motherhood or the mother figure here to

connote an embodiment of knowledge (including moral values) with a view to substantiating her choice of a candidate. This indicates a positive attitude. She also likens the loss of this figure (her mother) with what she terms “the dimming of that hope” in (16). This suggests a negative attitude. Above it all, the speaker positions herself with respect to the two values. This denotes engagement. The interpersonal resources she uses here include projection, modality, polarity and repetition. For example, the modality features she deploys include “to be honest” in (16); “maybe” in (17); “still” in (21); “even” and “d” in (22); “can” in (25); “in fact” in (26); “always” in (30); “The belief that”; “will” and “maybe” in (31); “Even” in (35); “d” and “often” in (38). While some of the identified modality elements encode certainty (“will”; “d”; “can” and “The belief that”), others express intensity (“even” and “in fact”), honesty (“to be honest”), usuality (“always” and “often”), probability (“maybe”) and temporality (“still”). As it appears, this extract contains fewer modality compared to polarity. This is to say, most of the clauses in the speech are assigned either positive or negative value by the speaker. But there are only three instances of negative polarity here: “wasn’t” in (22i and 27ii) and “didn’t” in (26i). Again, the speaker employs repetition (lexical and structural) in this passage. She repeats such lexical and structural items as “I”; “you”; “we”; “she”; “they” or/and their variants, “those values”; “the values”; “the woman”; “my mother”; “my mum”; “all children”; “all people”; “our mothers”; “You see”, “if you do unto others”; “if you love thy neighbor”; “if you work”; “if you scrape”; “if you sacrifice”; etc. All these repeated items serve to realize the speaker’s stance; i.e. by using these items, she projects herself as a conservative who is strongly worried about the future of every American-born citizen, and by extension, that of America.

The speaker’s use of the personal pronouns “I”; “you”; “we”; “she”; “they” or/and their variants deserves a few comments here as it indicates a shift in perspective in this extract and across the whole speech. Recall we said earlier that the speaker’s deployment of “we” in (3) suggests inclusiveness; i.e. it includes the speaker and her recipients. Other instances of we-inclusiveness in the speech that deserve to be mentioned here include (86; 87; 90; 91; 93; 96; 98; 99; 101 and 103). It is noteworthy to add that the speaker employs the modal operators “must” in (87) and “cannot” in (99; 101; 102 and 103) to encode strong obligation: “87. *That’s why* (Aj) we (S) must (Fml) do (P) everything (C) in our power (Ac) [to elect two of those good, big-hearted people] (Ac). ...99. *So* (Aj) *folks* (Av), we (S) cannot (Fnml) be (P) our own worst enemies (C). ... 101i. *See* (P), 101ii. *because* (Aj) the minute something (S) goes (F/P) wrong (Ca), 101iii. The minute a lie (S) takes (F/P) hold (Ca), 101iv. *folks* (Av), we (S) cannot (Fnml) start (P) wringing our hands (C) (Dec). 102. We (S) cannot (Fnml) get (P) a Goldilocks complex (C) [about whether everything is just right] (Ac). 103. *And* (Aj) we (S) cannot (Fnml)

indulge (P) our anxieties (C) [about whether this country will elect someone like Kamala instead of doing everything we can to get someone like Kamala elected] (Ac).” Now consider how the variant “our” of the same pronoun is deployed in (34 and 35): “34. Kamala Harris and I (S) built (F/P) our lives (C) on those same foundational values (Ac). 35i. Even (Am) *though* (Aj) our mothers (S) grew up (F/P) an ocean apart (Ac), 35ii. they (S) shared (F/P) the same belief in the promise of this country (C).” Note that the use of this pronoun indicates inclusiveness. However, unlike in the prior case, the pronoun only includes the speaker and her candidate.

Note also that the pronoun “they” is used in (35) to designate the speaker’s and her candidate’s mothers. But elsewhere, in (26 and 27) and in (94; 104; 105 and 106) to be precise, the speaker employs the same pronoun to refer respectively to her parents and Kamala Harris and Tim Walz. Again, she uses the pronoun “I” and its variants in (16; 18-23, for instance) to designate herself. By deploying these pronouns, the speaker encodes her opinions, attitudes, personal cognitions or ideologies in the speech. In addition, the speaker employs the pronoun “she” and its variant “her” in (21; 24; 26; 29 and 30) to refer to her mother. On the contrary, she uses the same pronouns in (36; 37 and 38) to designate Kamala’s mother. Finally, the speaker uses the generic “you” and its variants (*almost throughout the text*) to directly address her recipients (present or not at the DNC). By using these pronouns, the speaker acts on (the minds of) her audience in order to make them believe and do things against their will or against their best interests. Her use of the Clause structures “You see” in (23i and 32i) and “You know” in (9i; 11i and 125i), the jussive imperatives (“Look” in [49i; 74i; 75i; 77ii and 112i]; “See” in [72i and 101i]; “Wait” in [73i]; “remember” in [97i]; “Don’t complain” in [123i]; “consider” in [126] and “welcome” and the suggestive imperative “let me” in (79i) (it implies “allow me”); in [143]) evinces cognitive manipulation (Amoussou and Aguessy, 2020) or/and discursive manipulation (van Dijk, 2006b).

From what has been said thus far, it is evident that the speaker employs interpersonal resources to legitimate her choice of a candidate, and self-evidently presents this candidate to her recipients as a trustworthy or credible and well-educated person qualified for the presidential function. This exudes a positive attitude. It also suggests judgment and engagement. Consider how she represents Kamala Harris and her running mate, Tim Walz in the extract below. In fact, the speaker’s choice of words and grammatical structures entirely projects a positive image of these two persons. But let us single out Clause complex (104) for illustration. In the first clause (104i), the speaker uses the Vocative “Kamala and Tim” to designate her candidate and her running mate. This Vocative, *as it were*, indicates the use of first names. This

suggests an informal tenor wherein the participants (the speaker and the persons named) are intimate, affectively involved and share an equal power relation. Again, her use of the Complement “amazing lives” associated with the Subject “they” (designating “Kamala and Tim”) encodes a positive appreciation. A Transitivity analysis of this clause further confirms the preceding inference in that it shows that “they” is the Actor, “lived” a material process and “amazing lives” a Range. Likewise, in the second clause (104ii), the speaker employs “I” as a Subject, “am” a Finite and “confident” as an Attributive Complement. The pronoun “I” refers to the speaker and the Attributive Complement qualifies her. This construes a positive feeling. It also suggests engagement. Again, in the last clause (104iii), she deploys the modal operator “will” and the Circumstantial Adjunct “with compassion, inclusion, and grace” to encode certainty; i.e. she is very sure that these two people she is presenting to Americans are trustworthy, credible and humane.

42. *My girl* (Av), Kamala Harris (S), is (F) more than ready (Ca) for this moment (Ac). 43. She (S) is (F) one of the most qualified people (C) [ever to seek the office of the presidency] (Ac). 44. *And* (Aj) she (S) is (F) one of the most dignified—a tribute to her mother, to my mother, and to your mother too (C). 45. The embodiment of the stories (C) we (S) tell (F/P) ourselves (C) about this country (Ac). 46. Her story (S) is (F) your story (C). 47. It (S)’s (F) my story (C). 48. It (S)’s (F) the story of the vast majority of Americans (C) [trying to build a better life] (Ac). ... 53. Kamala (S) has (F) shown (P) her allegiance to this nation (C), [not by spewing anger and bitterness, but by living a life of service and always pushing the doors of opportunity open to others] (Ac). 54i. She (S) understands (F/P) [54ii. *that* (Aj) most of us (S) will (Fms) never (Am) be afforded (P) the grace of failing forward (C)] (C).... 104i. *Kamala and Tim* (Av), they (S) have (F) lived (P) amazing lives (C) 104ii. *and* (Aj) I (S) am (F) confident (Ca) 104iii. *that* (Aj) they (S) will (Fms) lead (P) with compassion, inclusion, and grace (Ac).

Unlike Kamala Harris and Tim Walz whom the speaker depicts positively, she portrays Donald Trump in terms that evoke only negative emotions in her audience. For instance, her use of Clause (71) projects Trump in a negative role. Similarly, her use of the nominal group “his limited, narrow view of the world” associated with the Attributive Complement “threatened” and the Circumstantial Adjunct “by the existence of two hardworking, highly educated, successful people” in (72ii) construes a blend of feelings: positive and negative. Naturally, the negative feelings are related to Trump. Again, the subsequent clause (72iii) which serves as a defining clause for the preceding one clearly includes the Attributive Complement “Black” ascribed to the speaker and her husband, Barrack Obama. Here, the speaker surreptitiously suggests that Trump does not

tolerate Blacks (Black Americans); i.e. he is a racist. Moreover, she employs the Complement “one of the “Black jobs” associated with Trump in (73iii) to further project his condescending attitudes towards Blacks. She also deploys this group of words to encode self-glorification; i.e. she glorifies her ethnic group by discursively *blackening* the presidential job. This alludes to the ideologies of Black Power. Again, the speaker increasingly makes recourse to nominalization to foreground the negative properties of Trump. This clearly denotes a “shift from the clausal to the nominal construal of experience” (Webster in Halliday and Webster, 2009, p. 4) in the speech. It also evinces graduation. The nominalized verbs she deploys are “doubling down on” (74ii), “cutting” (75ii) and “taking away” (75iii), “Shutting down” (76i), “banning” (76ii), “Demonizing” (77i), “Going” (79ii; 80 and 81i) and “Doing” (84i). Note that all the nominalized clauses represent Trump or his intention (or Action Plan) negatively. Consider, for example, Clause (74iii). Here, the speaker accuses Trump of substituting real ideas and solutions with ugly, misogynistic and racist lies. However, she couches this accusation to make it palatable for her recipients.

71. For years (Ac), Donald Trump (S) did (F/P) everything (C) in his power (Ac) [to try to make people fear us] (Ac) (Dec). 72i. See (P), 72ii. his limited, narrow view of the world (S) made (F/P) him (C) feel (P) threatened (Ca) by the existence of two hardworking, highly educated, successful people (Ac) (Dec) 72iii. who (Wh/S) happen (F) to be (P) Black (Ca). 73i. Wait (P), 73ii. I (S) want (F) to know (P) (Dec): [73iii. Who (Wh/S)’s (F) going to tell (P) him (C) [73iv. *that* [the job (C) he (S)’s (F) currently (Ac) seeking (P)] (S) might (Fms) just (Am) be (P) one of those “Black jobs” (C)] (C)] (C)? 74i. Look (P), 74ii. it (S)’s (F) his same old con (C) (Dec): 74iii. doubling down on ugly, misogynistic, racist lies as a substitute for real ideas and solutions that (S) will (Fms) actually (Am) make (P) people’s lives (C) better (Ca). 75i. Look (P), 75ii. because cutting our healthcare (Mn), 75iii. taking away our freedom to control our bodies (Mn), 75iv. the freedom to become a mother [through IVF like I did] (Ac) (Mn)—75v. those things (S) are not (Fn) going to improve (P) the health outcomes of our wives, mothers, and daughters (C). 76i. Shutting down the Department of Education (Mn), 76ii. banning our books (Mn)—76iii. none of that (S) will (Fms) prepare (P) our kids (C) for the future (Ac). 77i. Demonizing our children [for being who they are and loving who they love] (Ac) (Mn)—77ii. look (P), 77iii. that (S) doesn’t (Fn) make (P) anybody’s life (C) better (Ca). 78. *Instead* (Aj), it (S) only (Am) makes (F/P) us (C) small (Ca). 79i. *And* (Aj) let me (S) tell (P) you (C) this (C): 79ii. Going small (S) is (F) never (Am) the answer (C) (Dec). 80. Going small (S) is (F) [the opposite of what we teach our kids] (C). 81i. Going small (S) is (F) petty (Ca), 81ii. it (S)’s (F) unhealthy (Ca), 81iii. *and* (Aj) quite (Am) frankly (Am), it (S)’s (F)

unpresidential (Ca). 82. *So* (Aj), why (Wh/Ac) would (Fml) any of us (S) accept (P) this (C) from anyone seeking our highest office (Ac)? 83. Why (Wh/Ac) would (Fml) we (S) normalize (P) that type of backward leadership (C)? 84i. Doing so (S) only (Am) demeans (F/P) (Dec) 84ii. *and* (Aj) cheapens (F/P) our politics (C) (Dec).

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how Former First Lady Michelle Obama deploys language in her political campaign speech in support of Kamala Harris, a presidential candidate, delivered on August 21st, 2024 at the 2024 Democratic National Convention (henceforth, DNC) held in Chicago, to encode interpersonal meaning. It has borrowed its theoretical underpinnings (Mood and Appraisal) from SFL and the descriptive mixed-method research design. With this, it has specifically analyzed the interpersonal resources the speaker employs in her speech to negotiate social relations and construe feelings as well as a relationship of solidarity. The analysis has yielded some salient findings. For instance, the findings evince that the speaker uses, in varying proportions, Mood features (Mood, Modality and Adjunct) to negotiate social relations. The analysis of Mood shows that she selects four out of the five types of Mood: declarative, interrogative, modulated interrogative and imperative. The predominant type is declarative. The predominance of declaratives indicates that the speech is mainly concerned with the exchange of information. To restate the foregoing, the speaker mainly deploys declarative clauses to realize three major functions: 1) describe a situation (i.e. the state of affairs of the presidential elections) and explain how this situation is tied to the very nature of the United States of America (i.e. America, as a nation, is more than ever threatened or its democratic heritage is more than ever threatened, and by extension, the future of all Americans is more than ever menaced) (Clauses 7i-38); 2) legitimate self (Clauses 42-67iii; 92-109 and 140i-142) and delegitimize others (Clauses 68i-89) and 3) convince and appeal to the audience to act in her interest (Clauses 110-119).

Likewise, the analysis of Modality reveals that the speaker employs the two types of Modality: epistemic and deontic. The dominant type is epistemic. This indicates that the speech is marked by a less authoritarian tenor. Again, the analysis of Adjuncts exudes that the speaker deploys the three types of Adjunct: Circumstantial, Modal and Textual. The dominant type is Circumstantial. This evinces that the speech embodies experiential meanings. Moreover, the findings indicate that the speaker uses, in varying proportions, Appraisal features (Attitude, Engagement and Graduation) to construe feelings. The most predominant type is Attitude. This shows that the speech is mainly concerned with feelings, including emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of things. In conclusion, it can be established that Michelle

Obama deliberately makes use of the aforementioned interpersonal resources to influence or persuade and manipulate her recipients with a view to getting them to act in her own interest; i.e. vote for her candidate, Kamala Harris, whom she depicts positively, while she at the same represents her opponent, Donald Trump, exclusively in negative terms. While this analysis has demonstrated how the speaker deploys interpersonal resources to interact and bond with her recipients, unveiling the stance she takes towards what she communicates to them, including the two vying candidates, it has not explored how she uses language to encode ideational (experiential and logical) and textual meanings. Future research can look at these aspects.

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