# Language, Attitudes and Party Politics: The Representation of Republicans and Democrats in Presidential Weekly Addresses

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**Abstract**

This study investigates Barack Obama's attitudes towards Republicans and Democrats by analyzing a corpus of 249 Presidential weekly addresses. Analysis shows that Obama's attitudes towards the Republicans are characterized by a negative judgment of propriety, whereas when Republicans and Democrats are mentioned together, his attitudes are characterized by his hopes for and commendations on bipartisan collaboration. An analytical model based on the attitude schema is proposed to explicate the strategies for encoding attitudes. It is found that negative attitudes are always expressed implicitly by recounting events that elicit the attitudes (i.e. behaviors of the Republicans) and performing speech acts that are motivated by the attitudes (i.e. urging the Republicans to stop the wrong behaviors). The patterns of attitudes reflect bipartisan conflict and cooperation on the one hand, and constitute an important strategy to battle the opposition party and build coalition on the other.

**Keywords**: Political discourse analysis; attitude; Presidential rhetoric; party politics; Obama; weekly addresses

## 1. Introduction

In October 2013, the federal government of the United States was shut down for more than two weeks due to the dispute between the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and the Democratic Senate over the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (known as Obamacare). President Obama commented in *Your Weekly Address* on 5 October 2013: "Earlier this week, the Republican House of Representatives chose to shut down a government over a health care law they don't like." By using the verb 'chose', Obama clearly attributed the responsibility to the Republicans and criticized their behavior. This incident reflected the long existing bipartisan conflict between the Republicans and the Democrats throughout American history. The conflict can be traced back to the first half of the 19th century when the Democratic Party was founded to represent the interest of white

Southerners, in particular, slave owners, while the Republican Party was founded later to represent the interest of anti-slavery activists and modernizers. In the modern era, the policies of the two parties still have sharp differences, and one of the fundamental differences is around the role of government (Bibby 2004). Democrats tend to favor an active role of government in society and support a broad range of social services, while Republicans favor a limited influence of government, both fiscally and socially.

Bipartisan differences result in intense competition in Presidential and Congress elections, as well as conflicts between the President and the Congress. Due to the separation of powers between the President and the Congress, the President's power is significantly constrained. Unlike other democratic countries, for example, the United Kingdom, where the Prime Minister is always the majority leader in the House of Commons and can get his/her policies passed, the President in the US has no role in the House of Representatives. In the case of the Obama administration, the House of Representatives is dominated by the Republican Party which can veto his proposals, as in the aforementioned case of Obamacare. As a result, the President is involved in bipartisan conflict during his whole candidature.

Bipartisan conflict and competition are primarily manifested in the politicians' use of language, which has been extensively studied by linguists and (critical) discourse analysts. However, most studies focus on the language during the election period, in particular the Presidential debates (e.g. Benoit 2007; Bilmes 1999; Charteris-Black 2006; Friedenberg 1990; Gordon and Miller 2004; Marietta 2009; Shenhav 2009; Zichermann 2006), whereas there has been no study of bipartisan conflict in the speeches of Presidents in power. While in election debates candidates always use acclaiming, attacking, and defending strategies to establish preferability (Benoit 2007), Presidents may use different strategies to deal with bipartisan conflict as they have already won the battle and are supposed to serve the whole nation in reconciliation with the opposing party. Therefore, investigating how Presidents position themselves in relation to the opposition party may offer new insights into political communication in the bipartisan system.

This study analyzes how partisan relation is reflected in Obama's (2009-2014) *Your Weekly Address*, and what his linguistic strategies are for constructing his attitudinal stance towards the two parties. Weekly addresses are chosen because they are an essential component of Presidential rhetoric, but they have received scant attention from discourse researchers. Weekly addresses have a long tradition in the United States. President Wilson initiated twice weekly news conferences as a public relations platform from 1913-1915 and

this routine practice has been carried on by his successors, although with different degrees of regularity (Sacco 2011). President Reagan started the weekly radio address in 1982. However, weekly address has never been so frequent and accessible until Barack Obama took office in 2009. President Obama changed its name to 'Your Weekly Address' and used it as a main platform for communicating his policies and rallying against the opposition party. Throughout his candidature, President Obama delivered *Your Weekly Address* every Saturday morning; it was made available on the YouTube page and the White House government website, aside from radio and TV broadcastings. Furthermore, Obama's *Your Weekly Address* is also chosen for its wide coverage of bipartisan issues. We focus on Obama's attitudes towards the Republicans and the Democrats. To analyze the types of attitudes and their realization in an explicit way, we draw upon the Appraisal system developed by Martin and White (2005). It should be pointed out that 'attitude' in the Appraisal theory and in the current study refers to a system of meanings which are realized in language, that is, choices of words and grammar. Therefore, our concern is not with Obama's inner feelings (which are apparently not available), but how attitudes are carefully designed as discursive strategies to battle against the opposition party and to build a coalition. In what follows, we shall first situate our study in the field of political discourse analysis and then narrow it down to studies of weekly addresses and Obama's speeches. After that, the analytical framework based on Appraisal system is introduced and attitudes in the concordances are analyzed. Finally, the results are discussed in relation to power, party politics and Presidential rhetoric.

## 2. Political discourse analysis and studies of Obama's speeches

2.1 Political discourse analysis

Over the last two decades, political discourse has occupied a central place in discourse studies, in particular, critical discourse analysis (CDA) (e.g. Charteris-Black 2005, 2014; Chilton 2004; Fairclough 1998; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012; Van Dijk 1997; Wodak 2009). For critical discourse analysts, political discourse is a form of social action; it is a constitutive part of various political process, such as governing, legislating, election campaigns, and party propaganda (Van Dijk 1997: 21). In what follows, we will briefly discuss the main theoretical approaches to the critical analysis of political discourse. Van Dijk (1997) adopted a socio-cognitive approach and discussed the 'preferred structures and strategies' in political discourse within a multi-dimensional framework incorporating topics (semantic macropropositions), superstructures (textual schemata), local semantics (e.g.

cohesion, presupposition, entailment, implicitness), lexicon (word choices, e.g. 'terrorists' vs. 'freedom fighters'), syntax (e.g. use of pronouns, choice of passive/active constructions, topicalization, etc.), rhetoric (e.g. repetition, hyperbole, rhetorical questions, etc.), expression structures (paralinguistic features such as volume, pitch level and intonation), and speech acts (e.g. expressives, commissives, assertives). Chilton (2004) made another important contribution to political discourse analysis. Drawing on cognitive science and cognitive linguistics, he focused on the way in which humans represent the world in their minds in the process of political communication. Also working from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, Charteris-Black (2005) focused on the crucial role of metaphor in political communication by analyzing the speeches of influential politicians such as Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Margaret Thatcher, and Tony Blair. Wodak (2009) adopted a discourse-historical approach which is concerned with latent power dynamics and the range of potentials in agents. This approach distinguishes between three dimensions of textual meanings and structures: the topics which are spoken/written about, the discursive strategies employed, and the linguistic means that are drawn upon to realize both topics and strategies. Furthermore, it integrates and triangulates knowledge about historical sources and the background of the social and political fields within which discursive events are embedded. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) introduced a new approach to analyzing the structure and representation of practical argumentation in political discourse, and applied their framework to a variety of political discourse types, such as government reports, parliamentary debates, political speeches, and online discussions of political issues.

Adopting different theoretical approaches, researchers have analyzed a wide range of political discourse, for example, political interviews, government reports, election campaigns, and Presidential speeches. Among them, the speech of political leaders is one of the most popular research objects for discourse and rhetorical analysts (e.g. Austermühl 2014; Biria and Mohammadi 2012; Campbell and Jamieson 2008; Charteris-Black 2005; Graham et al. 2004; Shogan 2006). Speeches of Presidents/Prime Ministers have been analyzed for rhetorical strategies and hidden ideologies. Researchers have also examined how Presidential speeches are targeted at specific audiences (e.g. Campbell and Jamieson 2008). Compared with Presidential speeches such as inaugural and state of the union addresses, the weekly addresses which "convey the 'tick tock' of everyday Presidential actions have gone largely unnoticed in the scholarly literature" (Scacco 2011: 66). Among the few studies, Jones and Rowland (2000), in their study of President Reagan's weekly radio addresses, found that

Reagan's addresses functioned in "creating public support, reassuring the public, agenda setting, role definition, and self-defense" (p. 257). Sigelman and Whissell (2002) compared the weekly addresses of Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton and found generic similarities, although Clinton projected a more active and positive image than Reagan. Scacco (2011) compared the weekly addresses of Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama, and found that although they were ideologically disparate, they used the weekly routine for similar purposes, namely, sermonizing to the nation, projecting the power of the presidency, and insulating the institution from legislative inaction. However, the findings of most of these studies are based on the observation and summary of a limited number of samples, rather than theory-guided discourse analysis of a sizable corpus. For example, these studies may tell us that weekly addresses are used "to rouse the public to action for certain proposals" (Scacco 2011: 78), but not exactly how this is done through specific language choices. Even if some excerpts are used to illustrate the language choices, there is no theorizing of these choices, as their proponents do not have a semantic theory of language. As Van Dijk (2007: 6) comments, relevant research in communication studies and political science often "does no more than cite, summarize, paraphrase or merely comment on the content of the texts, as if they speak for themselves". As a result, basic properties of meaning making practices are left only poorly articulated, which hinders the thorough understanding of the process and effect of political communication. The present study complements research in political science and communication by providing an explicit model for analyzing the discourse semantics of weekly addresses.

2.2 Studies of President Obama's Speeches

In this section, we shift our attention to studies of President Obama's speeches. Obama's speeches have received a wealth of attention from linguists and discourse analysts who have investigated the communicative/rhetorical strategies (e.g. Jenkins and Cos 2010; O'Connell et al. 2010; Sheckels 2010) and/or hidden values and ideologies in his speeches (e.g. Boyd 2009; Horváth 2009; Shayegh and Nabifar 2012). The frameworks drawn upon include systemic functional grammar (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), dimensions of discourse (Fairclough 1989), ideological discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1995), conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), rhetorical theories and so on. For example, drawing upon Fairclough's (1989) model, Horváth (2009) analyzed the ideological component enshrined in the inaugural address of President Obama. Wang (2010) analyzed two speech samples of Obama, victory

speech and inaugural address, using systemic functional grammar. Shayegh and Nabifar (2012) analyzed the execution of power in interviews with Obama, using systemic functional grammar and Fairclough's (1992) dimensions of discourse. Dougal (2013) studied 33 of Obama's Presidential speeches to explore how Obama framed social problems faced by African Americans. Kienpointner (2013) analyzed the strategies of maneuvering in the political rhetoric of Obama. Furthermore, a number of studies have been conducted on the comparison between Obama and others. For instance, Kyrala (2010) compared the speeches of Obama and John McCain in the 2008 election, using systemic functional grammar. Biria and Mohammadi (2012) investigated the typical discursive characteristics underlying the inaugural addresses of Bush's second term and Obama's first term respectively, in order to identify the social and pragmatic functions of these inaugural speeches.

This study contributes to analysis of Obama's speeches and political discourse analysis in general in the following ways. First, the present study is the first large scale corpus-based discourse analysis of weekly addresses and can deepen our understanding of this important genre of Presidential communication. While previous studies of Obama's rhetoric typically rely on a small data base (e.g. one or two speeches), this study looks at the weekly addresses spanning five years of Obama's presidency. Second, the weekly addresses in our data contain a wide range of issues concerning the two parties, and our analysis sheds light on bipartisan relations from the perspective of the President. Third, this study proposes a new framework based on the Appraisal system which enables us to analyze the strategies of attitude expression in relation to power struggle in an explicit way.

## 3. Analytical method: Corpus-based Appraisal analysis

Discourse analysts argue that social values and ideologies are not transparent, but are carefully designed, using various semiotic discursive strategies. Therefore, they should not be taken for granted; rather, they should be interpreted, or demystified, based on the systematic analysis of their discursive features (Van Dijk 2007; Wodak 2009). "One important benefit of, and motivation for, a text-oriented approach is that it becomes possible to rule out inappropriate analyses more easily—that is, the linguistic frameworks will constrain the analysis so that it is more reliable and trustworthy, giving us better criteria for the evaluation of proposals and competing hypotheses" (Bateman and Schmidt 2012: 2). Among the wide array of discursive features, evaluative concepts are the most common forms of expressing ideological content (Van Dijk, 1995: 260). White (2006: 38) also suggests that "a key aspect

of ideological functionality is evaluation – the text's positioning of its audience to take either negative or positive views of the participants, actions, happenings and state-of-affairs therein depicted". To model the attitudinal evaluations within a coherent framework, we draw upon the Appraisal system developed by Martin and White (2005). The Appraisal system encompasses the three sub-systems of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Attitude is the most sophisticated system, which includes values of emotional response (Affect), values by which human behavior is socially assessed (Judgment) and values which address the aesthetic qualities of objects and entities (Appreciation).

Affect deals with resources for construing emotional reactions, and it is further categorized into dis/inclination, un/happiness, in/security, and dis/satisfaction. Dis/inclination is to do with the desire for the condition of future events; un/happiness is to do with how much or to what extent we feel happy/unhappy; in/security deals with our anxious or assured feelings about the surroundings; dis/satisfaction refers to our feelings of frustration and fulfillment relating to activities or states of events. Judgment is concerned with the assessment of human behavior according to social sanction and social esteem. Judgment of social esteem involves sub-categories of normality (how special someone is), capacity (how capable someone is), and tenacity (how resolute someone is). Judgment of social sanction is concerned with veracity (how truthful someone is) and propriety (how ethical someone is). Appreciation is the evaluation about things, which can be divided into reaction, composition, and valuation. Reaction refers to the degree to which things catch our attention. Composition is concerned with the internal structure of things, such as balance and complexity. Valuation is to do with the value of things, such as how original or authentic things are. The types of attitudes are illustrated with examples in Table 1.

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Appraisal meanings are realized across different lexicogrammatical resources. Martin and White (2005) distinguish between *inscribed* Attitude (explicit) and *invoked* Attitude (implicit). Inscription means that attitudes are explicitly expressed by attitudinal lexes, such as those in Table 1. Invocation refers to the implicit expression of attitudes through various linguistic strategies, including using lexical metaphor (provoke), intensification (flag), or merely recounting the events (afford). We argue that the category of 'afford' needs to be further

elaborated, as the nature of events recounted constitutes different expression strategies. Feng (2012) proposed to categorize the strategies for expressing attitudes based on the attitude schema in cognitive psychology (e.g. Lazarus 1991; Scherer 1984). The schema involves three components in a relation of causation: the events, behaviors, and objects which cause the attitudes (eliciting condition); the inner feelings and attitudes; and the verbal or nonverbal actions motivated by the attitudes (resultant action), as illustrated in Figure 1. For example, in making judgments about a person, we can say 'she is very kind' (directly through attitudinal lexis), 'she donated all her money to the orphanage' (event that elicits the judgment), or 'we all need to learn from her and help others' (verbal action motivated by the attitude). Resultant verbal actions can be commissives (e.g., 'I will learn from you', 'I will never do business with you again'), directives (e.g. 'Mind your manners', 'Don't beat the dog'), or representatives which recount a material action (e.g. 'I have stopped my collaboration with him') (see Searle 1969). Different strategies imply different degrees of attitudinal responsibility. The speaker's responsibility is the lowest when recounting the eliciting conditions, as he/she is merely stating the facts and it is the listeners who infer the speaker's attitudes.

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This Appraisal system provides an effective tool for analyzing, both explicitly and implicitly, evaluative meanings in a systematic way. However, as with other approaches to discourse analysis, researchers tend to rely on the close reading of a small number of texts, which leads to concerns about representativeness and generalizability. To overcome this weakness, the present study combines corpus-based research with manual text analysis, following Bednarek (2006). The study adopts a concordance analysis approach to analyze Obama's attitudes towards the Republican and the Democratic parties. All *Your Weekly Address* transcripts were retrieved from the White House government website; the period we chose was from January 24, 2009 to January 11, 2014. Altogether, 249 transcripts were collected and a corpus of 171,858 words was compiled. Using Wordsmith 6 (Scott 2012), the concordances of the keywords 'democratic', 'democrat(s)', and 'republican(s)' were extracted and analyzed by the two authors independently, using the attitude framework. To guarantee the accuracy of analysis, we not only focused on the sentences containing the keywords, but

also considered the neighboring sentences (and even paragraphs, wherever necessary). The inter-coder agreement was above 90% and differences were resolved through discussion.

## 4.   Results and discussion

The concordances of the keywords 'democratic', 'democrat(s)', and 'republican(s)' were generated using Wordsmith 6. There are 6 concordances for 'democrat', 96 for 'democrats', 23 for 'democratic', 86 for 'republican (n. and adj.)', and 188 for 'republicans'. A closer observation shows that a large number of concordances were overlapping. After careful manual sorting, 272 concordances are kept for analysis. Among them were 162 concordances directly related to the Republicans, 0 concordances in which Obama talks about the Democrats alone, and 110 in which the Democrats and the Republicans are mentioned together. Before looking at the attitudes in detail, we notice that the number of concordances shows interesting patterns. First, President Obama talks about Republicans much more often than about Democrats. As a matter of fact, he never comments on Democrats' behaviors or policies by explicitly referring to their party. Second, he prefers talking about the Democrats together with the Republicans. In what follows, we will discuss in detail his attitudes towards the Republicans and the two parties together and explicate how the attitudes are constructed.

4.1. Attitudes towards the Republicans

The result of the analysis of the 162 concordances about the Republicans is shown in Table 2. First, in all cases where the Republicans are mentioned, the language contains attitudes. Second, judgment is the most frequent attitude that President Obama holds towards the Republican Party, when compared with affect and appreciation. Most of the time, Obama's attitudes are about the propriety of the Republicans' actions, rather than his subjective emotions (e.g. likes and dislikes). Third, negative judgments significantly overweigh positive ones. The negative judgments do not just reflect bipartisan conflict (as in the case of Obamacare), but are strategically designed to construct a negative image of the Republican Party. Fourth, when he judges the Republicans' behaviors, beliefs and policies, he prefers to do it implicitly, that is, recounting 'facts' without using any explicit evaluative lexis.

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Feng, D. and Zhang, S. (2018). Language, attitudes and party politics. *Pragmatics and Society*.

> Text 1: What is so *disturbing* is that Republicans in Congress are threatening to shut down the government.
>
> (28 September, 2013)

Attitudes can be expressed explicitly through attitudinal lexes, in particular, adjectives (i.e. the Attitude stage in Figure 1). From Table 2, we can see that this strategy is seldom used, and when it is used, it evaluates things (i.e. appreciation). In this way, Obama avoids his subjective feelings and judgments, especially when the attitudes are negative. Text 1 is an example of explicit appreciation which uses the attitudinal lexis 'disturbing' to evaluate the Republicans' threat of shutting down the government.

> Text 2: But Republicans in Congress are holding tax cuts for 98% of Americans hostage until we pass tax cuts for the wealthiest 2% of Americans. (2 October, 2012)
>
> Text 3: Republicans in Congress went home for the holidays and let that lifeline expire. And for many of their constituents who are unemployed through no fault of their own, that decision will leave them with no income at all. (4 January, 2014)

The most frequently used strategy for expressing negative judgment is recounting events which elicit attitudes from the audience. The eliciting conditions typically include two moves: the behaviors of the Republicans and the consequences. In the behavior move, Obama describes the Republicans' opposition to his policies, their improper actions and concerns. For example, in Text 2, the language does not directly represent the attitudes through attitudinal lexes (e.g. 'unwise', 'irresponsible', 'wrong', etc.), but describes the behavior in a way that it is against the interest of American people. Very often, the description of behavior is followed by its serious consequences – which further reinforces its negative nature. Text 3, in which Obama advocates his temporary insurance plan, is a typical example. However, it should be noted that the consequences may not immediately follow the behavior but may be found in other places of the text. The consequences do not just elicit negative judgment towards Republicans, but invoke fear in the audience (e.g. that they will lose their job, pay more tax, lose their medical insurance, etc.).

> Text 4: Republicans in Congress should stop the games and extend the payroll tax cut for working Americans.
>
> (10 December, 2011)

In the latter strategy, attitudes are expressed through various speech acts motivated by the attitudes. In terms of expressing negative judgment, this typically involves requesting the Republicans to stop what they are doing and do the right thing (i.e. directive speech acts), which implies that what they are doing is wrong. In Text 4, 'playing the games' is judged as improper, but rather than making direct judgments or stating the consequences of the games, Obama expresses his attitudes by urging the Republicans to stop the games. This kind of attitude expression is powerful as they serve to directly exhort the Republicans to act.

The distinction of eliciting condition and resultant action enables us to understand the strategies for the negative representation of the Republicans. First, Obama constructs a negative image of the Republicans by recounting their irresponsible, improper or wrong behavior and invokes fear in American people by highlighting the consequences of such behaviors and decisions. Second, in resultant action, Obama urges the Republicans to stop the wrong behavior and do the right thing. The expressions of attitudes reflect partisan conflict, which is characteristic in politics. At the same time, they are a strategically designed rhetoric to battle the Republicans and to coerce them into supporting him, as will be elaborated in Section 4.3.

4.2. Attitudes towards Republicans and Democrats together

As previously mentioned, in *Your Weekly Address*, Obama frequently puts Republicans and Democrats together. However, different from the representation of Republicans, they are sometimes mentioned without any attitude. As shown in Table 3, among the 110 concordances, there are 86 attitudinal expressions in total.

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In contrast to the negative attitudes towards the Republicans, the attitudes towards the two parties combined are predominantly positive. On the one hand, Obama commends the cooperation between the two parties and the achievements (positive judgment and appreciation); on the other hand, he expresses his hope that Republicans and Democrats can put partisan ideology aside and work together as one country and one people (positive affect of inclination). Different from attitudes towards the Republicans, his commendations and inclinations here are very often explicit.

Text 5: So my hope is that we can put this kind of politics aside. My hope is that Democrats and Republicans can find common ground and move forward together. (17 April, 2010)

Text 6: And I'm confident that the Democrats and Republicans in Congress can find a way to give some ground, make some hard choices, and put their shoulders to wheel to get this done for the sake of our country. (2 July, 2011)

Text 7: This isn't a Democratic or a Republican issue – it's an American issue. (3 September, 2011)

Text 8: They don't expect Democratic solutions or Republican solutions – they expect American solutions. (7 February, 2009)

Text 9: Democrats and Republicans need to work together to help grow this economy. We've got to put politics aside to get some things done. (6 August, 2011)

Text 10: And I've called on Democrats and Republicans to join me in this effort – to put aside their differences to help America meet this challenge. (16 April, 2011)


A more detailed analysis reveals that there are 41 cases of inclinations, accounting for 80% in the affect category. Using different strategies, Obama expresses his desire that the two parties should work together. In almost half of the cases, the inclination is explicitly constructed through expressions like 'I hope' and 'I would like', as in Text 5. Aside from explicit expressions, Obama uses three other strategies to express inclination indirectly. First, the inclination is expressed through other categories of affect (e.g. security and satisfaction). For example, in Text 6, the inclination is realized through the expression of confidence that they will work together (positive security). Second, similar to attitudes towards the Republicans, the inclination may also be constructed by facts that lead to the desire (i.e. eliciting conditions). In this case, Obama would stress again and again that the issues they are facing now should not be labeled as Democratic or Republican ones; rather, they are challenges for all the American people (as in Text 7). Such claims provide a strong rationale for his inclination for bipartisan cooperation. Further strengthening the rationale, he also highlights that it is the hope of American people, as in Text 8. Third, the inclination is transformed into actions motivated by the attitudes (i.e. resultant actions). The first type is directive speech acts in which the subjective desire is transformed into the obligation of both parties. Expressions like 'should', 'need to', and 'have to' are used in these cases, as in Text 9. The resultant action may also be recounts of what Obama has done in reality as a result of the inclination. For example, in Text 10, Obama explains that he has called on the Republicans to

join him (to support his fiscal plan), which is motivated by his inclination.

> Text 11: And I was *pleased* that Democrats and Republicans in Congress came together a few days ago and
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> passed a plan to cut spending and keep the government running for two more weeks. (11 March, 2011)
>
> Text 12: Democrats and Republicans have already done some *important* work together. (12 May, 2012)
>
> Text 13: What's also helping to fuel this economic growth are the tax cuts that Democrats and Republicans
>
> came together to pass in December and I signed into law – tax cuts that are already making Americans'
>
> paychecks bigger and allowing businesses to write off their investments, freeing up more money for job
>
> creation. (11 March, 2011)

Aside from inclinations, another salient feature is Obama's commendation of the bipartisan cooperation and its outcomes. First, he uses attitudinal lexis like 'pleased' and 'happy' to explicitly express his satisfaction (affect), as in Text 11. Second, he uses attitudinal lexis like 'good' and 'important' to explicitly praise the collaborations and the outcomes, as in Text 12 (appreciation). Third, aside from explicitly expressing his attitude, he also recounts the fact of the cooperation and the outcome (i.e. eliciting conditions), which implicitly constructs his positive attitude, as in Text 13.

To summarize this subsection, we have analyzed Obama's attitudes when he mentions the Republicans and the Democrats together in his weekly addresses. Similar to his attitudes towards Republicans, the ways Obama expresses attitudes include using attitudinal lexis, recounting eliciting conditions, and representing resultant actions (both directives and representatives). The attitudes mainly include commendations and hopes for bipartisan cooperation. He constantly urges both parties to put political ideologies aside and get things done. Such attitudes reflect another aspect of party politics, namely, cooperation, which coexists with conflict. This aspect of analysis will be further pursued in the following section.

## 4.3. Attitudes, power, and party politics

In the two subsections above, we have analyzed Obama's weekly addresses at two levels: patterns of attitudes and linguistic strategies of expression. We reported two major findings regarding the pattern of Obama's attitudes. First, his attitudes towards the Republicans reflect a predominantly negative judgment of propriety. Second, his attitudes towards the two parties together are characterized by positive inclinations towards bipartisan collaboration and commendations (i.e. positive judgment and appreciation) of their collaboration. As already

shown in the previous analysis, the attitudes are not merely described as individual concordances, but are interpreted as part of Presidential rhetoric for exerting power and building coalition. In this subsection, we shall explain the patterns of attitudinal stance in relation to power and party politics in the US from the perspective of critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysts consider texts as sites of struggle for power, and CDA is concerned with how power and power relations are expressed through language (e.g. Fairclough 1989; Wodak 2009). This entails two dimensions of analysis: power relations manifested in the discourse, and the power of discourse to influence the attitudes and behavior of others. In the context of party politics and separation of powers, the weekly address is a site of struggle between the Democrats and the Republicans and between the President and the Congress. President Obama's attitudes reflect two interrelated aspects of party politics: conflict and cooperation (cf. Chilton 2004). On the one hand, his attacks on the Republicans in Congress reflect the bipartisan conflict and his struggle for power. As Scacco (2011) observes, weekly address has become a mechanism for Presidents to go after the opposition party in Congress. The power relation is unequal in the sense that the Republicans would not be able to rebut in a similar manner. On the other hand, his praise of and hope for bipartisan cooperation reflects another aspect of power struggle, that is, achieving hegemony. As Fairclough (1998: 147) observes, accommodations and alliances are an important part of this struggle. The cooperation is not an equal partnership; rather, it is premised on the Republicans' support of his policies. This unequal power is reflected in his active language which urges the Republicans to act (e.g. 'Republicans in Congress should stop the games' in Text 4).

Discourses do not just reflect power relations, but exert power to influence the attitudes and behavior of others. As Wodak (2009: 46) points out, "discourse exerts power because it transports knowledge which is the basis for individual and collective action". Van Dijk (2006: 365) also suggests that "manipulating the minds of others, such as the knowledge, opinions and ideologies which in turn control their actions, is a form of exercising discursive power". In the weekly addresses, Obama constructs a version of reality that serves to reproduce and enhance his executive power. The addresses are designed to achieve multiple goals by influencing multiple audiences. As Scacco (2011: 68) observes, the weekly addresses are targeted at both the elites (e.g. policy makers and news media) and the public. Presidents can set the agenda for the Sunday news and "showcase leadership by documenting

accomplishments for the press and advocating for legislation" (Edwards and Wood 1999; Cohen and Nice 2003; Scacco 2011: 69). Meanwhile, the addresses are readily available on the White House website, Youtube, and social media for users to view and share. This creates a ubiquitous Presidential message to influence the attitudes and behavior of the audience. As a fundamental rhetorical device, the attitudes are carefully designed to promote Obama's policies, pressure the Republicans in Congress and win support from the American people.

We will talk about the influence of audiences' attitudes first. The most striking feature of the 'reality' Obama constructs is the extremely negative image of Republicans, which serves to dissuade the audience from supporting them. The strategies for creating such an image were elucidated in previous sections; the most important of these strategies is a recounting of 'facts' that elicits negative attitudes. Hidden behind this version of reality is the positive representation of Obama in the context of party politics. First, by criticizing Republicans, he builds a morally superior image, implying that he is exactly the opposite, that is, he truly cares about the interest of the American people. Moreoever, he highlights his efforts to fight the Republicans and frames his role as one who fights against Washington politics for the interest of the American people (Scacco 2011), and thus may win support from audiences who are politically neutral. Second, the description of the behaviors of the Republicans provides an explanation for American audiences, especially his supporters, why some of his promises are not fulfilled. The strategy reflects the ideology of positive self-representation and negative other-representation in Van Dijk's (1995) framework. Such dichotomous representation serves to shape public perceptions of the two parties and to win voters' support.

Text 14: Let's be honest – Republicans in Congress won't act on this plan before the election. But maybe they'll come to their senses afterward if you give them a push. So contact your Representative, especially if this plan will help you or someone you know. Tell him or her that American homeowners have waited long enough. Tell them that it's time for Congress to stop standing in the way of our recovery and to start standing up for you. (20 October, 2012)

The attitudes are also designed to influence the immediate actions of the Republicans and the audience by exhorting them to act. These exhortations mainly include urging the Republicans to stop their wrong deeds (e.g. playing games, as in Text 4) and work together with the Democrats to get things done; Obama does this mostly by using directive speech acts

(resultant actions of attitudes, as in Text 9). Not only does he urge the Republicans to do the right thing, but he also directly asks the American people to act. He encourages his audience to 'contact your Representative' several times, as in Text 14. Such direct exhortations are also frequent in the weekly addresses of President Clinton and President Bush (Scacco 2011); this suggests that the weekly address is a site where Presidents struggle for power over Congress and the opposition party. The power of U.S. Presidents is constrained by Congress; thus, when the legislative gears come to a halt, they can only use language to pressure and persuade lawmakers in order to achieve their policy goals and consolidate their executive power (Campbell and Jamieson 2008; Kernell 2007).

## 5.  Conclusion

The weekly address is an important discursive practice through which Presidents of the United States advocate policies, build coalitions, and sustain their institutional legitimacy. It is therefore important to examine the linguistic strategies they use for achieving these purposes. This study investigated Obama's attitudes towards the Republicans and the Democrats in his weekly addresses. Analysis shows that his attitudes towards the Republicans are dominated by negative judgment of propriety, whereas his attitudes towards the Republicans and the Democrats together are overwhelmingly positive, characterized by his hopes for, and commendation on, bipartisan collaboration. These strategies of attitude expression are elucidated using the schema of attitude, while further developing Martin and White's (2005) framework of indirect realizations of attitude. Rather than directly judging the Republicans, Obama expresses his attitudes through events that elicit the attitudes (i.e. the behaviors of the Republicans and the consequences of such behaviors) and verbal actions that are motivated by the attitudes (i.e. urging the Republicans to stop the wrong behavior and do the right thing). Similarly, Obama's attitudes towards the Republicans and the Democrats together are constructed by using attitudinal lexis, recounting eliciting conditions and representing resultant actions. The patterns of attitudes and their construction are then discussed in relation to power and party politics. We argue that the attitudes reflect power relations between the two parties on the one hand, and are strategically designed to battle against the opposition party and build coalition on the other.

As the first large-scale corpus-based analysis of Presidential weekly addresses, this study makes a number of contributions to discourse and communication research. First, the semantic patterns of attitudes enable us to understand the nature and feature of bipartisan

relations from the perspective of the President in power. Second, it develops an interdisciplinary framework, which is based on the Appraisal system but draws upon the attitude schema (Figure 1) and on speech act theory in order to elucidate the strategies of attitude expression. The study provides further understanding of routine Presidential communication in the context of party politics and the separation of powers. Further research in this area could compare the attitudes and expression strategies in the weekly addresses of different Presidents or the longitudinal change throughout the candidature of a single President. The framework can also be used to analyze attitudes and their construction in other communication practices (e.g. news reports; Feng 2017) and in other political systems (such as China, see Wang forthcoming).

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