

Discourse Analysis of Oprah Winfrey's Speech at 2024 Democratic National Convention

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.61796/ijss.v3i1.63>



Sections Info

Article history:

Submitted: July 31, 2025

Final Revised: August 07, 2025

Accepted: August 20, 2025

Published: September 07, 2025

Keywords:

Oprah Winfrey

Discourse analysis

Lexical cohesion

Grammatical cohesion

Democratic national convention

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study elucidates Oprah Winfrey's address at the 2024 Democratic National Convention. It seeks to examine the many forms of lexical and grammatical coherence according to the theory of Halliday and Hasan (1976). **Method:** The data analysis indicated that the use of both lexical and grammatical cohesion significantly contributes to the development of cohesive, clear, and comprehensible speech. **Results:** The research indicated that "Repetition," a lexical cohesive technique, and "Reference," a grammatical cohesive device, were extensively used by Oprah to reinforce her message to the audience. She used these two categories with the others to enhance the efficacy of her speech and its persuasive impact. **Novelty:** Oprah Winfrey is a credible individual, transcending her role as a media icon, which imparts considerable influence to her statements among millions. Oprah's extensive influence and media presence make her endorsements of politicians a significant effect in shaping voting patterns. Her support of Kamala Harris at the 2024 Democratic National Convention exemplifies the significant voter interest her speech garnered.

INTRODUCTION

The Life Journey of Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Gail Winfrey was born in 1954 in a modest community in central Mississippi. Her name was intended to be "Orpah," derived from a biblical figure, but it was erroneously spelt "Oprah." It has been her designation since then [1]. She was reared by her grandmother, Hattie Mae Lee, on a modest farm, subsisting on its produce and wearing garments crafted by her grandmother, whilst her father, Vernon Winfrey, served in the military. Her mother, Vernita Lee, relocated to northern cities in pursuit of a better life. In summary, Oprah's formative years were characterized by several challenges associated with poverty [2]. However, poverty was not the only challenge that Oprah encountered. Instead, she endured bigotry due to her skin color and sexual assault [1].

Although what she went through, Oprah was a gifted girl with an amazing speaking ability. This talent was reflected in reciting passages from the Bible, poems or sermons [3]. In addition to this, Oprah was a bookworm. She derived pleasure from reading the books, particularly after acquiring a library card. Additionally, she allocated a portion of her time to watching television. She envisions herself as a character from that novel, an actress, or a renowned celebrity like those seen on television [1]. It is noteworthy that Oprah not only envisioned but also made significant efforts to attain her objectives. Her ascent to prominence started at the age of 17 when she secured her first position as a newsreader at a local radio station. At the age of 19, she secured a position as a news anchor. Subsequently, she transitioned to hosting the television program "People Are

Talking". The pivotal moment in her life occurred when she presented the chat program "AM Chicago," which was transformed into "The Oprah Winfrey Show" in 1986. This program aired effectively for 25 seasons and received several Emmy Awards [4] [5]. This achievement resulted in another milestone, as Oprah became the first African American woman to own her firm, "Harpo Productions," which subsequently evolved into "Harpo Studios." Oprah created television series, films, and periodicals via this firm [6]

Oprah Winfrey has become a worldwide icon, profoundly impacting millions. She has been an inspiration to several women across. She convinced them to heed her advice to enhance their own lives. She illuminated several issues, including abuse, homelessness, disease, and divorce, while assisting those in analogous circumstances. Primarily, it was her character that garnered the affection and confidence of others.

Discourse Analysis

To define the term "Discourse Analysis", it is important to understand each word. First, the word "Discourse" can be defined simply as "meaningful symbolic behavior". The reason behind using the term "discourse analysis" instead of "language analysis" is not to focus on language as an abstract system, but to deal with language in connection with the knowledge people have to do things in the world. Second, the word "Analysis" is used for this term rather than other words because there is a focus on the analytical process or simply taking things apart [7]. Broadly, discourse analysis can be defined as "the study of language viewed communicatively and/or of communication viewed linguistically" (Hugh Trappes-Lomas134).

James Paul Gee believed that language alone can not be used to build identities and activities. Therefore, he focused on the concept of "Discourse" with a capital "D" to refer to the fact that language is integrated with actions, interactions, beliefs, and values in specific contexts [8].

However, to summarise what is meant by discourse analysis, three traditions need to be explained. The first tradition influenced by Norman Fairclough represents linguistic modes of analysis. This tradition uses discourse to refer to language, both written and spoken. The second one represents critical discourse studies, which in turn focus on the context of the text rather than the textual dimension. This tradition is influenced by Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairclough, and Teun Van Dijk. Finally, the third tradition of discourse analysis, influenced by Michel Foucault, is related to poststructuralist approaches. This tradition goes beyond just analyzing the text. It represents discourse as a force that shapes our knowledge, reality and what we say or think about. It connects discourse directly to power and knowledge production [9].

While recognizing the value of the critical and poststructuralist approaches to discourse. This study adopts a framework aligned with the first tradition of discourse analysis. This decision is based on the research's primary objective.

Cohesion

Upon analyzing any text, whether written or spoken, the first observation is the manner in which the phrases are interconnected to convey a coherent notion. The relationships within the text succinctly elucidate the notion of "Cohesion". [10]. Cohesion

is essential for the creation of any text [11]. The notion of cohesion is articulated by its principal theorists, M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, in their publication, *Cohesion in English* (1976). Cohesion is defined as "a semantic relation between an element in the text and another element that is essential for its interpretation" [12]. Cohesion pertains to the manner in which phrases and segments of the text are interconnected [13].

Cohesion is divided into two types. The first one is lexical cohesion, while the other one is grammatical cohesion. As the terms imply, lexical cohesion can be achieved by lexical means or devices. On the other hand, grammatical cohesion is achieved through grammatical means [14]. However, it is important to note that many studies have expanded or modified the classification of the lexical or grammatical cohesion presented by Halliday and Hasan (1976). However, lexical cohesion is divided into two categories: Reiteration (Repetition, Synonymy, Superordinate, General word) and Collocation [15]. Grammatical cohesion is also divided into four categories: Reference (Personal, Demonstrative, Comparative), Substitution (Nominal, Verbal, Clausal), Ellipsis (Nominal, Verbal, Clausal) and Conjunction (Additive, Adversative, Causal, Temporal) [12]. However, the following table summarises what is meant by each category according to Halliday and Hasan's theory (ibid).

Table 1. Lexical and grammatical cohesion.

Lexical Cohesion	
1- Reiteration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition: repeating the same word (e.g. book-book) • Synonymy: Using words having similar meaning (e.g. road – path) • Superordinate/Hyponymy: Using words linked by a class-member relationship (e.g. pet – dog) • General word: simple or broad-meaning words used instead of specific words mentioned before, and mostly modified by reference items (e.g. thing)
2- Collocation	Using words that share the same lexical environment. It is about words that tend to occur with other words (e.g. cloud – rain)
Grammatical Cohesion	
1-Reference Using words to refer to other elements (1) inside the text (Endophora), which can be preceding text (Anaphora) or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal: Using pronouns (Personal e.g. I, me), (Possessive adjective e.g. my), (Possessive pronoun e.g. mine) • Demonstrative: Using demonstrative (Adverbial, e.g. here, there, now, then), (Nominal, e.g. this, these, that, those)

following text (Cataphora) or (2) outside the text (Exophora)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comparative: Using comparative words (Adjective, e.g. similar) (Adverb, e.g. similarly)
2- Substitution Replacing one item with another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nominal: The substitute functions as a noun (e.g. the same, one)• Verbal: The substitute functions as a verb (e.g. do, does)• Clausal: The substitute functions as a clause (e.g. so, not)
3- Ellipsis Omitting items according to grammatical rules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nominal: omitting a noun or noun phrase• Verbal: omitting a verb or verb phrase• Clausal: omitting a clause
4- Conjunction Words connect ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Additive: Add new information, either positive or negative (e.g. and, nor)• Adversative: Show contrast between two ideas (e.g. yet, but)• Causal: Show reason or purpose (e.g. because, for)• Temporal: Show the order of events (e.g. first, then)

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

The data of this research is analyzed through the qualitative approach by adopting Halliday and Hasan's theory. The researcher seeks to investigate the different types of grammatical and lexical cohesion used by Oprah Winfrey at 2024 Democratic National Convention.

Data Collection

The data of this research is based on a speech delivered by Oprah Winfrey at 2024 Democratic National Convention [16]. The transcript of the speech has been downloaded from the internet source www.Time.com.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Lexical Cohesion

The analysis of the speech showed clear use of lexical cohesion, covering the two types: reiteration and collocation, as follows:

Oprah is a trusted and loved person. She is confident that people will be affected by her speech. She used different kinds of reiteration, especially "repetition", which was observed most frequently, to indicate the following points:

- Creating a sense of national identity

*"I am an **American**."*

*"We are **Americans**."*

*"We're all **Americans**."*

- A call for unity

*People who seek first to divide and then to **conquer**. But here's the thing: when we stand together, it is impossible to **conquer** us.*

- A call for collective and unified choice

"Let us choose loyalty to the Constitution over loyalty to any individual."

*"Let us **choose** optimism over cynicism."*

*"Let us **choose** inclusion over retribution."*

*"Let us **choose** common sense over nonsense."*

"Let us choose the sweet promise of tomorrow over the bitter return to yesterday."

*"Let us **choose**. Let us choose truth."*

*"Let us **choose** honor, and let us **choose** joy!"*

*"Let us **choose** freedom."*

*"Let's all **choose** Kamala Harris!"*

- Voting for Kamala Harris

*"We're now so fired up we can't wait to leave here and do something. And what we're going to do is to elect **Kamala Harris** as the next President of the United States."*

*"Common sense tells you that **Kamala Harris** and Tim Walz can give us decency and respect."*

*"Let's all choose **Kamala Harris**!"*

- A call to choose and protect freedom

*"I am so honored to have been asked to speak on tonight's theme about what matters most to me, to you, and all of us Americans: **freedom**."*

*"**Freedom** isn't free."*

*"They are the new **freedom** fighters."*

*"They instilled in her a passion for justice and **freedom**."*

*"Let us choose **freedom**."*

- Values are the priority

*"I've always voted for my **values**. And that is what is needed in this election,"*

*"I'm telling you the truth: that **values** and character matter most of all,"*

- America is an ongoing project

*"It **requires** commitment, it **requires** being open to the hard work and the heart work of democracy. And now and then, it **requires** standing up to life's bullies."*

- Rejecting the past

*"We won't go **back**. We won't be sent back, pushed back, bullied back, or kicked back.*

*We're not going **back**."*

In addition to these points, Oprah repeated the phrase "Best of America" to motivate the audience and to create an emotional connection with them".

On the other hand, she made only limited use of the other types of reiteration. For example, synonymy was used through her speech to emphasize upholding moral principles, using synonyms such as "decency" and "respect".

*"And more than anything – you know this is true – that **decency** and **respect** are on the ballot in 2024."*

*"Common sense tells you that Kamala Harris and Tim Walz can give us **decency** and **respect**."*

The use of synonyms also keeps the speech lively instead of repeating the same words as in the use of "country", "United States", "America" and "nation".

*"We are a **country** of people who work hard for the money."*

*"**America** is an ongoing project."*

*"How this child grew up to become the 47th President of the **United States**."*

*"There are people who want you to see our country as a **nation** of us against them".*

Moreover, the word "people" was a good example of the third type, superordinate, in which the word "American(s)" represents the hyponym.

*"These are the **people** who make me proud to say that I am an **American**."*

For the general word, only one example can be mentioned in which the word "thing" was used. The reason behind using a general word here is to link the ideas concisely while adding an exciting and direct tone to the message by grabbing the audience's attention for the crucial point that will be made next.

*"But here's **the thing**: when we stand together, it is impossible to conquer us."*

Looking at the sentences mentioned above, different examples of collocation can be seen, such as "common sense", "stand together", "sweet promise", "bitter return", "work hard", "do something", which indicate the same points above and make her message more persuasive and clearer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Grammatical Cohesion

The analysis of the speech showed clear use of grammatical cohesion, covering all four types: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, as follows:

1. Reference

Oprah used the three types of references in her speech. First, she used the pronouns "I, you, we" as a personal reference in addition to others. But the reason behind using these pronouns "I, you, we" was to create a sense of closeness with the audience. The

pronoun "I" represents "Oprah" herself, and the pronoun "you" addresses the audience directly. The pronoun "we" was used to foster unity, build rapport, and create a collective identity between Oprah and the audience. It emphasizes shared goals, responsibilities and values.

"I am so honored to have been asked to speak."

"I was eligible to vote."

*"Let me tell **you** this: This election isn't about **us** and them. It's about **you** and **me**."*

*"**You** know this is true."*

*"**We** can't wait to leave here and do something."*

*"**We** pray for peace."*

*"Let **us** choose."*

*"All of **us** Americans"*

Moving to the second type, demonstrative reference was used repeatedly to ensure smooth transitions between sentences. It is Oprah's tool to link the ideas without repeating excessive details and present a clear and concise message.

*"Tessie passed away six weeks ago, and I tell **this** story to honor her tonight."*

*"How **this** child grew up to become the 47th President of the United States."*

*"After watching the Obamas last night, **that** was some epic fire,"*

*"I've always voted for my values. And **that** is what is needed in **this** election."*

*"**These** are the people who make me proud to say that I am an American."*

*"And they told us **these** things for one reason, and that is to keep what happened to them from happening to anybody else."*

*"And I welcome **those** conversations."*

*"We're **now** so fired up we can't wait to leave here and do something."*

*"I want to talk **now** about somebody who's not with us tonight".*

Finally, Oprah provided a different example of the comparative reference. These examples were clear and powerful. The use of this type of reference indicates the same ideas expressed through the use of lexical cohesion.

*"We are all in the **same** boat."*

*"And despite what some would have you think, we are not so **different** from our neighbors."*

*"And that is what is needed in this election, now **more than ever**."*

*"I'm telling you the truth: that values and character matter **most** of all, in leadership and life."*

*"But **more than anything** else, let us choose freedom. Why?"*

2. Substitution

Oprah employed the two types of substitution throughout the speech. We can see

the verbal substitution in her speech where "do" was used in the sentence below to provide a concise and decisive answer that Americans can make the change. On the other hand, the word "one" was used in place of "Kamala Harris and Tim Walz" as an example of nominal substitution. The reason behind using substitution is to prevent repetition and to make the sentences smoother.

*"Now, there's a certain candidate that says, if we just go to the polls this one time, then we'll never have to do it again. Well, you know what? You're looking at a registered independent who's proud to vote again and again and again. Because I'm an American, and that's what Americans **do**."*

*"Common sense tells you that Kamala Harris and Tim Walz can give us decency and respect. They're **the ones** that give it to us".*

3. Ellipsis

Ellipsis was used minimally and only for brevity, as Oprah was clear and understandable in her speech. Thus, there is not much focus on this type. The first sentence is an example of verbal ellipsis where the verb [I've lived] was omitted. While the other two sentences are examples of clausal ellipsis in which the omitted items are written between [...].

*"I know this. I've lived in Mississippi, **[I've lived]** in Tennessee, **[I've lived]** in Wisconsin,...."*

*"**There are** people who want you to see our country as a nation of us against them. **[There are]** People who want to scare you, who want to rule you."*

*"And that is what is needed in this election, now more than ever" **[it was needed before]**"*

4. Conjunction

Conjunctions are divided into four types. Oprah's speech included them all. An additive conjunction, which was widely used, adds new information or links connected ideas, as in the use of "and, or, also". Adversative conjunction, on the other hand, was used to shift between contrasted ideas as in the use of "but". Causal conjunction, as the term implies, was used to show reasons by using the cohesive device "because, cause". Finally, temporal conjunction was expressed through the use of "when, then, after". The following sentences are good examples to show how Oprah used conjunctions in her speech to create a smooth flow.

*"We're now so fired up we can't wait to leave here **and** do something."*

*"I've seen racism **and** sexism **and** income inequality, **and** division."*

*"The women **and** men who are battling to keep us from going back to a time of desperation, shame, **and** stone-cold fear are the new freedom fighters."*

*"Somebody did a beautiful job of showing this young girl how to challenge the people at the top **and** empower the people at the bottom."*

*"This election isn't about us **and** them. It's about you **and** me **and** what we want our futures to look like."*

*"We're going to be teaching our daughters **and** sons."*

*"You're looking at a registered independent who's proud to vote again and again and again. **Because** I'm an American, **and** that's what Americans do."*

*"Why? **Because** that's the best of America."*

*"**Cause** we are a country of people who work hard for the money".*

*"Congressman Lewis knew very well how far this country has come **because** he was one of the brilliant Americans who helped to get us where we are. **But** he **also** knew that the work is not done, the work will never be done, **because** freedom isn't free."*

*"**After** watching the Obamas last night, that was some epic fire"*

*"There are choices to be made **when** we cast our ballot."*

*"**When** a house is on fire, we don't ask about the homeowner's race or religion. We don't wonder who their partner is **or** how they voted."*

*"**When** we stand together, it is impossible to conquer us."*

*"People who seek first to divide and **then** to conquer."*

*"Tessie passed away six weeks ago, and I tell this story to honor her tonight, **because** she, like Ruby Bridges, **and** her friends, Leona **and** Gail – the New Orleans Four, they were called – they broke barriers, **and** they paid dearly for it. **But** it was the grace **and** guts and courage of women like Tessie Prevost Williams that paved the way for another young girl, who nine years later became part of the second class to integrate the public schools in Berkeley, California".*

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : Oprah Winfrey exemplified the concept that genuine power resides with the people by spearheading an electoral campaign to encourage her viewers to support Kamala Harris. She delivered an unexpected address during the 2024 Democratic National Convention. The speech had several educational themes that urged action. The research indicates that Oprah used many cohesive strategies to make the discourse accessible, coherent, comprehensible, interconnected, and, above all, impactful. The study revealed that Oprah's speech used both lexical and grammatical cohesiveness. Oprah's speech exhibits significant lexical consistency via the widespread use of prepositions. She highlighted certain concepts such as "American identity," "freedom," "unity," "values," "supporting Harris," and "disavowing the past." Conversely, her speech had robust grammatical cohesiveness, mostly attributable to the use of reference.

Implication : She urged individuals to alter their destiny by selecting what is most advantageous for themselves and the nation. Oprah recognizes the affection and admiration people have for her; hence, she often employs the personal pronouns "we, us, our" with "I, you" to establish an emotional rapport with the audience and communicate her perspective on what is optimal for America.

Limitation : the study focused only on Oprah Winfrey's single speech during the 2024 Democratic National Convention and did not include a comparative analysis with other speeches or broader contextual factors that may have influenced its impact.

Future Research : could explore other speeches by Oprah

Winfrey or similar influential figures to identify patterns of cohesive strategies across different contexts and to analyze how these strategies evolve in various political or social campaigns.

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