# DISCOURSES OF DEMOCRACY AND RESILIENCE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF KAMALA HARRIS'S CONCESSION SPEECH

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**ABSTRACT**

*This Paper is a critical analysis of Kamala Harris's post-election concession speech after losing against Donald Trump on November 5th 2024. The main focus of this research is her resilience that she shows even after losing and her faith in democracy. Harris's speech about democracy and resilience stands as the main topic of analysis because this research looks into her delivery methods during the address. The research focuses on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of analyzing a discourse with discursive and social practices. This method enables researchers to study speech elements both from the linguistic perspective and through evaluations of political influences as well as societal effects. The research demonstrates how Harris delivered a letter that acknowledged defeat yet maintained democratic principles and encouraged political commitment after the electoral loss. Various persuasive strategies alongside references to other texts and strategic narrative structures allow the speech to build a story of continued democratic commitment alongside resilience. The analysis studies how multiple factors between language and power and ideological dynamics work in a significant political scenario to demonstrate how concession statements protect electoral legitimacy through 'losers' consent' following voting results.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Concessions speeches play an important part in maintaining an image of legitimacy and promoting the consent of the loser after the elections. After losing the election against Donald Trump on Tuesday 5th November 2024, Kamala Harris gave gave her concession speech at Howard University in Washington D.C. According to (Craig et al., 2006) supporters of losing party often show lower levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy compared to the winners of the elections. This "losers' consent" is essential for allowing winners to govern and facilitating peaceful transitions of power (Arceneaux & Truex, 2022). The willingness of voters on the losing side to accept electoral outcomes is fundamental to democratic legitimacy (Tilley & Hobolt, 2023). This study deals with the discourse of Kamala Harris, specially her stance on democracy and her resilience.

In linguistics, discourse typically encompasses the patterns of speech and language use, including dialects and accepted expressions within a community. Discourse Analysis involves

examining connected speech and writing from a linguistic perspective. Additional definitions describe discourse as a linguistic concept dealing with structures above the sentence level, whether spoken or written. Consequently, Discourse Analysis (DA) involves evaluating language as it is employed. This article conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis of Kamala Harris's concession speech utilizing Fairclough's 3D Model. CDA particularly examines how language functions within institutional and political contexts, as well as specific discourses, to reveal overt or often subtle inequalities in social relationships. The utilization of language in speech and writing is considered a social practice, implying a reciprocal relationship between a specific discursive event and its framing situations, institutions, and social structures (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wajdi et al., 2024). Thus, in this bidirectional relationship, discourse is viewed as both socially constitutive and shaped. This critical discourse analysis focuses on Kamala Harris's concession speech, particularly her stance on democracy and her determination to continue her efforts for her nation's political well-being. The speech has significantly influenced her supporters even after her electoral defeat.

## General objective of the study

Objective of this study is to analyze the concession speech of Kamala Harris and find out different discursive strategies used by the speaker and how she uses the themes of this speech to highlight her stance on democracy and her resilience to keep on fighting after losing.

## Research Questions:

1. What Discursive strategies are used by kamala Harris in her speech to articulate the concepts of democracy and resilience?
2. In what ways does the speech construct democracy and resilience as interconnected themes?

## Review of related literature

Kamala Devi Harris (born October 20, 1964) is an American politician and attorney who served as the 49th vice president of the United States from 2021 to 2025 under President Joe Biden. She was the first female U.S. vice president, making her the highest-ranking female official in U.S. history (Wikipedia contributors, 2025). Discourse analysis encompasses a wide range of language used in various contexts. As Titscher et al., (2000) state, "discourse is a broad term with different definitions, which 'integrate a whole palette of meanings'". This field incorporates various theoretical approaches and methodological approaches from linguistics, sociology, philosophy and psychology. The way language functions is strongly concerned with its cultural requirements and purposes. Halliday (1978) notes, "The particular form has taken by the grammatical system of language is closely related to the social and personal need that language is required to serve". A key aspect of discourse analysis is examining genuine texts and conversations within their social settings. While early discourse analysis focused on the internal shape of the texts, Halliday's systematic functional linguistics represents a shift from this approach. Halliday (1978) argues that texts should reflect both personal and social processes, emphasizing their generation, comprehension, and placement within a social background. Discourse has implications at both the micro and macro levels of discourse, it necessitates both linguistic and social examinations to be taken into consideration. Discourses are viewed as communicative events because they convey messages beyond their literal content. The social information implicitly transmitted in these exchanges is of particular significance.

During the 1970s the academic field of CDA gained its fundamental position for studying linguistic discourse. CDA utilizes linguistic analysis together with theoretical social theory to research how social powers get misused through discourse structures which create dominant inequality patterns within public systems (Fairclough, 1992). Norman Fairclough built a three-part research model in his academic career which combines text methods with operational discourse methods alongside social discourse methods. The evaluation approach of CDA enables analysts to detect manifestations of power throughout statements made by political actors and media advertisements alongside official papers. Systematic functional grammar created by Halliday serves as the principal linguistic framework of CDA. The evaluation method stands essential for assessing expressions hence linguists from diverse areas employ it to analyze texts. Van Dijk (1998) states Critical Discourse Analysis examines both written and verbal text messages through social systems that investigate hegemonic dominance and rights discrimination and ethnic prejudice. Systematic analytical procedures lead to the identification of

economic and political social factors through this method. The method of CDA works as analysis of discourse to explain irregular communication patterns that appear between ethnic cultures and diverse social groups per Fairclough (1993). Research methods mainly use text analysis together with sequential examinations according to him since analysts must demonstrate their results based on social-cultural contexts. Critical Discourse Analysis analyzes genuine language usage to establish how participants' cultural aspects and social elements along with ethnic features become visible in their communication. The experts within CDA show that linguistic choices in both words and syntax showcase the social aspects which emerge from discourse. The analysis probes language-founder relations through two exclusive categories while researching their connection with discourse procedures. In his 1978 work Halliday describes language as a social process which unfolds between established social networks. The presented theory by the author shows compliance with this model. The social structure maintains an active connection with language since language determines how identities develop. The ability to speak English demonstrates control of specific cultures through its association with their political authority across our community framework. The linguistic element operates as an educational method which shows how social power operates differently but still follows ideological principles. A complete discourse analysis needs three sequential steps which Fairclough (1992) describes. The first stage of CDA analyzes personal life experiences combined with acquired knowledge from speakers as well as considers their belief systems. Social relationship analysis shapes discourse production in the second analysis step and identity construction plays a leading role throughout the complete process. Fairclough's theory shows that discourse needs vocabulary and grammar elements to demonstrate societal patterns and dominant power relationships. A thorough analysis of discourse choices depends on CDA because it helps examine social and political factors that shape environments (Taylor 2004). Carroll (2004) views Critical discourse analysis as multifaceted, serving as both a theoretical framework and a method for data analysis. The procedure used to evaluate political text involves components of analytical CDA methodology. Both political discourse carries essential critical aspects while CDA represents a fundamental method for political analysis according to this approach. Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) interpretation should unify political discourse aspects with discourse analysis while including elements of political approach based on Van Dijk (1997). A political discourse analyst requires critical positions to obtain the most thorough research findings that align with his perspective. The "critical-political discourse analysis" investigates the relationship between questionable political behavior and power abuse through discourse methods.

**Methodology**

This paper aims to analyze the concession speech of Kamala Harris's concession speech by using the method of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis. The study is Qualitative due to the nature of the study being an analysis of text of the speech. The data was directly collected from her speech which is currently available on multiple platforms on the internet. In addition, a transcript of her speech was also acquired from Time Magazine:

https://time.com/7173617/kamala-harris-concession-speech-full-transcript/

Fairclough's model allows us to do a comprehensive examination of the speech's linguistic features, discursive practices, and sociocultural context. The model provides researchers with tools to explore both social systems of beliefs and interpersonal relationships found within the speech given by Kamala Harris. Sentences together with their structural elements form ideas that defend prevailing norms or construct alternatives to these norms. Fairclough's three-dimensional model provides complete analysis of Harris's concession speech since it reveals the linguistic elements alongside their social changes and social effects. Through interpretive methodology researchers can understand discrimination impact on political reality and its influence on public understanding of those political realities (Joye, 2010).

**Fairclough's Model**

Norman Fairclough develops a critical discourse model that uses three analytical dimensions to study documents through different inspection methods. The model comprises three unique components according to Al-Badawi & Al Najjar (2021) including text description and text-interaction interpretation and social context explanation. His model develops through three visible dimensions as explained in this description.

I. **Textual Analysis**: The text examination process includes studying both verbal aspects and structural components within authentic speech data. Studying vocabulary and grammar structures and text organizational and cohesive elements forms an integral part of the analysis method according to Guerrero & Torres-Olave (2021).

II. **Discourse Analysis**: Discursive practice as a dimension includes both the creation of texts together with the actions of spreading them out as well as the subsequent stages of reader engagement. Discursive strategy utilization pairs with distribution system interpretation within the analytical framework.

III. **Social Practice**: The operational framework of discourse systems obtains its foundation through social practices that involve cultural and political factors which enable system operation. This model investigates the associations between discourse and social ideological and power systems.

The three-dimension model of Fairclough enables complete discourse analysis by helping researchers identify elements in the text and discourse and social dimensions. The interlinked analysis of linguistic elements in texts with both production procedures and broad sociological aspects as well as distribution patterns serves as an efficient method for examining language-based social reality formation.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of this speech revealed comprehensive understanding of its political, verbal and cultural dimensions. The following presentation analyzes the entire address by using Fairclough's analysis framework in detail.

### 1. Textual Analysis:

In this dimension of the critical discourse analysis, we examine the micro-level features of the text, which include the vocabulary, grammatical structure, and rhetorical strategies used in the text.

| Structure and Organization: | Introduction: | The speech starts with a repetition of the phrases (Good afternoon and Thank you) by Kamala Harris which establishes a tone of approach and friendliness. This repetition acknowledges the audience and establishes a reflective and an optimistic atmosphere. |
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| | Body: | Following the acknowledgment of defeat the speaker chooses to restate her commitment to democratic values. The speech moves around and between the idea of expressing gratitude to her supporters and expressing disappointment of her defeat. Furthermore, the phrases like (roll up our sleeves) motivates her audience. |
| | Conclusion: | The speech concludes on a hopeful note, utilizing metaphors and adages to inspire resilience, leaving the audience with a sense of purpose. |
| Repetition and Parallelism: | Repetition: | A rhythm is created in her speech with constantly used Phrases such as (I love you back, Good afternoon and Thank you). The key themes such as (The fight for….) and (Don't ever give up) emphasizes the idea of not giving up. |
| | Parallelism: | Phrases like (the fight for freedom, for opportunity, for fairness, and the dignity of all people) provide balance, enhancing memorability and impact. |
| Lexical Choices and Semantic Fields: | Positive Lexicon: | Terms such as (freedom, justice, hope, opportunity, and dignity) highlight shared values. |
| | Contrastive Lexicon: | Dark/light imagery (e.g., dark time vs. light of optimism) underscores resilience. |

| | American Ideals: | References to democracy, the Constitution, and unity ground the speech in patriotic values. |
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| **Grammar and Syntax:** | Simple Declarative Sentences: | Statements such as (My heart is full today) convey clarity and sincerity. |
| | Imperatives: | Commands such as (Don't ever give up) are direct appeals, fostering action. |
| | Rhetorical Questions: | Implicitly posed in reflections like (The important thing is, don't ever give up) encouraging internalization. |
| **Rhetorical Strategies:** | Metaphors: | (The light of America's promise will always burn bright) frames hope as enduring. (Fill the sky with...stars) symbolizes collective optimism. |
| | Historical Allusions: | References to democracy, the Constitution, and past challenges invoke continuity with American heritage. |
| | Anecdotes and Personalization: | The speaker references personal relationships and experiences to humanize the message and establish an emotional connection. |

The speech follows a well-planned arrangement which incorporates passionate arguments while urging people to take action. Through rhetorical constructs the speaker maintains audience involvement and shows determination alongside hope while losing. The speech develops a friendly approach through repetitive wording followed by emotional and motivational elements that lead to an active flow. Noteworthy are the selected vocabulary in addition to the semantic fields used in the text. The speaker delivers language that ties to American cultural values which strengthens her connection to audience beliefs while emphasizing fundamental national principles. The speech contains repeated uses of positive words that keep alive the essential qualities of American ideals during times of trial. Through light and dark imagery, the text presents positive expressions with contrasting forces to depict the contrast between strength and challenging conditions. Through these elements the speaker develops a narrative which details obstacle surmounting. Through both forms of imagery, the message develops rich layers which help people better understand abstract thoughts while strengthening their overall effect. These combination of the declarative statements and imperative instructions and rhetorical questions makes the ideas to be direct and accessible to the audience. Through strategic language methods the writer develops both easy understanding and reflective thoughts in the audience. The message contains declarative sentences which share information and imperatives which generate commands and rhetorical questions which activate mental activity. Through metaphors together with references to historical events the speech develops its themes related to perseverance and the unbroken legacy of the nation. Through these tools the audience gains enhanced perception of different issues and better understands the wider relationships between situations. At the same time the devices spark emotional reactions. Through her analysis of previous challenges facing the nation the speaker demonstrates knowledge and endurance. The way this speech arranges its information creates both increasing emotional power alongside a systematic advancement of ideas. The speech probably begins with the existing situation then moves forward with themes of adversity before it concludes with themes of unity and hope. The speaker creates rhythm through using repeated patterns to deliver her crucial points to the audience. Repetitions or parallel elements and sustained thematic patterns compose some of the structural elements found in the text. The message gains importance as well as memorability through repetition because it connects major points which help unify the communication.

## 2. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

This section analyzes the text is generated, how its circulation and how it is interpreted in the general audiences and their environment. Below is an in-detail analysis of the text with keeping the discursive practice in mind.

| **Situational Framework:** | Narrative Arc: | Allusions to the campaign's duration (e.g., "107 days of this campaign") establish a shared experience, cultivating a sense |
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| | | of community among adherents. |
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| | Political Concession Address: | The concession speeches are a traditional acknowledgement of electoral defeats which reinforce democratic principles with honor and dignity. The speaker delivers this speech in order to show gratitude towards the voters and a call for not stopping the fight. |
| **Intertextual Elements:** | Democratic Discourse: | The speech incorporates longstanding themes of democracy, freedom, and justice, echoing previous concession addresses by political leaders. |
| | Cultural Motifs: | Phrases such as "hard work is good work" resonate with American ideals of perseverance and individual effort. |
| | Historical Contextualization: | By referencing past struggles for justice and democracy, the speech situates its message within a broader historical continuum. |
| **Audience Engagement:** | Supporters: | Offers reassurance and motivation. |
| | Opponents: | Conveys respect through acknowledgment of election results. |
| | General Public: | Reaffirms commitment to democratic principles |
| | Rhetorical Approaches: | Personal ("I love you back"), collective ("We must accept the results"), and instructive ("Don't ever give up"). |
| **Media Distribution:** | Oral Delivery: | The live format amplifies the emotional and motivational impact of the speech. |
| | Media Amplification: | The Key themes and quotes of her speech are distributed widely through news channels, social media, newspapers and political commentaries to reach her audience all around the world |

This political concession speech shows various ways according to discursive practice analysis through which contextual and intertextual components engage the audience. Standard concession structures function in a triple way to provide the speaker with defeat admission while preserving democracy and developing supporter base unity. The speech modifies its typical format by using different forms of gratitude and defense statements that combine with listener participation to maintain engagement from supporters. The message establishes permanent democratic principles that link with native American cultural values consisting of American values. By referencing democratic and just historical struggles the speaker successfully stretches her message across both time marks and shows how permanent victories can be reached by her audience. The central purpose of this speech hinges on its explanation of voting progress that leads to a more perfect union. The message employs multiple communication channels to transmit its information to separate audience sections which enables simultaneous information distribution to both backing and opposing parties. Through her messaging approach the speaker demonstrates knowledge of multiple community groups and unifies their interests toward establishing national unity. Additional challenges prey on the execution of oral presentation methods when delivering the speech. The speaker delivers strong determination and genuine strength by controlling her voice quality combined with expressive physical movements to all her audience members. The immediate interchange between speakers and viewers occurs during live delivery because it enables instant two-way communication. The speech expands its reach beyond original audiences through media transmission of the content to wider groups. Media software systems possess the capability to make political speeches significant nationwide through her ability to expose broad information about the speech content. Media control chooses news focus based on specific elements it wants to reveal while specific terminology produces different public news interpretations that ultimately generate political consequences. A peaceful transfer of power benefits democracy as the speaker maintains both the recognition of

election obstacles and the democratic framework to protect political equilibrium.

### 3. Social Practice (Interpretation)

This part of the analysis connects the text with the society through political, social and cultural environments and it investigates the construction and challenge of power and ideology.
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| Socio-Political Context: | Divided Political Landscape: | The address addresses electoral divisions while promoting unity and democratic values. |
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| | Democratic Succession: | By highlighting the smooth transition of power, the orator upholds a fundamental principle of democratic governance, countering potential legitimacy challenges. |
| | Cultural Significance: | References to common values such as freedom, justice, and equality align with American ideals, reinforcing collective identity. |
| Power Dynamics: | Power Negotiation: | While acknowledging defeat, the speaker reasserts moral standing by presenting the campaign's ideals as ongoing challenges. |
| | Audience Empowerment: | The call to action ("roll up our sleeves") transfers agency to listeners, encouraging grassroots involvement. |
| Hegemony and Ideological Conflicts: | Reinforcing Democratic Principles: | The speech confirms core values including (Loyalty to the constitution, peaceful transition of power and shared responsibility). |
| | Countering Defeatism: | By seeing her defeat as a temporary setback, the speaker counters the narratives of hopelessness and confirms her faith in democracy. |
| Cultural and Historical Context: | Historical Continuity: | The legacy of American struggle for justice is evoked in the address which situates current challenges with a broader narrative of progress. |
| | Forward-Looking Perspective: | The emphasis is set on youth empowerment and sustained activism indicates a vision for transformation of the society. |

The textual analysis has a focus on studying what the relationships are between social issues, historical frameworks and textual meaning. During a politically torn time the speech addresses voter divisions in order to blend democratic standards with national unity. Democratic legitimacy is strengthened because the presenter puts emphasis on peaceful transfers of power between governing institutions. The speaker makes these divisions to prove the present political climate while developing our fundamental democratic form. Nationwide beliefs that support freedom as well as justice and equality align precisely with the fundamental values outlined in the speech for building national identity. American citizens find unity in core values through which they surpass all diversity so they can focus on their shared principles. Main elements of American national principles serve as the basis for the speech to generate acceptance from listeners for new perspectives and national defining values. The presentation successfully handles multiple levels of power dynamics. After acknowledging defeat the speaker preserves her position of moral leadership through emphasizing that the campaign's principles continue as active struggles. By using this rhetorical method, the speaker acknowledges political defeat but maintains leadership status in the national political dialogue. The speaker displays advanced knowledge about political power which transcends simple electoral success because it emphasizes both ideological leadership and grassroots community-building activities. Through her call for people to "roll up their sleeves" Obama transfers power to the citizens so they can maintain the essential work of the movement. Through this method the democracy remains strengthened as we reject bleak outlooks while inspiring believers in democratic engagement. The call to action supports three primary goals which include both fostering ongoing political momentum for the speaker and turning potential discontent into meaningful activities as well as emphasizing democracy exists as an unending process needing continuous citizen involvement. The speech connects

contemporary challenges to America's historical fight for justice thus constructing both the present's context and future vision by using transformational historical references. By establishing a historical context the speaker achieves three key outcomes: it helps people understand present struggles better while showing past triumphs and positions everybody as a member developing society.

Throughout the speech the author explores the various dimensions of national identity found in modern multicultural societies. The address demonstrates a broad view of American nationality by honoring the diverse imaginary and cultural traditions across the nation which combine democratic values with acceptance of many voices. By following this specific method national unity will emerge through connectedness without requiring everyone to share identical characteristics. The speech demonstrates recognition of how America interacts with global communities as an active world presence. The speech reveals how domestic political matters impact international relations while demonstrating how modern governance depends on maintaining credibility between nations. The speech uses precise verbal strategies and vocal intonations to accomplish four simultaneous objectives such as expressing disappointment while showing positive outlooks and acknowledging the loss and yet maintaining continued importance while speaking to both core supporters and broader constituencies. Words in this context serve as a gauge for political discourse under polarization because they need precise selection to unite different sides without losing their base support. This speech demonstrates through social practice an advanced technique of political communication which goes beyond straightforward concessions. The address functions as both democratic principle reconfirmation and civic involvement invitation as well as a transformation of defeat into an occasion for uniting around core values and team work. The speech addresses intricate social and political challenges to mold public dialogue thus affecting upcoming political acts while contributing to the continued development of American democratic principles.

## Conclusion

By using the Fairclough's 3d model to analyze Harris's concession speech. She has demonstrated a powerful combination of acknowledging the loss of election with building the strength of nation and the values of democracy. The research was able to find the central discursive elements that Kamala Harris developed her ideological framework and her political stance. By using the elements such as repetition, direct address and powerful metaphors at the textual level, Harris created an emotional impact with her audience that motivates her audience for enduring behavior. She chose to focus on words such as uniting people, democratic systems and equality to show her stance, while her repetition of some key phrases and contradiction between opposing ideas create a story that show both optimism and determination to keep moving forward. Her speech serves two works at the same time. it is both a concession and also a call to action. She follows the tradition norm of accepting her defeat in the elections, while also using different media platforms to inspire and unite her supporters. Throughout the speech, she creates a sense of "US" as a united group of people standing against the political challenges together. In a broader sense, the speech is a address to the America's political division, democratic values and civil rights struggles. Harris goes on to reinforce the importance of the electoral process, justice and freedom, while subtly criticizing the inequalities in the system. She promotes idea of being progressive by encouraging people to stay engaged in the politics and fight for democracy and a bright future. In her words she admits defeat but she expresses resistance against any injustice, suggesting that democracy survives through continuous struggle and determination.

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