A Comparative Linguistic and Literary Analysis Of 'The Singapore Story' And 'The Laws of Leadership'

Sevara Bakhodir qizi Yoqubjanova

Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages, 2nd-Year Doctoral Candidate, Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article presents a comparative linguistic and literary analysis of Lee Kuan Yew's "The Story of Singapore" and Theodore Roosevelt's speeches compiled under "The Laws of Leadership." Although they were written in different geopolitical and historical contexts, both statesmen used rhetorical strategies to shape their political identity and communicate national ideology. This research examines the role of such works not only as historical documents but also as tools for reinforcing political identity and legacy through the integration of literary critical discourse analysis. It argues that these works differ from general socio-political texts. This study substantiates, through examples taken from both texts, how each leader reflects the ideology of leadership through linguistic choices.

Keywords: Strategic rhetoric, leadership identity, critical discourse analysis, rhetorical analysis, systemic functional linguistics, speech act theory, political autobiography, metaphorical language.

Introduction: Works by statesmen are powerful tools in shaping national identity and political ideology. These texts significantly impact the public and contribute to the formation of perspectives on political power. Political leaders express their governance philosophy, values, and thoughts on state administration through narrative structures and rhetorical choices. Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, in From Third World to First, describes Singapore's transformation from a poor island to a global economic hub. He constructs the image of leadership through clear and pragmatic language, emphasizing meritocracy, governance, and state control. Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, constructs his leadership image based on moral virtue, resilience, and reformist ideas. His texts are characterized by rich use of metaphors, stories, and calls for national unity.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on qualitative comparative methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): to analyze power relations, ideological construction, and the discursive formation of leadership (Fairclough, 2015). Stylistic and rhetorical analysis: to identify literary devices, narrative structures, and rhetorical methods (ethos, logos, pathos). Text corpus: Primary sources include Lee Kuan Yew's The Story of Singapore (2000) and Roosevelt's speeches compiled under The Laws of Leadership.

Literature Review

Recent academic research emphasizes the intersection of language and leadership in political texts. Studies by Charteris-Black (2019) and Wodak (2020) demonstrate how metaphor, discursive construction, and rhetorical repetition reinforce power in political leadership. Van Dijk (2020) explores how ideologies are embedded in elite discourse through linguistic structures.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 1997) provides the theoretical basis for understanding how Lee Kuan Yew and Theodore Roosevelt use language to reinforce their leadership. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) highlights the role of grammatical and syntactic choices in meaning-making. In the Southeast Asian context, Tay (2022) examines Lee Kuan Yew's technocratic narrative as a foundation of

Singaporean statehood. Meanwhile, Hollihan and Baaske (2021) reinterpret Roosevelt's rhetoric as an expression of American moral exceptionalism. Another important approach is Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), which examines how leaders guide their audience toward certain actions or ideological stances through directives, commissives, and assertives. This is especially useful for distinguishing tones of command and advice in both texts. However, there is a lack of comparative studies that explore how leaders from different cultures construct political legitimacy through language from literary and linguistic perspectives. This work aims to fill that gap.

RESULTS

Leadership communication studies (Burns, 1978; Kellerman, 2004) classify leaders into two types: Transformational leaders — inspire social change in society. Transactional leaders — focus on stability and effectiveness. Lee Kuan Yew is often seen as a transactional leader, whereas Roosevelt presents himself as a transformational leader through reforms and active public engagement.

Lee's speech is characterized by direct syntax, low modality, and institutional vocabulary. His memoirs portray leadership as a logical, data-driven activity, promoting values like meritocracy, discipline, and survival. Through personal anecdotes and political commentary, he constructs the image of a pragmatic practitioner. Roosevelt's speeches are rich in metaphors (e.g., "hard life"), references unique to America, and calls to civic duty. His leadership philosophy is based on character, moral strength, and reform. Through storytelling, repetition, and parallelism, he presents the leader as a heroic reformer. Comparative studies in political rhetoric (Charteris-Black, 2018) reveal that Lee Kuan Yew's rhetoric is built on logical structure, fact-based arguments, and direct statements. In contrast, Roosevelt's rhetoric is built on emotional resonance, moral values, and figurative language. Both texts portray the leader as an indispensable figure for the nation's destiny. Their rhetorical strategies reflect broader cultural and political models.

Both authors used language as a strategic tool to legitimize their leadership. Each portrayed themselves as symbols of national values, shaping political ideology and national consciousness. Their main linguistic strategies include:

• Lexical choices: Lee – technocratic terms; Roosevelt – emotionally and value-laden words.

• Syntactic structure: Roosevelt – rhythmic and persuasive sentences; Lee – precise and simple structure.

• Rhetorical devices: Roosevelt – metaphor and storytelling; Lee – minimal storytelling and a fact-based approach.

Both leaders refer to history in their rhetoric. Lee Kuan Yew mentions Singapore's colonial past and the struggle for independence, using historical facts to legitimize his governance model. Roosevelt references the revolutionary spirit and democratic foundations of America, interpreting leadership as a continuation of democratic values. Both legitimize their leadership narratives through historical continuity. Key results of this study:

• Lee Kuan Yew: Technocratic authority — Theodore Roosevelt: Moral leadership;

• Technocratic modernism in Singapore — Moral nationalism in early 20th-century USA;

• Lee emphasizes economic logic — Roosevelt demonstrates moral ideology;

• Lee uses formal, structured, and fact-based language to emphasize pragmatism and political efficiency — Roosevelt prefers inspiring, emotionally rich rhetoric relying on metaphor and moral appeals;

• Lee promotes the ideology of collective governance through linguistic strategies — Roosevelt promotes individual moral strength.

DISCUSSION

Studying political discourse is essential in linguistics, particularly in analyzing how language shapes power, authority, and public perception. CDA analyzes the interconnection between ideology and power in language, playing a decisive role in analyzing political texts. Using the SFL approach, linguistic choices such as active/passive voice, modality, and nominalization are examined to understand how leadership and authority are represented in The Story of Singapore and The Laws of Leadership. Earlier studies mostly focused on individual leaders, e.g., Churchill's wartime rhetoric (Beard, 2000), Obama's speeches (Charteris-Black, 2014), and Lee Kuan Yew's pragmatism (Barr, 2000). However, comparative linguistic and literary analysis of Western and Asian leaders is still lacking. This study aims to fill that gap by comparing the rhetorical strategies, narrative techniques, and linguistic structures in The Story of Singapore and The Laws of Leadership. Political autobiographies and works by statesmen serve not only as historical documents but also as rhetorical tools. Narrative theory (Genette, 1980; Bal, 1997) shows that the way a leader constructs their life story shapes public perception. Roosevelt's personal stories and metaphorical storytelling align with classical rhetorical traditions, while Lee's detailed, data-driven language reflects his pragmatic leadership

style. Using rhetorical analysis approaches (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), the use of ethos, pathos, and logos in both leaders' texts is explored. This section compares their effectiveness in persuading the audience and shaping national identity and governance ideology. Lee's rhetoric emphasizes ethos and logos — he bases his authority on personal experience, statistical data, and logical reasoning. For example: "In 1965, Singapore's per capita income was less than $500. Through economic policies based on meritocracy and investment, we achieved exponential growth." Roosevelt relies more on pathos and ethos — appealing to emotions and moral responsibility. For example: "The greatest victory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." This contrast illustrates Lee's preference for fact-based credibility and Roosevelt's for inspirational storytelling. Lee's style is official, authoritative, and highly structured, emphasizing clarity and precision. His vocabulary frequently includes legal, economic, and governance-related terms — reinforcing his image as a policy-oriented technocrat. The Story of Singapore is deeply connected to postcolonial nation-building discourse. Transforming Singapore from a British colony to an independent state required strategic language to unify a multi-ethnic society. Lee's leadership discourse emphasizes:

• Practicality over ideology (Mauzy & Milne, 2002)

• Meritocracy and technocratic governance (Barr, 2014)

• Strong state control over media and public discourse (George, 2000)

His narrative style is direct, structured, and policy-focused, often legitimizing authority through statistics, legal references, and strategic forecasts.

In contrast, Roosevelt uses more conversational and rhetorical language — frequently addressing the reader directly with inspirational and encouraging tone. His prose reflects his role as a public figure and storyteller, resembling a dialogue rather than an official report. The Laws of Leadership emerged during the Progressive Era — a time of social reform, industrialization, and political renewal in the U.S. Roosevelt's leadership discourse emphasizes:

• Moral responsibility and personal character (Dalton, 2011)

• Anti-monopoly and economic justice (Morris, 2001)

• The role of charisma in political persuasion (Greenstein, 2009)

Unlike Lee, Roosevelt writes in a metaphorical, narrative-rich tone, often using metaphors, religious references, and heroic storytelling to depict leadership as a moral and personal journey. For instance: Lee Kuan Yew: "Governance requires an unwavering commitment to discipline, meritocracy, and economic prudence."

Roosevelt: "A leader must never waver! Stand firm in your beliefs, and you shall command the respect of the people." These examples highlight Lee's focus on technical precision and Roosevelt's emphasis on oratory and motivation. Lee often employs active voice — tying actions to specific individuals or policies. This reflects his practical, accountability-centered leadership style. Example: "We implemented policies that transformed Singapore into a global hub." Roosevelt blends active and passive voice, especially when emphasizing moral lessons. Example: "Great leaders are shaped by adversity." This difference shows Lee's preference for direct communication and Roosevelt's portrayal of leadership as shaped by external forces. Lee uses repetition sparingly but strategically to emphasize discipline and resilience. Example: "Without discipline, we cannot progress. Without progress, we cannot survive." Roosevelt frequently employs parallelism, reinforcing leadership values through balanced sentence structures. Example: "A leader must be strong in character, firm in decisions, and relentless in pursuit of justice." Roosevelt's use of parallelism enhances memorability and rhythm, while Lee's repetition strengthens policy-based messaging. Lee frequently uses declarative sentences — expressing his authoritative and decisive leadership stance. Example: "Singapore had no choice but to be exceptional." Roosevelt prefers imperative sentences — urging the audience to act. Example: "Take action! Stand up for what is right, no matter the cost." This contrast shows Lee's managerial confidence and Roosevelt's action-oriented leadership vision. Both leaders use language strategically to promote national unity, though their approaches differ. Lee often employs inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" to stress collective responsibility. Example: "We built Singapore from the ground up, and we must continue to protect our progress." Roosevelt views leadership as personal moral responsibility and encourages individual growth. Example: "Each citizen must strive for greatness, for in doing so, we strengthen our nation." This comparison reveals Lee's collectivist rhetoric and Roosevelt's individualist ethos.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that Lee Kuan Yew, through technocratic and pragmatic language, emphasizes nation-building and policy, whereas Roosevelt, through moral rhetoric and metaphorical storytelling, presents leadership as a moral endeavor. These conclusions

bring a new perspective to political discourse, leadership studies, and comparative literature. This study affirms that language plays a central role in political leadership and state-building. Despite being from different eras and geographies, both Lee Kuan Yew and Theodore Roosevelt construct governance narratives that transcend autobiography and become solid rhetorical frameworks for political identity. This research contributes to understanding political discourse as a literary and ideological activity.

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