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**A PRAGMATIC AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MALCOLM X'S  
SPEECH: "THE BALLOT OR THE BULLET"**

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## **Abstract**

Speech analysis is a very common practice found in the field of linguistics as well as in that of other fields, particularly with regard to speakers whose discursive practices have become incredibly memorable. Such speeches, like those from Malcolm X, are no exception and there are a plethora of analyses that exist on his discourse which consider distinct societal, cultural, and linguistic aspects and theories. However, this paper intends to analyze one of Malcolm X's speeches in particular, "The Ballot or the Bullet" by utilizing various linguistic subjects like Pragmatics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Stylistics, etc., while also considering certain cultural and linguistic aspects in detail in the overall contextualization of this speech. Furthermore, this study also intends to define the controversiality, persuasiveness, and memorability of Malcolm's speech and the methods through which he accomplished these effects.

## **Subjects**

The subjects that I have taken and whose academic aspects I will incorporate in this paper are mainly Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis as well as English Academic Reading and Writing.

### **1. Introduction**

History is an often complex, mysterious, and curious thing that can easily be misconstrued or misinterpreted. Historical figures, events, speeches, and intentions are usually remembered as having a predisposition towards one of two things: the virtuous or the immoral, the hero or the villain. When we examine the civil rights movement, its impact, and particularly its leaders, it is evident the public's view on the events that transpired shifted dramatically not only throughout

many years from when said events unfolded until the present, but also how it was perceived from one racial group to another. While the name Martin Luther King has become synonymous with the movement itself and his efforts for equality are incessantly praised in modern media by all sides of the political spectrum, history shows us that King's actions were *widely* disliked by the American public at a majority 75% disapproval rate according to a Harris poll in 1968 (Cobb, 2018). Similarly, if we take another leader of the civil rights movement who was even more disliked at the time--Malcolm X, we note a familiar pattern in the way his words were interpreted distinctly not only through the passage of time and shifting ideologies but also through the ethnic and political groups who listened.

Therefore, I hold it is of monumental importance to examine the immortal words of certain historical figures, in this particular case that of Malcolm X in his famous speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet," considering linguistic and pragmatic aspects as well as those of critical discourse analysis. Such a study will allow us an in-depth look into the cultural context in which his words became popular enough to either cause public disdain or resonate with particular groups at the time and continue to remain relevant with issues still present in the modern day.

## **2. Objectives: General and specific**

As previously mentioned, the general objective of this analysis is to uncover and understand the cultural and historic meaning behind Malcolm X's words utilizing linguistic, pragmatic, and critical discourse analysis criteria.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows, 1) identify distinct discursive elements that Malcolm X incorporated into his speech to create a powerful and meaningful message he

delivered to his audience and 2) determine which pragmatic, historic, and cultural elements caused the dichotomy of reactions to his speech not only in the past but still in the present day.

### **3. Literature Review**

This paper will analyze Malcolm X's speech with elements from both pragmatics and discourse analysis. Such elements include implicatures from pragmatics and critical discourse analysis and persuasion. The following is a more detailed description of the aforementioned concepts.

#### **Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is a subdiscipline of linguistics which seeks to study the meaning of utterances as they are communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener (Yule, 1996, p. 3). This subdiscipline explores the intended or hidden meaning of words and utterances beyond their literal meaning. This is accomplished by thoroughly considering the context whether it be social, historical, cultural, or ideological and masterfully sifting through them to find the connotative and denotative meanings of a particular utterance.

#### **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is a research method utilized in many diverse disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, and cultural studies in order to analyze written or spoken language in relation to a particular social context (Luo, 2020). Conducting this type of analysis entails examining the functions of language which can include non-verbal aspects of communication such as intonation patterns, pauses, and gesticulation. It also implies focusing on the cultural aspects of communication in which meanings are created and how language is employed to evoke a particular reaction from its receptors. In addition, according to Luo (2020), discourse analysis focuses on larger extracts of language like entire conversations or collections of texts instead of

focusing on smaller units of language such as sounds, words or phrases with the intent to recognize the purposes and effects of different types of language and how its use relates to its social, political and historical contexts.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis, or CDA, is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of dialogue that views language as a form of social practice. A general description of this discipline is, “to systematically explore opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events and texts, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes to investigate how such practices arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power” (Fairclough 1995: 132). Furthermore, this field is concerned with how texts can influence a person's political and social views (Jeffries & McIntyre 2010).

### **Stylistics**

Stylistics is a sub-discipline of linguistics concerned with the systematic analysis of style in language and how it varies according to different factors like genre, context, historical period and author (Jeffries & McIntyre 2010). Although stylistics has tended to concentrate on the analysis of literary texts, it also analyzes a much broader category of non-literary texts using a general framework incorporating theories from numerous other disciplines to understand the function of a particular text or speech. A key principle of this sub-discipline is that language meaning is found and demonstrated through the linguistic choices a writer or speaker makes, hence the interrelation between stylistics and linguistics are the analytical techniques and methodologies said fields utilize to facilitate the study of style (Jeffries & McIntyre 2010).

## **Implicature**

A conversational implicature is an implicit speech act, in other words, the intention of what is meant by a speaker's utterance, that is not explicitly said, which can be inferred by readers or listeners (Nordquist, 2020). Implicatures can be determined by different pragmatic contexts pertinent to a conversation or by particular words that convey additional meanings when used.

## **Alliteration**

Alliteration is a literary device that takes place when two or more words share the same first consonant and sound in a sentence or phrase; it is important to note that it is the initial sound and not the letter that is considered as an element of alliteration (Green, 2020).

## **Assonance**

Assonance is another literary device used in the repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds in adjacent words (Nordquist, 2020). Similarly to alliteration, said device can be employed to achieve emphasis in a certain part of a text or utterance.

## **Duarte's structure**

Another relatively recent framework used in the study of discourse is that of Nancy Duarte who mapped out an actual shape found in memorable speeches. This outline consists of a rising and falling pattern of one extreme to another when speakers begin their presentation by defining the status quo and then proceed to compare it to what could be. The amplification of the contrast between the problem and the solution holds an immense amount of persuasion among an

audience and as Duarte explains, the presenter conveys, “here's the past, here's the present, but look at our future” in order to achieve their desired effect (Duarte, 2011, 6:55).

#### **4. Referential Framework**

There are a number of papers that study similar elements of discourse and intentionality in speeches written and delivered by Malcom X as well as those that provide historical and cultural contexts of the events that were taking place in 1960's America. One research paper by Maya Fitriyani called, *LINGUISTIC AND INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE SPEECH BY MALCOLM X ENTITLED: WHO TAUGHT YOU TO HATE YOURSELF?* (2018), analyzes how linguistic features and intertextuality constitute meaning in speech. It demonstrates through systematic textual analysis the relationship of power, inequality, and ideologies between structures in discourse in order to reveal the meanings found in Malcolm X's speech. Fitriyani concludes that a textual and intertextual analysis helped to uncover the intentions behind the words Malcolm employs and similarly to this paper, she uses critical discourse and linguistic analysis to discover said intentionality. However, her study focuses on the role of intertextuality and does not particularly account for social or cultural contexts, as she states herself. Additionally, the speech she chose to analyze is, “Who Taught You To Hate Yourself?” which, although it discusses similar issues of inequality, it is distinct from the speech examined in this paper, “The Ballot or the Bullet.”

Another research paper that examines the intent and structure of Malcolm X's speech is titled, *Identify/Divide This, Cracker! A Rhetorical Analysis of The Ballot or The Bullet* by Barak Bullock (2013). This author focuses on the evolution of Malcolm's political and social stances reflected in his speeches over time and the elements which show his new attitudes towards the

problems concerning civil rights (Bullock, 2013). Bullock employs two main markers of discourse--identification and division found in, "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech to not only identify the changes from previous speeches but also to understand the reasons and implications for these shifts. Bullock concludes the paper by saying that identification is the key concept of rhetoric and persuasion in the speech because of its effectiveness for Malcolm X's advocacy (2013). Whilst Bullock incorporates some linguistic analysis such as the intent behind the repetitive use of the pronouns "we" and "us" to create a sense of collectivity and the persuasive effects of using inflammatory language, the paper mainly focuses on the content and noticeable changes between Malcolm X's discourse in the controversial 1964 speech.

Yet another paper titled, *Descriptive Analysis on Malcolm X's "The Bullet or the Ballot" Speech* by Rochelle Hernandez (2014), discusses the historical events that were occurring at the time Malcolm delivered said speech as well as the effects his discourse had on the public afterwards. Hernandez also describes the purpose and intentions of the Civil Rights leaders' speech in relation to the black community and their electoral power. The author of the paper concludes that the structure of the speech as well as the tone and materials with which it was delivered, created an inspiring and, depending on the group, controversial message. This study analyzes some linguistic elements such as the repetition of certain words for emphasis and the use of statistics to further highlight the power imbalances of politics in America at the time, but does not carry out an in depth examination on further linguistic factors or any discourse theories. Hernandez instead focuses on the cultural and societal environment of the time and the events surrounding these aspects.

Additionally, one article by Monica Lunin, *Malcolm X Speech (The Ballot or the Bullet)* also examines the intended effect behind Malcolm X's words and the stylistics of his speech. Lunin

(n.d.) explores the positions Malcolm sets throughout his discourse, particularly that of a call for unity among the black community in America. She also describes his lyrical use of repetition, rhythm, and rhyme to keep listeners' attention as well as the presence of anadiplosis, an effective rhetorical tool. Similarly to other analyses mentioned, Lunin asserts the intention of Malcolm's calls for unification and action and mentions general stylistic aspects found in, "The Ballot or the Bullet" but does not elaborate on further linguistic or theoretical aspects of discourse.

The final paper mentioned here is titled, *Critical Discourse Analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Speech I Have a Dream and Malcolm X's Speech A Message to the Grassroots* by Bajri and Othman (2019) in which they deconstruct one speech from Martin Luther King and another from Malcolm X to compare and contrast the linguistic tools used by both speakers. They also base their study on critical discourse analysis and examine the discursive and social practices of the speeches. Bajri and Othman describe the linguistic and stylistic attributes of Dr. King's speech such as the use of positive lexical items, the repetition of inclusive pronouns, and anaphora. They also discuss the position in which Martin Luther King's places himself and the formality found in his discourse. Additionally, they contrast the aforementioned characteristics of Dr. King's speech to those of Malcolm X's stating the use of both positive and negative lexical items, anaphora, epistrophe and the informality found in the latter's discourse. The authors conclude by emphasizing the importance of critical discourse analysis in understanding the distinct ideologies and stances both speakers relay to their audiences based on their linguistic and pragmatic choices. This study is the most similar to the one that will be carried out in this paper, however Bajri and Othman's main goal is to carefully analyze linguistic and pragmatic elements in two speeches by leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, "I Have a Dream" and "A Message to the Grassroots" in order to compare them.

As demonstrated, there are other studies that analyze the discursive elements found in Malcolm X's speeches but they either focus on other elements or speeches entirely. Thus, what separates the aim of this paper from the ones above is to understand the pragmatic meaning of Malcolm's speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet" not only by analyzing its different linguistic and stylistic features but also by accounting for historical and cultural elements.

## **5. Methodology**

The subject whose speech I chose to analyze is one of the most prominent leaders of the civil rights movement, Malcolm X, with regard to his speech delivered on April 12, 1964, "The Ballot or the Bullet." As previously stated, the reason I chose this particular speech is due to its degree of influence and historical importance and also because of Malcolm's distinctive articulatory mannerisms. In order to conduct this rhetorical analysis, I will primarily base my research on the lexical transcript of the speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet" found on an online corpus of Malcolm X's speeches. The speech was attained on the following website: <http://malcolmxfiles.blogspot.com/2013/06/the-ballot-or-bullet-april-12-1964.html>.

Additionally, I will analyze an audio recording found of the aforementioned speech on the social media platform, Youtube. Said recording was obtained on the following website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJi0Jx2y1fQ>.

This study will use qualitative research centered on critical discourse analysis theories to 1) identify the discursive elements found in Malcolm's speech that created an empowering and controversial message, and 2) establish instances in which implicatures and other intended meanings are found. Studying the pragmatic context of implicatures found in the speech through linguistic and stylistic means, provides further understanding into Malcolm X's words, his

objective behind using them, and the distinct reactions they caused. The purpose of this study is to provide insight into the tactics implemented in Malcolm's discourse to invoke a wide set of reactions from his audience and the public at large with regard to his utterances and ideologies. Furthermore, I intend to demonstrate how certain cultural and historical elements had a role in the reception and subsequent legacy of his speech. To achieve this analysis, I will use search tools from the word processor Google Docs to numerate the frequency of certain lexical terms in Malcolm's speech and display said data on graphs to later analyze altogether. This data will facilitate an in-depth analysis of Malcolm's creation of dichotomies, union, and controversy through his word choice and rhetoric style. The graphs will serve to visualize the differences in the use of positive terms such as “unity” and negative terms like “enemies” or “slave.” Moreover, graphs will also allow a visual comparison of the frequency of opposite terms like “us,” (the black community,) versus “them” which Malcolm explains as “the white man” in his speech.

Additionally, I will use various online articles to verify the historical and cultural elements pertinent to the events surrounding this speech not only at the time it took place but also until the present day. Said articles can provide insight into the historical context in which the speech was delivered and thus the significance it had when it was made, as well as give perspectives from different racial groups, which aid to understand the diverse range of responses generated by the “The Ballot or the Bullet” speech. I will incorporate all of these technological, visual, and linguistic tools to create a synchronic, linguistic and historical analysis of Malcolm's speech and ultimately attempt to establish the intention of his words and their effects based on the lexical data obtained.

## 6. Data analysis

The analysis of the speech focuses on the following aspects: 1) linguistic elements such as certain lexical items and rhetorical devices, 2) the controversial message behind Malcolm X's utterances and the reactions they subsequently caused, and finally, 3) extralinguistic features such as historical and cultural context and its role in characterizing "The Ballot or the Bullet" as such a memorable piece of discourse. Firstly, we begin by analyzing the most noticeable lexical items found in the speech which can be divided into two main groups, those with negative or positive connotations. Malcolm employs an extensive use of hostile verbs, which are demonstrated in Table 1, as well as many nouns and adjectives that allude to the violent and grim circumstances that the black community had and were continuing to endure in America at the time.

*Table 1: List of negative lexical terms*

|               |                  |                  |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>attack</b> | <b>exploited</b> | <b>bloody</b>    |
| <b>hang</b>   | <b>oppressed</b> | <b>enemy</b>     |
| <b>suffer</b> | <b>trapped</b>   | <b>hypocrisy</b> |

As can be evidenced in the table above, there are numerous violent terms found throughout Malcolm's speech associated with brutality, death, and entrapment. Verbs like "hang" and "trapped" appear a total of 8 and 6 times respectively, while "blood," and words closely associated with it like "bloody" and "blood-shed," appear a total of 13 times. Additionally, we can see how Malcolm incorporates several negative lexical items simultaneously to create a powerful visual of the many issues facing the black community in America.

We *suffer* political *oppression*, economic *exploitation*, and social *degradation*, all of them from the same *enemy* (Little (X), 1964, 12:45).

In this particular instance, he paints a clear picture of the many harmful actions perpetrated by one single enemy, “the white man.” As we will see various times, Malcolm always employs these words when referring to caucasian individuals and their actions, and thus creates a negative mental lexical association in the minds of his audience by repeatedly connecting violence and exploitation to a particular group, the one he defines as “the enemy.”

Now we will focus on the utilization of positive lexical terms and their associations.

*Table 2: List of positive lexical terms*

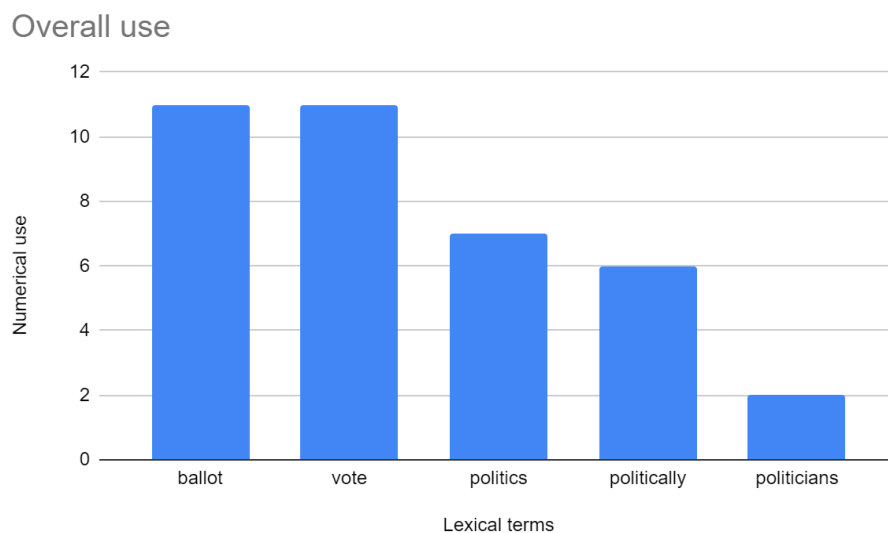
|                  |                |                  |
|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <b>brothers</b>  | <b>freedom</b> | <b>community</b> |
| <b>sisters</b>   | <b>power</b>   | <b>unity</b>     |
| <b>fraternal</b> | <b>liberty</b> | <b>harmony</b>   |

The above terms are positively correlated with two main topics: unity (specifically among the black community) and freedom. Malcolm discusses both of these aspects in detail and how the unification of Afro-Americans as a community will ultimately gain them their liberty. These optimistic terms are used only in reference to the black community and hence, Malcolm’s effort to equate black identity with positive values is apparent. Moreover, the frequency of positive lexical items is significantly higher than those which are negative, for example, the word “community” appears over 30 times and both “power” and “freedom” appear 13 times each. Additionally, it is evident how Malcolm marks a clear dichotomy between two racial groups and ideologies like, “the whites” and Afro-Americans, through recurring lexical terms such as “white,” used 42 times, and “black” used 52 times. The phrase “brothers and sisters,” is used 5

times, and the noun “enemy,” used 7 times, also demonstrate a clear *us* versus *them* distinction whilst “liberty” and “slave” are two conflicting ideas that Malcolm capitalizes on.

Moreover, we can calculate the overall frequency of certain words and those which are semantically related to said terms in order to visualize their numerical recurrence in Malcolm’s discourse. For example, since Malcolm’s speech clearly centers around politics, it is not surprising that nouns and verbs associated with this subject matter are prevalent throughout. It is interesting to note that the political terms with the highest use are “ballot” and “vote,” used a total of 22 times, and “politics,” “politically,” “politicians” are collectively used only 15 times. We can assume that this was done in order to draw listeners’ attention to the inefficiency of actions such as voting and the invalidity of ballots. The repeated use of such terms also aids to confirm the assertion that more dramatic steps need to be taken in order for the black community to achieve freedom, which as Malcolm reiterates, is not necessarily through voting or politics but through black nationalism since, “the government has failed us.”

*Graph 1: Number of times political terms are used*

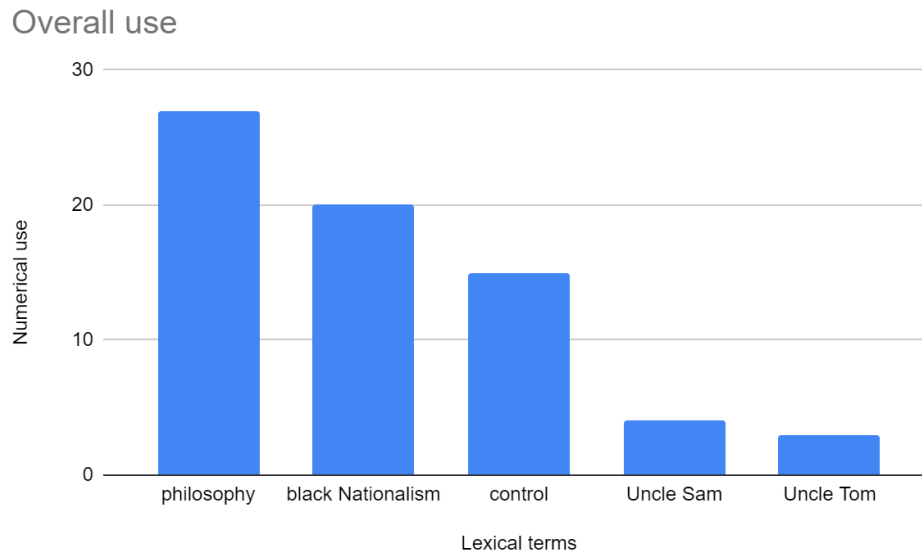


Another significant instance of frequent lexical repetition is found with terms associated to negative or contrasting ideologies and entities. For example, Malcolm compares white nationalism to black nationalism and increasingly associates negative terms like the nouns “crook” and “hypocrite,” the adjective “guilty” and the verb “violating” with Uncle Sam--a personified symbol of the United States government, and Uncle Tom, a derogatory term used in reference to black people considered to be subservient to white people (Oxford University Press (OUP), n.d.). This is exemplified in the following extract even further by the gory connection Malcolm establishes between the terms “blood,” “jaws,” and “wolf” with regard to the aforementioned entities.

...*Uncle Sam is guilty of violating* the human rights of 22 million Afro-Americans... Not only is he a *crook*, he’s a *hypocrite*. Here he is...*Uncle Sam*, with the *blood* of your and mine mothers and fathers on his hands, with the *blood* dripping down his *jaws* like a *bloody-jawed wolf* (Little (X), 1964, 47:37).

Malcolm again outlines a grotesque association between these unjust entities and violence through his lexical choices. Additionally, he also marks a stark contrast between the philosophy he preaches of, that of black nationalism, and the one he labels as that of the “white man.” Graph 2 demonstrates the numerical frequency with which “philosophy” occurs, the highest at 27 times, as well as the main ideology Malcolm emphasizes, “black nationalism,” used 20 times. Similarly, the verb “control” is also used fairly extensively, at a total of 15 times, and is found in the speech in one of two ways: either in direct correlation to how the government and “whites” exert unjust control over the black community in America or in reference to how blacks should be the ones in control of their own communities and businesses.

Graph 2: Number of times ideological terms are used



Thus, it is apparent that Malcolm X’s repeated use of the above terms serves to highlight the differences between both philosophies as well as contrast the control exerted by one group over the other. All of this makes his call to action that much more compelling for his audience.

Now, we will examine Malcolm X’s strategic use of both personal and object pronouns in order to generate a degree of closeness and inclusion with his target group and in contrast, alienate members of another group by purposefully incorporating distant and, at times, derogatory language. For example, one way Malcolm manages to get closer to and address his target demographic--specifically the black members in his audience, is through the use of the personal pronoun “you.” A clear instance of this is found in the following sentence:

Let me tell *you*, *you* wouldn’t be in this country if *some enemy* hadn’t *kidnapped you* and brought *you here* (Little (X), 1964, 10:58).

Here we notice a clear accusation of kidnapping and subsequent enslavement committed by one group, “the enemy” towards another group, which Malcolm repeatedly addresses by using the

pronoun “you” four times in one sentence. What's more, in the entirety of “The Ballot or the Bullet” speech, we find this personal pronoun used an astounding 298 times<sup>1</sup> and it is possible to assume this was done intentionally given that the majority of Malcolm’s discourse is mainly directed towards one group--a group which he attempts to call to action. With such an elevated use, the pronoun “you” is a clear and yet subconscious way of communicating with his target audience and signaling to all listeners who this utterance is intended for. On the other hand, we can note another instance of intentional isolation of one group and simultaneous inclusion of another by Malcolm’s use of subject pronouns “I,” “you,” “he,” and “we,” and object pronouns like “us” as seen in the following extract:

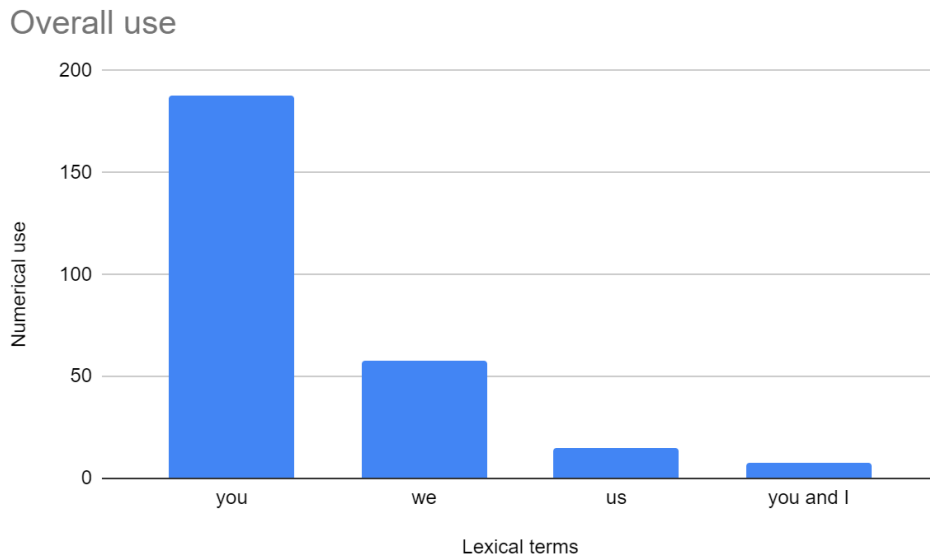
...the strategy of the white man has always been divide and conquer. *He* keeps *us* divided in order to conquer *us*. *He* tells *you I’m* for separation and *you* for integration to keep *us* fighting with each other. No, *I’m* not for separation and *you’re* not for integration. What *you* and *I* are for is freedom. ... *We* both got the same objective, *we* just got different ways of getting at it. (Little (X), 1964, 49:02)

Once again, Malcolm X creates a dichotomy of the *us* versus *them* ideology through positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation as mentioned by van Dijk’s model (2002). Hence, he establishes the positive goal of achieving freedom among the black community and demonizes “the whites” by accusing them of intentionally dividing them while using distant and accusatory language concerning them and their actions. Yet again, we see Malcolm accomplish this effect through his persistent and intentional use of certain pronouns. In fact, if we tabulate the statistical frequency of the pronouns “you,” “we,” “us,” and “you and I,” we can visualize and compare the number of times they each appear in the speech.

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<sup>1</sup> This number includes variations of “you” like the determiner “your” and the contraction of “you” and “are” as “you’re.”

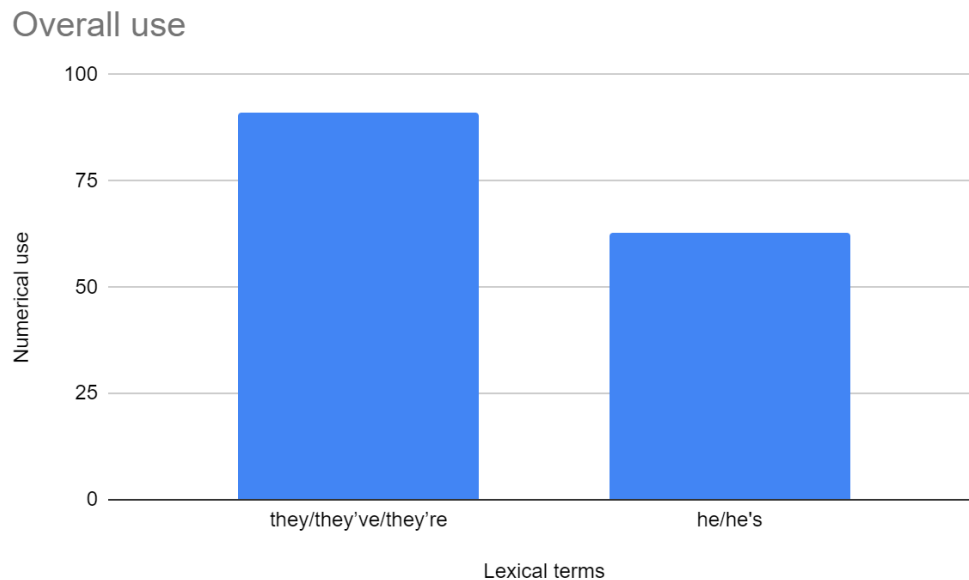
Graph 3: Number of times inclusive pronouns are used



“You” appears 191 times, “we” 58 times, “us” 15 times, and the phrase “you and I” 8 times. Again, this influences the positive lexical association of inclusivity through pronouns in Malcolm's message of unity among one specific group.

In contrast to the use of inclusive pronouns, there are also numerous uses of distancing pronouns like “they,” the contraction “they” and the verb “have” as “they’ve” and “they” and “are” as “they’re” which are found a total of 91 times. In addition, we find the subject pronoun “he,” the contraction of “he” and the verb “is” as “he’s,” used 63 times as can be seen in graph 4.

Graph 4: Number of times distancing pronouns are used



The frequent use of negative terminology and distancing pronouns demonstrates the ideological position and beliefs Malcolm holds with regard to individuals outside of the black community. Here is yet another instance in which this dichotomy is highlighted:

You're going to *his* court expecting *him* to correct the problem. *He* created the *problem*.  
*He's* the *criminal* (Little (X), 1964,45:47).

Once again, it is evident Malcolm blames various issues on the “white man” and uses the appropriate pronouns like “his,” “him,” and “he” to separate one group and enforce the *us* versus *them* mentality in order to make his opinions understood. He also incorporates lexical items with negative connotations such as “problem” and “criminal” to once again foreground the cynical aspects he associates with the “whites.”

In the final section of linguistic analysis, we find instances in which Malcolm employs literary devices like assonance and alliteration as are seen in the following extracts.

You and I are in a double *trap*...we're *trapped, trapped, double trapped, triple trapped*. Anywhere we go we find that we're *trapped*. And every kind of solution that someone comes up with is just another *trap* (Little (X), 1964, 8:14).

Here, both assonance and alliteration are employed with the repetition of the word “trap” given that the initial consonants, the voiceless, alveolar, stop /t/ as well as the alveolar approximant /ɹ/, form the initial consonant clusters which are repeated in the above paragraph. Additionally, the front unrounded vowel /æ/ is also repeated frequently and thus, constitutes assonance. Again, this reiteration works not only to emphasize the feeling of entrapment but also to create unity among those who Malcolm refers to as being trapped. We find other examples of these devices used as can be seen in yet another extract:

They've become *disenchanted*. They've become *disillusioned*. They've become *dissatisfied*, and all of this has built up frustrations in the black community that makes the black community throughout America today more explosive than all of the atomic bombs the Russians can ever invent (Little (X), 1964, 18:59).

Once again both assonant and alliterative elements are found with the rhythmic repetition of the words “disenchanted,” “disillusioned,” and “dissatisfied” with the voiced, alveolar, stop consonant/d/ and the front unrounded vowel /ɹ/.

The second part of the analysis, which scrutinizes the controversial message behind Malcolm X's utterances and the reactions they caused, ties in with the above extract. Terms like “frustrations,” “explosive,” and “atomic bombs” are uttered in the same sentence to illustrate a clear picture of the racial tension building up in America and moreover, Malcolm associates said tension to war,

such as with the conflict of the Cold War that was brewing at the time, and with weaponry like atomic bombs. He further emphasizes this point by stating the following.

Whenever you got a *racial powder keg* sitting in your lap, you're in *more trouble* than if you had an *atomic powder keg* sitting in your lap...it doesn't care who it knocks out the way. Understand this, it's *dangerous*. (Little (X), 1964, 19:19)

It is at this point in his speech that Malcolm incorporates increasingly hostile terminology as with "dangerous" and begins to take on a more threatening and accusatory tone.

This is part of what's *wrong* with you. You do too much singing. Today it's time to stop singing and *start swinging*. You can't sing up on freedom, but you can *swing* up on some freedom (Little (X), 1964, 13:16).

He accuses those who partake in Civil Rights activities peacefully, such as those who would march whilst singing, as being part of the problem, hence the words, "This is part of what's wrong with *you*." Furthermore, there is a clear call to a more hostile approach in obtaining freedom when Malcolm states, "it's time to stop singing and start swinging." Given the pragmatic context, we can infer he means "swing" as in "to hit" or "throw a punch." His negative lexical association becomes even more apparent with the following phrases.

...as long as you think that *old* sit-down thought you'll be in some kind of sit-down action. That right there *castrates* you. Right there it *brings you down*...An *old* woman can sit. An *old* man can sit. A *chump* can sit. A *coward* can sit. Well you and I been sitting long enough, and it's time today for us to start doing some standing, and some *fighting* to back that up (Little (X), 1964, 15:34).

The repeated use of the adjective “old” demonstrates his antipathetic opinions towards using a pacific tactic such as a sit-down and the verb “castrates” and nouns like “chump” and “coward” further illustrate his aversion. Thus, Malcolm equates peaceful actions, such as sitting, to a negative ideology and contrasts it to standing and fighting which he depicts as the right and courageous thing to do.

This is why I say it's the *ballot* or the *bullet*. It's *liberty* or it's *death*. It's freedom for *everybody* or freedom for *nobody* (Little (X), 1964, 38:56).

Here, he reiterates the very title of his speech and again draws sharp contrasts between “ballot,” “bullet,” “liberty,” “death,” and “everybody,” “nobody” and there is again a noticeable, underlying threatening tone to his words.

It becomes increasingly clear why said words and ideologies provoked a plethora of mixed emotions with his audiences and in America. Given that the primary message of the speech highlighted inequalities and injustices, his words resonated with many members of the black community. However, there was much disagreement as to the more violent methods championed by Malcolm as is evidenced in the disagreements between himself, Martin Luther King Jr., and their followers. In addition, there was growing unrest among racial groups, particularly among caucasians, who mostly agreed, “Negroes were moving too fast” as was shown in a Newsweek poll taken at the time (Younge, 2007). Hence, Malcolm's words served as an outlet for the rage and frustrations felt by many but also stoked division in an increasingly hostile and volatile America.

The third section focuses on the extralinguistic features like historical and cultural context and how they defined “The Ballot or the Bullet.” There are two noticeable aspects worth mentioning with regard to said contexts. The first is found in the following section.

I studied this man, Billy Graham, who *preaches white nationalism*...I say that’s what he preaches. The *whole church structure* in this country is *white nationalism*. You go inside a *white church* that’s what they preaching is *white nationalism* (Little (X), 1964, 49:41).

Malcolm outright calls Christianity, as it is preached in America, as white nationalism and paints a renowned evangelist, Billy Graham, as a white nationalist. Furthermore, at other instances in his speech, he references his belief in Islam and praises black nationalism as the correct alternative. Therefore, he positions himself in such a way that opposes traditional Christianity and calls for a different set of values. Given that the dominant religion in America was, and still is Christianity, such statements were taken as inflammatory by many who belonged to “white churches.” Another subject Malcolm discusses quite emphatically is politics.

In the South, they’re outright political *wolves*. In the North, they’re political *foxes*. A *fox* and a *wolf*...both belong to the *dog* family. Now you take your choice. You going to choose a Northern *dog* or a Southern *dog*? Because either *dog* you choose I guarantee you you’ll still be in the *dog* house (Little (X), 1964, 38:10).

Yet again, Malcolm incorporates terms like “wolf,” “fox” and “dog” in a pejorative sense to elicit the intended emotions he wants from particular audience members. However, his reference to politics found in the Northern states by “North foxes” and those in the South by “Southern wolves,” extends to the distinct stances and actions taken by politicians in different states. By referring to all politicians as “dogs” and stating “you’ll still be in the dog house,” he is covertly

referring to the fact that, while some were openly discriminatory with their policies, the ones who seemed to support the black community did not actually intend on helping them.

In addition to the historic events taking place in the U.S. at the time, there were many others occurring globally, some of which Malcolm mentions.

The white man can *never win another war* on the ground. His days of...victory are *over*. Can I prove it? Yes. Take all the action that's going on this earth right now that he's involved in (and) tell me where he's winning. *Nowhere*. Why some rice farmers *ran him out of Korea*...with nothing but gym shoes, and a rifle... (Little (X), 1964, 41:28)

Here, he references the U.S.A.'s involvement in the Korean War which had occurred some years prior to Malcolm's speech. As explained by Rotondi (2021), although the excuse given for their involvement was to fight against communism, the U.S. and other foreign powers were unsuccessful in achieving a peace treaty in the region. Thus, Malcolm declares their attempts as futile and even ridicules them.

The same thing happened in Algeria, in Africa, they didn't have anything but a rifle. The French had all these highly mechanized instruments of warfare, but they put some guerrilla action on, and a *white man can't fight a guerrilla warfare*. Guerrilla action takes *heart*, takes *nerve*, and he doesn't have that (Little (X), 1964, 42:41).

Yet, another example he mentions is that of the seven-year Algerian War which eventually culminated with the termination of French colonial rule in the country (History.com Editors, 2019). Again, Malcolm foregrounds these international defeats of the "white man" and praises the actions taken by those who fought and died for change. Given these historical realities, he

ends by emphasizing a distrust in the government as well as the urgency to take matters into their own hands.

To conclude the data analysis, there is one fascinating discourse framework model Malcolm X's speech coincides with which is what Duarte labels the "secret structure of great talks." This structure follows an up and down pattern switching from a description of the "status quo" to the opposite end of what could be a new reality. Said pattern is distinctly prevalent throughout "The Ballot or the Bullet" as Malcolm highlights the many grim circumstances of the time and contrasts them to opposite scenarios of what could and should be.

## **7. Conclusions and recommendations**

Considering all the aforementioned elements of linguistic, historic, and cultural analysis, it becomes clear why this speech became such a popular example of memorable discourse and why it not only left an impact at the time it was made but still exerts influence to the present day. Malcolm X masterfully employed many distinct oratory techniques, such as repetition and assonance, and used them to create a powerful and persuasive message to those who heard him. By utilizing CDA and Duarte's discourse framework to scrutinize the structure of "The Ballot and the Bullet," it becomes easier to understand which particular elements constructed an unforgettable speech. Moreover, a further look into the extralinguistic aspects of his discourse, such as the historic instances Malcolm cites and the cultural context of the United States and the world at the time, provides an additional insight into the societal conditions occurring when he rendered his speech and how this served to emphasize his message. Concerning the controversial aspects of Malcolm's rhetoric, this analysis shows why some groups denounced him while others fervently agreed with his words. Thus, it makes sense as to why there were, and still are,

conflicting opinions about Malcolm X's character, his discourse, and ideologies. However, his speeches are studied and cited in many diverse academic disciplines and continue to be a source of inspiration for those who identify with the conflicts and injustices he spoke about still prevalent in the present day.

With regard to recommendations, further studies should include a detailed analysis that takes phonetic aspects such as intonation and pauses on behalf of the speaker into account as well as auditory reactions from the audience which are found in the recording of the speech. It could also be enlightening to analyze the level of formality or informality found in certain words or phrases employed in Malcolm's speech which were not discussed in detail here. Furthermore, it would be interesting to carry out an analysis similar to this one and contrast it with a speech from another famous speaker of the time such as one from Martin Luther King.

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