

Obama's commencement speech

Literature



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Obama's Speech Everybody knows how good of a speaker Obama is. His speeches always seem to convince the audience, but it is not by everybody understood what distinguishes him from other speakers. Certain skills he frequently uses help him reach his main purpose, but the question remains what these skills include. Therefore, the aim of this commentary is explain how the use of rhetorical devices makes Obama's speeches stand out and memorable. Rhetorical devices are techniques that an author or speaker uses in order to convey the listener or reader a message with the goal to persuade him or her towards a certain perspective.

There are a lot of different kinds of techniques such as irony and the use of metaphors. When listening carefully to Obama's speeches one is able to distinguish certain rhetorical devices that seem to keep coming back in every other of his speeches. We could say Obama has got some favourite techniques which clearly seem to help him in giving excellent speeches. When we take a closer look at Obama's commencement speech for the Illinois university school of medicine we can also find the devices that keep coming back. The Technique he uses the most frequently is the so called 'tricolon', which can also be called 'the rule of threes'.

Tricolon uses series of three to emphasis certain issues and by this making his point even more clear and memorable. In Obama's Inauguration speech alone we are able to find twenty two example of tricolon and in this commencement speech he also is not 'afraid' of using it. Already in his first sentence we are able to find an example of this device: "After four years of endless work, sleepless nights, and constant stress". And even though this is

his first sentence and it is a joke, he already stresses the fact that his audience has worked hard and that it is something they can be proud of.

Also by using three word groups each from a noun and an adjective he makes the 'situation' seem even more dramatic and funny. Another example when he uses tricolon is "genocide in Dafur or the AIDS epidemic or the fifteen-year-old who was gunned down on front of his house." By using three examples instead of two or four examples he reaches the just the right point where people will get his point, understand him, where they have had enough time to think about the situation, are able to identify and keep remembering his words.

There are many more great examples but tricolon is of course not the only rhetorical device he uses. Barack Obama also knows exactly how to use the pronouns 'I', 'you' and 'we' in a good and effective manner. By using specifically these three pronouns much more often than pronouns such as she, he or they, he is able to create a higher degree of intimacy and solidarity towards his audience. He makes his audience feel as if he is talking to them personally even though he may be speaking to an audience of thousands of people.

Also when his topics concern some issues such as the healthcare issue in this speech, he is able to twist his story in such a way that he really believes that there is a solution and that certainly together we can always come to a solution. It is amazing he is able to tell it in such a way that the audience is also going to believe it. "This is why we need you. We need you to dream, we need you to speak out, and we need you to act. And together, we can build a health care system in this country that finally works for every

American. This part of his speech is a perfect example where all of the most important rhetorical devices come together and work effectively together. We can identify his use of pronouns, tricolon (“ We need you to dream, we need you to speak out, and we need you to act. ”) and also anaphora. Anaphora is another of Obama's favourite techniques. “ We need you” is already repeated four times in just two sentences. The five following paragraphs also consist of anaphora, because they all begin with “ We can (have)...” Repeating this part of the sentence does not only give the speech a nice structure, it is much more than that.

It is saying in an indirect way that we really, honestly can, but in a much more effective way. Because every time the audience is reminded of that ‘ fact’ and when things keep coming back one will be able to remember it easily with the effect that one can also start to believe in his words. “ Perhaps you will first notice when a doctor tells a woman that her husband will need a life-saving procedure that their insurance does not cover and their family cannot afford. Perhaps it will be the late-stage diagnosis of a cancer that could have been prevented with a routine of screening that the patient's health care plan just doesn't cover.

Perhaps it will be the endless stream of people who wait and wait in the emergency room which is the only place that will treat the uninsured. ” Is another example where anaphora and tricolon are combined to create a stronger effect. Again three examples are used together to increase the power of the three separate examples another thing is that all three examples start with “ perhaps” which is used to link the three separate examples but also again to make it more memorable. So Obama knows

exactly how to use words in order to create the effect he likes: being persuasive, personal and productive.

Every speaker has got his or her own characteristics in their way of speaking and so does Obama. His good and effective way of speaking distinguishes him from others. He is able to create this effectiveness by the use of important rhetorical devices. The three most important devices he uses Obama uses are tricolon, the correct use of pronouns and anaphora. By using these both separate as together he is able to make speeches in which his message comes across at the good manner and he is able to make speeches in which he can be as effective and persuasive as possible. 1. 058 words