

An investigation into the rhetorical devices and language features used by barack...

[People](#), [Barack Obama](#)



An investigation into the rhetorical devices and language features used by Barack Obama in his acceptance speech to assert power and to influence peoples' thoughts Barack Obama is a name that many citizens can recall of, especially after he became the first African-American candidate to be nominated by a major party, and the first to win, for either president or vice president when he became the Democratic Party presidential nominee in the 2008 election and was elected. Prior to this, Obama had vigorously campaigned for change in the country.

This context is convenient as due to being a part of the political party, it is obvious that the linguistic techniques used would express an idea or ideology. Which as a result would influence people's attitudes and beliefs. An effective speech can not only spur loud applause of the audience but also enlighten them. Public speech is made to exert much power on the public in a short time, thus achieving the speech-maker's aim.

Obama has been asserting himself among the American people through his powerful speech. There are many factors attributing to Obama's success in speech, and he applies a tactic of rhetorical devices in his approach. I will be researching secondary sources such as Fairclough Norman, extra sources of theorists (Irving Goffman) which can deliver me with extra information on my analysis. I will be splitting the investigation to categories to which I believe are used in Barack Obamas Speech such as pronouns, rhetorical devices like anaphora and alliteration and other language features. Aims of my study include: Analysing how Barack Obama uses language in his victory speech exercise power and influence people's views Study the functions of these

devices and link back to secondary sources To identify patterns of language throughout the speech Research consisted of analysing many political speeches from the election 2008. I decided to use the victory speech delivered by Barack Obama, an American politician and 44th president of the United States. It was delivered at Grant Park in his home city of Chicago, Illinois, on November 4, 2008, before an estimated crowd of 240, 000. Information would be easy to transcribe and was a topic of interest and had undeniable pizzazz. He employed different rhetorical strategies to deliver the speech and it was effective in giving the audience hope for the future. Obamas acceptance speech captured my imagination from the start. The sections of the speech, characterised hope, celebration, thanks and history, which all had a central focus on emphasising the importance of unity in America. More so than the other speeches he had done which I initially decided to analyse. However, I concluded there may have been too little to analyse and include in my investigation. The speech was my primary source of data as it was free, well known and easily available. The data itself was retrieved from an online source The Telegraph at 5: 40AM GMT 05 Nov 2008, however it would have been originally delivered in his home city of Chicago, Illinois. It was also broadcasted on various television and radio stations and livestreamed online by the White House. I was not required to ask for consent as the website was available to public. Following onto my next step, was to analyse and infer specific expressions used. I located areas in which linguistic features were used for a purpose and where ideologies were being transferred. I counted the techniques I was investigating for and these were divided into categories mentioned previously. The rhetorical features,

alliteration and pronouns drew up the main body of my analysis as they carried out a larger purpose towards achieving the aims of the study. This was further developed by other language features revolving Lexis, Grammar, Semantics and Phonology. AnalysisThe graph shows the percentage use of pronouns in the victory speechPRONOUNS-Firstly, you start to take note of the different types of personal pronouns Obama uses and how often he uses them in his entire speech. Pronoun use is the most revealing when in the context of interactions with other people. The usage of different pronouns is key to creating resonance within a speech. Great speeches generally have a lower I-You ratio because the focus is not on the I but the You as an audience and why you should listen out and what for. It is imperative to always ensure the speech is audience-centric, so value is created for the audience to listen and thus alter their attitudes. He uses this technique to illustrate the significance of people in America in helping him bring change to the country. The most common pronouns were we, us and our.' In his 21-minute acceptance speech, this was the percentage of usage of different pronouns: I- 17% (33 times)You/you're/your- 28% (56 times) We/Us/our- 55% (110 times) The collective and possessive pronouns we, us and our ensures that this speech rallies and includes everyone, as well as Barack Obama himself, on the same line and towards a joint endeavour. President Obama has the task of involving the audience and not side-lining, as this is his Victory speech and acceptance of the role. Those in higher status tend to use first person plural pronouns at much higher rates than those in lower status. Obama used these to make a statement about how much power he believes he has and how it can translate into a leadership role of a President.

Considering that this was victory speech for Barack Obama, it is no surprise that the speech itself was centred on himself for a few moments. This is due to passing on the message that Obama is committed to the audience's moral values and will do everything in his power to support the nation, hence the usage of I at 33 times (17%). This was probably an attempt to gain influential and personal power on his audience to establish an individual bond. It shows he is an independent man with an independent will, to which the audience can agree with. The use of the first person singular pronouns when talking about himself and what he can do, is impossible to avoid as he is talking about his goals for presidency and how he will help the audience. It is important to note how many of the latter pronoun classes he used You/You're/Your in the speech. These were used 56 times (28%). It has the effect of creating affinity and personal connection because it sounds as if Barack Obama is talking to you and no one else but yourself. The pronouns are used in order to achieve synthetic personalisation, so the audience is listening to what Obama is saying. Norman Fairclough's theory states that synthetic personalisation is used to create instrumental and influential power. This is the case when Obama uses this to establish himself as the winning electorate and future president of the United States of America. The combination of personal and possessive pronouns is stated for different meanings. I look forward to working with them shows that Obama has the power and responsibility to improve the nation and will achieve the goals with other people. I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to- it belongs to you. The use of the singular subjective pronouns I to you allows viewers to share Obamas accomplishment without detracting focus away

from him. He singles himself out but gives the audience credit, thus allowing them to side with him. It creates a balanced relationship and supports the theory above. An idea of humbleness is created. The audience sees him as a humble, generous and decent politician. ANAPHORA- In the course of his speech, President Obama deployed a variety of rhetorical devices that made his speech come to life and connect deeply with his audience. Usage of anaphora as a rhetorical device helps to convey and reinforce a certain message in a successive manner that resonates with the audience, and in this speech, Obama uses them generously. It's the answer told by lines ..., It's the answer spoken by..., It's the answer that led..., but that's not what makes us rich..., but that's not what keeps the world..., but that's not what makes us strong..., I've seen it in the..., I've seen it in the family..., I've seen it on the shores. Using repetitive clauses is an effective way to make Obamas statements stand out and easier to remember. In the speech, Obama routinely repeats the expression, Yes we can. This acts like an encouragement that all things are possible and together they can achieve social liberation. It stresses the fact that the country has transformed over the years and points out change that will come along with Barack Obamas presidency. It epitomises the American dream, which every citizen can realise through maintaining a positive mentality in life. Obama restates Yes we can as if it's a final blessing and new order to come about. He uses it very often to steady the feeling of triumph in the listeners and to make them want to feel supported that they want to and can change something. The idea of synthetic personalisation by Norman Fairclough, is to make each member feel like an individual member of a natural conversation. Such a technique

would be inclusive pronouns such as we. Using this repetitively makes the audience feel involved. That is why it is a popular used in politics to achieve again influential power. Also, creating a sense of unity between the American people. Alliteration- Hatched in halls Began in backyards Beacon still burns as bright Celebrate/Challenges , constants in our character, our partisanship and pettiness, poisoned our Politics, parliaments and palaces. despair, dust, depression Alliteration is the repetition of speech sounds in a sequence of nearby words; when the recurrent sound occurs in a conspicuous position at the beginning of a word or of a stressed syllable within a word. Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington - it began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of Concord and the front porches of Charleston. Obama uses the rhetorical device to instil sympathy in the eyes of his viewers. He talks about the fact that he had no professional help toward presidential election. The effort of another and himself got him to where he is. This allows the audiences to sense Obamas hard works and achievements and appreciate the effort he has put in. Using the same repeated sounds of b stresses the idea of how little he started off from. He embeds the thought that he has strived towards presidency and any power he has been given when elected is well earned and everyone will agree so. The expression Hatched in halls gives the authenticity to where Obama started off from. The idea that his campaign was not a continuation from previous help, but right from the bottom. This gives the audience the practicality his campaign and how he is ready to start America anew, with his own approach. The phrase partisanship and pettiness, poisoned our Politics is an alliteration showing the extent of the damage it has caused to the

American society. It also refers to the idea that Obama is present to heal America and will bring about a change for the better. He will do everything in his power to improve present conditions. Metaphors compare two different things in a figurative sense. Obama uses the metaphor put their hands on the arc of history. This brings forth the idea of unity between citizens and wants the audience to believe in this.