

# A linguistic analysis of obama's inaugural address

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## Rhythm and Rhetoric: A Linguistic Analysis of Obama's Inaugural Address

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University Bachelor's thesis in English Acknowledgment My appreciations to my supervisor Stuart Foster for very helpful advice during the research.

**Abstract** In this essay I shall analyze Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, January, 2009 from the perspective of various linguistic techniques. More specifically, I shall propose and focus on the idea that the composition of the speech has an aim to create a unity of the speaker and the audience in order to deliver the message.

Moreover, the speaker maintains the atmosphere of unity throughout the speech, so that the speech produces an effect when the audience becomes a co-author of it. My thesis will also discuss some aspects of persuasive strategies employed in the speech from those dating back as long as Ancient Greece to temporal discourses. The aim is to analyze how the use of a number of linguistic approaches creates a speech which senses an agreement and co-operation between the orator and the audience.

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Appendix 1. Introduction This essay's aim is to analyze Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, January, 2009 applying various linguistic approaches.

The linguistic devices used in the speech will be in focus in my research. It is a qualitative research, that is to say, the primary data is a verbal protocol, whose intertextuality - in the aspects of meaning and meaning production - will be analyzed with the help of such approaches as content analysis, critical theory and discourse analysis. I will try to unfold the sophisticated linguistic composition of various techniques lying in fields of semantics and rhetoric, employed by Obama and argue that the coherent use of them produces the desired effect in the delivery of the message.

A Presidential Inaugural Address is a ceremonial speech, made by a newly elected president of the USA, marking a new Presidential term. The Oxford Guide to the United States Government states that a speech " sets the tone for the administration" and that " presidents usually stress unity and bipartisanship after what is sometimes a divisive and bitter Presidential campaign" (" inauguration, Presidential"). There are no regulations

concerning the length or issues of the speech, it is only language which is specified by the Constitution.

The richness of the English language is employed to produce the first Presidential address to the nation and the world, the speech which is in focus of the world-wide mass media. An inauguration ceremony takes place at the Capitol on January, 20 and is usually attended by a large crowd, to which President speaks to. Presidents usually have a prepared text of the speech. Obama seemed to have learned his by heart and often appealed to the audience in the form of live performance interrupted by applause, which is indicated in the transcript.

The term performance, introduced by Chomsky, will be used in this paper since it describes "the way the individual goes about using language" (Mey 5). The term reflexes the issue that I will analyze, that is to say, not only the words used by the speaker as a lexical register, but also the context in which the speech is situated. Having been skillfully coordinated, they create the performance that aims the delivery of the message. I will focus on the structural and functional properties of the language, the combination of which enables the speaker to achieve the goal of the performance.

In chapter 2, I will introduce the historical and cultural context in which the speech was made. Context is defined as "circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or an idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood" (Oxford Dictionary of English, context noun). Defining the term context as dynamic, Mey states that it "is about understanding what things are for; it is also what gives our utterance their true pragmatic

meaning" (41). The context is vital for analysis of any speech, particularly made in public.

I will draw attention to the historical, cultural and social circumstances during the election campaign, which preceded the Presidential address. In subchapter 2. 1, the cultural and social background of Obama will be described. During a presidential campaign, any personal details of a candidate may be significant; they indicate the electors' preferences and, possibly, expectations. A President's address, in turn, is based on audience's expectations. That is why, I think, this aspect should be taken into account while analyzing the speech.

The historical/political context will be introduced in subchapter 2. 2 and will be devoted to the historical, political, economic and social aspects in American society, the complexity of which made it possible for a colored man to become President of the USA for the first time in the country's history. This subchapter also provides information about certain features of AfroAmerican traditional sermons, which, arguably, have influenced the president's address. Chapter 3 describes methodology of this work, that is to say, general approaches in this research. 2

Chapter 4 is devoted to the analysis of the speech from rhetorical and linguistic approaches. Since the address is a speech made in public, a rhetoric study, which is tightly linked to the use of linguistic devices, is worth doing. Subchapter 4. 1 is focused on the use of personal deixis in the speech and their role in aiming the delivery of the message. The choice of deixis, I will state, is carefully and skillfully made in order to foreground or background particular objects, so that to consider them appearing in more or

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less favorable aspects. In subchapter 4. , I will rearrange some extracts from the speech into stanzas - the structure of writing related topoetry- which I find to have strong links in the address. Referring to theories in linguistics dealing with parallelism, didactic poetry, rhythm and metrics I will try to prove the idea that the speaker uses rhythm as a tool for creating an emotionally agreeable atmosphere and an easily memorized message in his performance. In subchapter 4. 3, the role of parallelism and foregrounding in the complex of the linguistic devices employed in the speech will be analyzed.

They are the tools which strengthen or weaken objects in the chosen extract, depending on the goal which the speaker sets up. The subchapter is divided into two sub-subchapters, focused on syntactic and lexical forms of parallelism - 4. 3. 1 and the relationship with alliteration - 4. 3. 2. Rhetoric will be in focus in chapter 4. 4, particularly, the lexical register which reflects the intention to introduce forthcoming changes in the new administration's policy.

The attention will be drawn to the choice of words related to the innovative projects, which appear to be as presumable as the change of generations. In his speech, Obama cites other famous orators both directly and indirectly. Chapter 4. 5 draws parallels between some points in the address and speeches of Dr Martin Luther King and Rabbi Joachim Prinz. 3 In the inaugural address, as well as in his other speeches, Obama uses elements of preaching, which have already been noticed in mass media and academic studies.

Chapter 4. 6 draws attention to the use of words from the Bible, Afro-American traditional sermon and the role of transcendental theme in political rhetoric in the USA. In chapter 5, I will connect the discussed issues on the linguistic devices employed in the speech, which aim to maximize the effectiveness of the delivery of the message. The discussion on this subject will be presented here. Chapter 6 is the conclusion, where the analyzed aspects of various linguistic discourses will be summarized.

I will conclude that their combination makes a significant contribution to the success of the speech made in public. 2. Context: the historical, cultural and social circumstances The social and historical context plays a significant role in understanding the message of the speech and analyzing it. The term context is defined as: those parts of a text preceding and following any particular passage, giving it a meaning fuller or more identifiable than if it were read in isolation. The context of any statement may be understood to comprise . . . the biographical, social, cultural, and historical circumstances in which it is made (including the intended audience or reader). (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, context) In the following chapter I will describe the social and cultural aspects of the context preceding the performing of the Inaugural Address. 4 2. 1 Social and cultural background In November 2008, Barack Obama became the first African American president in the history of the United States. His electoral victory was considered to be a breakthrough in the social and political aspects of the American society.

He embodied the dream of millions of his fellow citizens to come true, including Martin Luther King Jr. , with whom Obama is often compared and whose principles he maintains. BBC News stated that “ for many . . . Barack

Obama's presidency will be the culmination of Dr King's dream" (1). The day before the inauguration, Obama drew attention to the resemblance when he " helped to decorate a community project in Washington in memory of Dr King" and used his idea for a deeper likeness by saying that " we resolve that as we walk, we must walk together.

And as we go forward in the work of renewing the promise of this nation, let's remember King's lesson - that out separated dreams are really one". (BBC News, 1) It is remarkable that, besides the fact that Obama is biracial, religion is said not to have played any particular role in his childhood, since his father had no particular influence on him and his mother was " an agnostic humanist", while " the grandparents who helped to raise him were not religious" (F. I. Greenstein, 209). The President represents a large number of the Americans in the sense of his ethnic and social background.

Being dark skinned, he was brought up by his white maternal grandparents apart from a few years when he lived and attended primary school in Indonesia. Obama later wrote that, during his youth he experienced " a variety of cultures in a climate of mutual respect" (Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 2007). Here could be mentioned the role of his wife, Michelle, a genuine representative of the African American population in the electoral campaign, but further discussion of this is beyond the remit of this essay. 5 2. 2.

Historical / political context The presidency of an African American person would probably not have been possible a few decades ago; many people claimed that they would never have dreamed that they would see a dark skinned man becoming a president of the United States. Obama realizes this, having said that he is a son of a man who " less than sixty years ago might

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not have been served at a local restaurant” (Obama, 5). A new generation has grown up since Martin Luther King Jr. gathered millions of people for peaceful marching to Washington in order to campaign for the identical rights for all races.

The political situation is also an important aspect of Obama's victory. The former president's administration involved the country in a wearisome war with Iraq, an unpopular war from which the country seems unable to extricate itself. Along with a military mission in Afghanistan, it has cost an enormous amount of money to the tax payers. On top of that, the deep recession in the economy, which started at the time of the election debates and which is said to be the worst one since the Great Depression, in a general understanding, damaged the popularity of the Republicans.

A new, “ fresh face” of a relatively young candidate appeared on the political stage at this moment, who “ promise[d] healing” instead of fighting. Not only did he promise changes, but he also spoke a language of young people, which associates with ability, opportunity and making new crucial decisions (Capone, 2972). The candidate, Barack Obama, made a “ meteoric rise to national prominence” (Greenstein, 206). 3. Methodology This essay's research is qualitative and the speech will be analyzed by employing a number of theoretical approaches in the fields of semantics, pragmatics and rhetorical criticism.

The use of various linguistic devices employed in the speech, which contribute to the aim of any speech and, particularly, a public one held by a politician, will be examined. Thus, the aim is to analyze the complexity of the devices in the context and the intertextuality, which means that “ all

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texts are . . . composed of other (pre-existing) texts . . . held together in a state of constant interaction . . . [hence] all text exist in a state of partiality and inter-dependency with other texts" (A Dictionary of Critical Theory, "intertextuality").

The format of C-essay does not present the opportunity to examine the whole speech from all possible approaches, hence, I will first analyze some excerpts from it in a framework of singular notions related to the theoretical basis of the above mentioned fields and then I will draw parallels between the notions. Roderick P. Hart's conceptions on modern rhetorical criticism and Jacob L. Mey's on pragmatics issues will be widely considered while completing the work on this paper. I will also refer to a study on Barack Obama's South Carolina speech by A. Capone.

The prepared text of President-elect Barack Obama's Inaugural Address, as provided by the Presidential Inaugural Committee, is in the Appendix and referred to according to its numbered pages. 4. Rhetorical and Linguistic Strategies In his performance, Obama employs a complex of rhetorical and linguistic strategies, which allow the speaker to introduce and deliver the message in favorable context. Analyzing rhetoric, Hart says that " human history has been written by great persons authoring great orations for social betterment. Often, these great statements have seemed more poetic than pragmatic, as satisfying to the heart as to the head"(4).

In order to distinguish a poem from a narrative story or any other type of message, I will try to highlight rhythm by employing a number of linguistic devices including metre and parallelism. Simpson defines metre as " an organized pattern of strong and weak syllables" and 7 its " repetition into a <https://assignbuster.com/a-linguistic-analysis-of-obamas-inaugural-address/>

regular phrasing across a line of verse" (15). Stanza is a product of correspondence of and " the length, metrical scheme and rhythmical pattern [of the verse lines] with those of at least one other such group of verse lines in a poem" (The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature, " stanza").

An extensive use of pronouns ' we', ' our' and ' us' in combination with a particular lexical register aims to foreground the desired effect of unity and communion the speaker and the audience. 4. 1. The use of personal deixis  
Deictic expressions, known as deixis, can be interpreted only in the context in which they are used. The word deictic derives from the Greek language and is used for pointing a subject. I will focus on the use of deixis employed in the speech which, I will argue, creates an effect of unity on one side and " outsiders" on the other.

In his analysis of Obama's electoral speech, Capone indicates that " a speaker is responsible for the positions or opinions advanced, but need not necessarily be the animator or even the author" (2967). He refers to Goffman for definitions of " a principal in the legalistic sense", which involves imposing " self-identification" as we not I. (2967). By doing so, the speaker " become[s] a representative of the people" (2967). This pattern of seemingly speaking on behalf of the audience is focused upon in the present chapter.

The use of person deixis in the speech, in these circumstances, is worth investigating. Unlike his previous public performances, where Obama aimed to convince the audience that he was the right candidate for the position of a congressman or, later, a president, here he is a victor and addressing his message from a position of Head of State. He, probably, does not need to put his personality in focus any longer, but rather needs the support for his future  
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challenges. In this case the pronoun I, which was used generously in Obama's previous 8 speeches, emerges only three times in his inaugural address in its beginning: " I stand here today . . . I thank President Bush . . . Today I say to you . . . " (Obama 1). The first person pronoun " I " does not appear any more in the performance. Obama favors the third person plural pronouns we, us and our(s) in the rest of the speech the pronouns which play their significant role in creating a sense of unity of the speaker with the audience. We, us and our(s) are employed 61, 20 and 65 times respectively and are, probably, the most often used words of the speech.

The speaker does not distance himself from the American people; instead, everything the president proclaims further seems to be issued by us - the people of America. According to Capone, " a political speech is in itself an interpretation of the audience's feelings and needs" that allow " the audience to build its own intentionality" while a politician reflexes them (2969) . The above mentioned pronouncements are employed as the inclusive ones throughout the text.

The speaker, in this case, is a member of the society to which he speaks. Whether he speaks of the previous achievements or the future plans, the orator claims them to be a commonality, which means that he shares responsibility for everything being said with the audience. As a result, the audience seems to become a co-author of the speech, providing that they approve of it, and they do so by frequent applause. Thus, the president speaks on behalf of the American people: " On this day we gather . . . we come to proclaim . . . ". The addresser has a message to his opponents, and the pronouns they, their, those and some are served as if to indicate a

distance between the American people, of whose behalf Obama speaks , and those “ who question the scale of our [the Americans] ambitions” (Obama 3) . The victory in the election, presumably, allows the new president to associate himself with the majority of the nation and to look down at “ the cynics [who] fail to understand [is] that the ground has shifted beneath them” (Obama 3).

By carefully chosen pronouns, the speaker foregrounds the Americans, whose ideas he articulates and backgrounds the rest, who “ have forgotten what this country has already done” (Obama 3). Having repeated by then we and our dozens of times and created a panoramic picture of the nation's achievements, the present state and the future challenges, Obama has little difficulty opposing and disparaging “ those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame” ( Obama 2). 4. 2. Rhythm Among the complex of the devices that Obama operates in the speech, I will argue in the following sub-chapter, the rhythm plays a significant role. Rhythm contributes to delivering the message in a most effective and agreeable way. Ancient Greeks used didactic poetry, not as a literary genre but, rather, to give instructions applying to it “ as being more easily remembered than prose” (The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, “ didactic poetry”). Moreover, poetry brings sentimental feelings which either thrusts disturbing thoughts or stresses them, depending on the context of the text.

Words often have double meaning and can be interpreted differently. In poetry one can “ play” with words employing their phonetic features, metaphors and sonic effect. In the following excerpt from the speech, the

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first line in the first four stanzas (the fourth one, however, has a conjunction “ and”, which neither disturbs the rhythm nor change the meaning) starts with the same phrase “ we will” followed by a verb phrase. The other three lines follow the main idea expressed in the first one. They are similar both rhythmically and metrically.

The last stanza is different in the structure and introverted, since “ the thought veers from the main theme and then returns thereto” (Catholic Encyclopedia (1913), “ Parallelism”, 2/4). Instead of starting, it finishes with the same construction “ we will” followed by a verb phrase. In the speech, a vestige of a poem emerges from time to time, both in terms of rhythm and lyrical contexts of the word related to nature (as the Romantic poets would do) for describing 10 practical, moreover, technological purposes.

I will try to rearrange an extract into stanzas, where each one (except the last one) consists of four lines and is, therefore, called quatrain (The Concise Oxford, “ stanza”). The last stanza brings a conclusion; and the last verse in the stanza sounds as if it were a final chord in a piece of music: We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise healthcare's quality and lower its cost.

We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools, and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. 11 All this we can do. And all this we will do. (Obama 2) The sun and winds are invoked to symbolise man's need for the energy necessary to drive the economy. Obama does not  
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speak a 'dry' language of economists; he prefers the language of poets. Hart compares an orator - a persuader - with a poet being "artistically creative.

Both work with symbols to breathe life into ideas" and use "their imaginations to engage their audiences imaginations" (10). The meaning of every sentence rests beyond the bare words - it is metaphorical. Analysing arguments, Hart refers to Toulmin's work, applying to the term major claims as: a) the broadest, most encompassing, statements made by the speaker, b) lie at the level of abstraction higher than all other statements the speaker makes, c) represent what the speaker hopes will become the "residual message" in listeners minds (i. . . , the main thoughts remembered when the details of the message have been forgotten), and d) are frequently repeated or restated in the message" (Hart 98). In the extract above, every sentence contains a major claim, according to its definition. The message does not consist of specific words having definitive meaning of the work planned; they are, rather, "the broadest, most encompassing". What seems to strengthen the message is its rhythmical construction and repetition.

Unlike the 'prosaic' parts of the speech, where the listener does not need to employ their imagination, the poetical ones require it in order to fill the gap in the meanings between "the sun and the winds", which should "fuel our cars", or work out the way "to wield technology's wonders" (Obama 2). The structures of these stanzas follow the rules of synthetic parallelism, where "the theme is worked up by the building of thought upon similar thought" (Catholic Encyclopedia (1913), "Parallelism", 2/4).

These linguistic tools contribute to the speaker's foregrounding of the idea of forthcoming changes by repeating the same or similar syntactic structures along with the 12 same phrase " we will". Lexically, the stanzas also correspond. The theme of building and reconstruction the country's economy progresses throughout the block with a final ' chord' where Obama seems to have changed his pre-presidential slogan " yes, we can" to " yes, we will". 4. 3.

Parallelism and foregrounding Parallelism is a product of " balanced arrangement achieved through repetition of the same syntactic form" (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, " parallelism"). Analyzing the text, one can find both syntactic and lexical parallels. Lexical parallelism is an effect of repetition of the same words or certain relationships between words, mostly belonging to the same word group, such as verbs or nouns. Giving examples of parallelism, scholars often refer to poetry and rhetoric.

It seems that what they have in common is their appeal to the listener's emotions rather than pragmatism. Foregrounding is based on " giving unusual prominence to one element or property of the text" (The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, " foregrounding"). The devices such as repetition and giving a favorable syntactic position are commonly employed for creating a foreground effect. The background is, hence, a weaker and significantly less important component in the text is used as a tool for stressing foregrounding.

I would like to suggest that the following piece of speech consists of lexical parallels. To start with, the nouns ' strength' and ' weakness' are antonyms; by putting them in the same line the speaker creates the effect of parallelism

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based on contradiction. He continuously contrasts and contradicts the rights and wrongs in the text until 'goodness' eventually prevails over 'evil'. For we know that our patchwork heritage is strength, not a weakness. 13 We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus - and non-believers.

We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from the dark chapter stronger and united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace. (Obama 4) It is interesting that by contradicting and drawing parallels, the speaker achieves the effect of foregrounding.

Before pointing out the goal, the speaker explains the reason for it and, hence, prepares the ground for the challenge, which seems achievable afterwards. Lexical and syntactic repetitions strengthen both the background and foreground of the text. Speaking about the diversity of the country, Obama uses the effect of antithesis making contrasts when mentioning the religious groups. The diversity of religions evolves from being simply contrastive, which might in other contexts be interpreted as divisive and, therefore, a problematic issue, to cohesion and solidarity of the purpose.

Those elements, which rest on the side of 'meanness', fade away under the pressure of 'goodness'. The following compounds of phrases seem predictable then: "hatreds - pass . . . tribe - dissolve . . . humanity - reveal" (Obama 4). 14 4. 3. 1Parallelism - syntactic and lexical The following extract

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is an example of both syntactic and lexical parallelism. The sentences begin with and are stressed by a prepositional phrase “ for us”. It is followed by the noun phrase consisting of the pronoun “ they”, which is followed by two verb phrases joined by a conjunction “ and”.

The sentences are not alike in the structures. That is to say, although their first verb phrase is intransitive, in the first two sentences, it is post-modified by a noun phrase and a prepositional phrase respectively. In the third sentence, the same prepositional phrase post-modifies the two intransitive verb phrases “ fought” and “ died”. These verbs have related meaning where fighting causes dying. In the second sentence, the phrases “ toiled in sweatshops” and “ plowed the hard earth” are quasi-synonymous as they both mean doing hard work.

In addition to the parallelism, the repetition and the heading position of the phrase ‘ for us’ produces the effect of foregrounding. The repetition and relationship of the phrases “ they” and “ for us” make the message of the passage more coherent. Everything “ they” did, they did “ for us”. In this case, what “ forebearers” [sic] did, is not signified merely as a list of jobs, but rather as the effort they made for “ a future generation”. The language devices serve as a promoter of the message here. For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and travelled across oceans in search of a new life.

For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; 15 endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth. For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sanh. (Obama 2) 4.

3. 2. Parallelism and alliteration The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms

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defines the term alliteration as “ the repetition of the same sounds – usually initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables – in any sequence of neighboring words”, remarking that in some poetry “ alliteration rather than rhythm is the chief principle of repetition” (“ alliteration”).

The following block of supposed poetry contains both of the devices alliteration and parallelism. The adjectives “ less” and “ last” are not only repeated in the same stanza, but they also start with the same consonant “ l”, consist of a single syllable and have similarity in the meaning. They both related to the tendency to minimize something to an unimportant level. Although the two first stanzas begin with the same pronoun “ our”, they differ in the choice of linguistic tools. The effect of parallelism of the following two stanzas rests upon contradiction.

Alliteration is more vaguely expressed in the words starting with consonant “ p” such as “ pat”, “ protecting”, “ putting” and “ passed” in the second stanza, and is absent in the third one. These two stanzas contain verbs and/or verb phrases having opposite meaning; they contradict each other and the parallelism is based on contradiction. Every stanza consists of a single, complex sentence, where intensity is accumulating in the first two lines in stanza 1 and 2 (in the third stanza that is line 1), and accelerating to its climax in the following line 3 and 4 relatively.

Calling for action, Obama stresses the last syllables in 16 phrasal verbs - verbs of action pick up and dust off. The choice of these multi-word verbs obviously reflects the desire to emphasize the need for action: up and off associate with impulse and movement. The tension is growing from the first to the last verse with the conclusion coming as a final chord: Our minds are

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no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished.

But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions - that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America. (Obama 2) 4. 4. Rhetoric: lexical chain for the planned changes Hart defines the word lexicon as " words that are unique to a group or individual and that have specific rhetorical power . . . [;] by using preferred words a speaker can establish the right 17 to address the audience" (156).

Considering the fact that rhetoric is a persuasive use of language, Hart is insistent that " rhetoric is an art . . . [which] creates a story out of nothing, using symbols to bring to life feelings we had forgotten we had, plans we had not yet considered" (7). He continues: " the story rhetoric tells is always a story with a purpose; it is never told for its own sake" (7). In the following chapter, I will draw attention to some rhetorical techniques which contribute to the delivery of the message.

More precisely, they are two of five " basic moves" as Hart define them: "(2) the speaker must come to be regarded as a helper rather than an exploiter; (3) the speaker must convince the listener that new choices need to be made" (7). In his address, Obama proclaims that the " time of standing pat . . . has surely passed" and the nation is to " begin again the work on remaking America" (2). In order to indicate forthcoming changes in various areas and to stress the novelties planned, he parallels them with ' a new generation' and ' a new age'.

He makes a specific lexical chain - the choice of vocabulary in order to indicate the expected changes in the society - whose aim is to create the atmosphere of unity and agreement similar to the ideal American family. The theme of 'unity' goes throughout the speech, and that is done by a carefully generated lexical chain as well as repetition. The feeling of unity is constructed in the very beginning - in the greeting: "My fellow citizens", where the president identifies himself as one belonging to the society, rubbing away the invisible border between the stage and the crowd.

The following step is to design the image of the nation as a family, where the ideals and traditions are transmitted from generation to generation- the word which is used quite extensively in the address. Obama creates 'a solid ground' for a consensus of the main issues with the Americans from the very beginning by claiming that "We the People have remained faithful to the ideas of our forebearers [sic], and true to our founding documents" (1). This idea is developed and reused in such a way that it reappears in the very end of the speech, where Obama cites the 8 words of "our (the Americans) father" "in the year of America's birth" calling for unity and commitment. 4. 5. Citing other orators Obama has numerous times been compared with the black American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, and he himself draws attention to such a comparison. The day before the inauguration BBC News reported that "he reflected that Tuesday's inauguration ceremony would take place on the same mall where many thousands gathered in 1963 to hear Martin Luther King's lesson "I have A Dream" speech" (1).

In fact, there was another political leader, who made his speech on the same day just before Dr King did - the national president of the American Jewish

Congress Rabbi Joachim Prinz, whose words Obama cites and whose message he reintroduces. "The time . . . has come" phrase is excerpted from Dr Prinz's speech. His thought of "the time . . . for us to work together, for it is not enough to hope together - for it is not enough to pray together" is edited and reused in Obama's speech (Prinz, Civil rights). The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit" is the phrase which not only resembles Dr Prinz's but proclaims a new "reaffirming" cycle in American history. Obama's style of addressing the audience is also resembles Prinz's. They both start with a rather formal address, changing then to "direct address . . . , a feature often found in personal correspondence", such as Prinz's "our fathers taught us", "our children, yours and mine", "we share" and Obama's "our forebearers", "our Founding Fathers", "men and women and children of every race and every faith", "we remain". 9 4. 6. The elements of preaching According to discourses of cultural criticism, Obama's rhetorical style may be described as an American one. Hart refers to a number of scholars when stating that "one of the most distinctive things about American rhetoric is its curious combination of Transcendental and Pragmatic themes" where he continues "the transcendent strain in discourse gives it an "elevating" tone, the sort of tone one hears on inauguration day in the United States"(240). On this day, the president might feel inclined to mention "the words of Scripture".

He avoids favouring one single religion by referring to "scripture" rather than the Bible, which relates to any religion in the world and, although he cites Bible, the values he mentions are universal: the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to

choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that the noble idea, passed from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness. Obama 2) In that block, one can feel the growing tension, which comes as a climax in poetry and culmination in a traditional, Afro-American sermon. It has elements of Gospel, where rhythm changes its pattern while the main idea is repeated. Obama's style of public performance has been compared with preaching, particularly that which belongs to "the tradition of AfroAmerican preaching discourse". Capone notices that "among the characteristics which parallel Obama's speech style with Afro-American religious traditions is rhythmic structure, sensitivity and 'elevation' (2970). 0 Hart argues that the Americans are "a nation that seems to need a Holy Purpose for doing almost anything" (240). Speaking on politics and business, Obama "strengthens" his states by referring to the Bible again - "hatreds shall someday pass . . . the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve . . . our common humanity shall reveal itself "(4). Transcendental theme supports the pragmatic thoughts, in other words, two themes collaborate so that the message maximizes its efficiency. 5. Conclusion

The analysis of Barack Obama's Inaugural Address suggests that the speech was made by a skilful orator, who employed various linguistic and rhetoric devices for the efficiency of the address. They are tightly linked together and, at times, it is hard to separate one from another as they are often multifunctional. I would like to suggest that the high level of education of the speaker was helpful when setting various tools in collaboration, so that the

use of them produced the effect of a desirable message, the one which the audience accepted as if it had come from it self.

Learning from Ancient Greeks, President uses didactic poetry: persuading, convincing and easy-to-be-remembered rhythmic style when addressing to a wide audience of the Americans. Didactic poetry rests upon repetition and parallelism, which are the basic tools for creating an easily memorized message. Parallelism is, in turn, a part of a linguistic field of semantics. Focusing on parallelism employed in the speech, I have found that personal pronouns play a significant role in creating a foregrounding effect, which is an aspect of pragmatics. All these devices positively correlate with a rhetorical style, which the orator chose for the speech.

The event took place at a historical mall, where some of the most prominent American orators have spoken to large audiences. In his speech, Obama stresses the strong connections between generations which he, as he states, is to endure, and employs other orators words in order to support the statement. <sup>21</sup> In an attempt to cover the most important values of the American people, Obama appeals to those which rest upon family and religion. He cites the Bible but quite carefully and, having pointed out the diversity of religions represented in the country, applies his words to universal, 'transcendental truth'.

He also creates an emotional atmosphere of a nation as a family, which suggests unity and support, the desire for a better future and a readiness for working hard on it for the next generation's sake. The lexical register along with the foregrounding help to fulfill the task in a favorable view. The newly elected president needs his people's support for the forthcoming reforms, <https://assignbuster.com/a-linguistic-analysis-of-obamas-inaugural-address/>



which he has planned to carry out. The unity of the Americans, in order to receive their advanced approval, seems to be the aim of the President's address to the nation. His speech is persuasive, but hardly aggressive.

By using linguistic techniques, which have been employed by a number of the nation's "Fathers" and which have proved to be successful and appreciated both by the audience present and forthcoming generations, Obama announces his address to his people in a favorable way. That is to say, the extensive use of pronouns 'we' and 'our' in combinations with the lexical chain discussed above, affects the speech in such a way that the audience, to some extent, might almost be considered to be participants in it and the President performs as a representative of the people.

The various linguistic and rhetorical devices suggest that the orator articulates the ideas of the audience and that as a president, he represents the interests of his people. 22 Works Cited ---. A Dictionary of Critical Theory by Ian Buchanan. Oxford University Press, 2010. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Hogskolan I Halmstad. Web. 30 Mar. 2011 Akmajian, Adrian, et al. Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication. 5th ed. The USA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001. Print. Bazzanella, Carla. "Redundancy, repetition, and intensity in discourse." Language Sciences 33 (2011): 243-254.

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2008. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Hogskolan I Halmstad. Web. 22Feb. 2011. 24 Appendix Obama's Inaugural Address Remarks as Prepared for Delivery January 20, 2009 My fellow citizens: I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors.

I thank President Bush for his service to our nation, as well as the generosity and cooperation he has shown throughout this transition. Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbearers, and true to our founding documents. So it has been.

So it must be with this generation of Americans. That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land - <https://assignbuster.com/a-linguistic-analysis-of-obamas-inaugural-address/>

a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights. Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short p of time. But know this, America - they will be met. On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. 1

On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics. We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted - for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risktakers, the doers, the makers of things - some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth. For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and <https://assignbuster.com/a-linguistic-analysis-of-obamas-inaugural-address/>

Khe Sahn. Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions - that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America. For everywhere we look, there is work to be done.

The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act - not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age.

All this we can do. And all this we will do. 2 Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions - who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can

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achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage. What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them - that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply.

The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works - whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified. Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end. And those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account - to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day - because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government. Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill.

Its power to generate wealth and expand freedom is unmatched, but this crisis has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control - and that a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous. The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our Gross Domestic Product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart - not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good. As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals.

Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience's sake. And so to all other peoples and

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governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more.

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint. We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort - even greater cooperation and understanding between nations.

We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people, and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat, and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you. <sup>3</sup> For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness.

We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus - and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united,

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we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West - know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it. As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains.

They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet, at this moment - a moment that will define a generation - it is precisely this

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spirit that must inhabit us all. For as much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies.

It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate. Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends - hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism - these things are old.

These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility - a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship. This is the source of our confidence - the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. 4 This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed - why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand

before you to take a most sacred oath. So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have traveled.

In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people: " Let it be told to the future world... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it]. America. In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations. 5