

RHETORICAL AND METATEXTUAL FEATURES IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: THE CASE OF OBAMA'S SPEECH ON RACE

Conchi Hernández-Guerra
Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, España
chernandez@dfm.ulpgc.es

El objetivo de este artículo es llevar a cabo un análisis de las características gramaticales y metatextuales en el famoso discurso de Obama sobre la raza del año 2008. Este discurso fue pronunciado en un momento crítico de su campaña y su mensaje podía significar seguir con opciones de convertirse en el futuro Presidente o, por el contrario, perder cualquier credibilidad en el electorado. En este discurso él no solo tiene que decir su opinión sobre quien fuera su asesor espiritual durante varias décadas, el Reverendo Wright y sus polémicas palabras sino, además, su propia opinión del tema.

Con este trabajo intento concluir con las razones por las que los discursos de Obama durante la campaña fueron tan aplaudidos por su contenido y los recursos gramaticales utilizados convirtiéndolos en mensajes bien contruidos que hace que se consideren ejemplos de buenos discursos.

Palabras clave: Características gramaticales metatextuales, discurso político

The aim of this paper is to analyse the grammatical and metatextual features in Obama's famous speech on race given in 2008. It was delivered at a critical moment of his campaign and his message

could determine whether he would maintain the option of running for the Presidency of the country or, on the contrary, reduce his credibility with the voters. In this speech he has to discuss not only his opinion of his spiritual leader, the Reverend Wright, over several decades and the latter's polemical words but also give his own opinion about the subject.

With this paper I try to consider why Obama's speeches in the campaign are so celebrated for their content and for the grammatical resources used to compose a well-combined message which is recognized as an example of excellent oratory.

Key words: Grammatical metatextual features, political discourse

1. Introduction

The analysis of a text from different perspectives constitutes an interesting field for linguists as these perspectives reveal a variety of approaches to the language and to the intention of the author. Hence, text linguistics studies what words are used, how a message is conveyed and how a discourse is built upon (Coulthard, 1994). The final aim is to study what resources an author has used to fulfill his/ her purpose in the act of communication. In a way linguistic analysis describes the possible contextualization of the writer's message, as the text is taken as a discourse with a purpose. Yet, if the discourse is delivered orally, the perlocutionary act or effect on others must be immediate, so other elements must be taken into consideration. Indeed, the speaker wants a prompt response to his speech so the illocutionary force or intention must be strongly biased in the message. This is what Coulthard (1994: 1) calls the "possible textualization of the writer's message". Nevertheless, in formal speech the relationship between listener and speaker is not exactly face-to-face. The speaker gives a talk to a large audience and not to a single addressee. Similarly, we cannot overlook the fact that we are

dealing here with a speech that is recorded. The speaker knows this and will try to be as formal as possible. So in a political speech expressed orally we are faced with a text with some elements taken from the written and some from the oral model.

That said, the first problem we face is whether the text should be taken as an example of spoken or written discourse, or both. Formal speeches expressed to large audiences have had different denominations: prepared speech, non-spontaneous oration, or spoken monologue, and comprise three characteristics, that is, the speech in question has been delivered to a large audience, it has been prepared beforehand, and the audience has to process that talk while it is being delivered.

The first approach of this research is based on the text analysis offered by Locke (2004), updated with P. Simpson's contribution (2010), as this frame bases the study not only on the linguistic elements but also the text structure and the interactional control (Simpson 2010: 45). Yet, after analyzing the corpus, we have concluded that the most comprehensive and accurate analysis would have to exclude some irrelevant elements in our corpus and include others that are significant.

The elements excluded in the vocabulary column (see below) are the formal/ informal words and the expressive values as they are not relevant in this speech. On the other hand, positive and negative words, repetition and synonymy have been included as being notable in the text, as we shall see. In the grammar column transitivity and nominalizations have been excluded as the former is seen in the passive and types of verbs elements and the latter is not relevant but modality has been included. The third column or cohesion is seen by Simpson in his text analysis, the column of text structure has been updated to the text and presupposition and implicature have been linked to external references. Taking all this into consideration, the research will be based on the following model:

TEXT ANALYSIS			
Vocabulary	Grammar	Cohesion	Text structure
Repetition Synonymy Positive and negative Comparison Inference Metaphors	Modality Tenses Pronouns Voice	Connectives Argumentation Parallelism	External references Intertextuality

Figure 1: Locke's and Simpson's text analysis model updated for our purposes

In terms of the vocabulary analysis we shall consider the condition of the text: whether it is optimistic or pessimistic, whether words with the same meaning are used and if they are frequent, the role of metaphors, etc. We will conclude the implicit purpose of the speech with an initial estimation. Vocabulary will also be considered in the section dedicated to cohesion.

Grammar will be based on verbs: voice, modality and tenses. In addition, we shall overview the use of the pronouns, i.e., whether the use of "we" implies "you and I" or "Americans and I" and others, and the almost null use of "you".

In the third section, we shall review the style of the speech and the use of parallelisms, argumentation and connectives which are included. We shall also compile the text structure, references to other sources and intertextuality. In addition the interactional control of the text as a whole will be ascertained.

By examining these properties we are fulfilling the two-fold purpose of this paper, that is, an analysis of the text from a discursive point of view in order to determine the range of metatextuality in the message, understanding by this the external and personal influences in the text.

2. Description of data/ Obama's speech

The model will be applied to a speech delivered on March 18, 2008 by Barack Obama at the Constitution Center in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. In it, Obama responds to the criticism of Reverend Jeremiah Wright, an unpaid campaign adviser and pastor at Obama's Chicago church. Wright has made inflammatory remarks about the United States in matters of war and racism and Obama uses this as an opportunity to challenge Americans to take a closer look at race relations.

The thread of Obama's speech is unity: the unity of all Americans, black, white and Hispanic. He starts with a reference to the American Declaration of Independence and also closes with it. The speech is well-built and balanced between points where he agrees and disagrees with Reverend Wright, introducing well-known American's quotations and references to the Bible. He speaks openly about race from his own viewpoint as an African-American with a white mother and deals cleverly with both sides of the race issue.

In the text, he comments on the situation of slavery in the Constitution. He acknowledges that one of his aims if he gains office will be to abolish racial differences for two reasons: firstly, he trusts Americans and secondly, because of his personal experience, which is not common but privileged. He also states that everybody is seemingly offended by Reverend Wright's words but remarks on his virtues. When Obama explains what his church is based upon he summarizes life in the black community in order to justify Wright's words because of the unfair situation the Reverend had to face some decades ago.

He ends by saying that Wright made a mistake thinking that society is static. He tells a story from his own campaign in which a young white woman and an old black man are the protagonists. The idea of perfection that opens the discourse with reference to the Declaration of Independence closes his speech.

As stated above, and taking the text as a whole, the concept of unity is the axis around which the entire message is contained. We

summarize the different topics in the following diagram. In it we can find the development of the discourse. On the left we see the positive side or virtues of American society and, on the right, the problems and reasons why this discourse is necessary are stated:

Main topic: UNITY

+	-
Fulfill what the constitution says: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - American generosity - Obama's own story: Uncommon Knows what racial problem is Not for him Reverend's virtues: Justification of Obama's belonging to his church: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quotation from Obama's book (his ideas are not new) - Description of Reverend's church He cannot avoid it but has faith in Americans and God Message to African-Americans Reference to the Scriptures Pledge to talk about real and important problems Anecdote about a white woman and a black man	Slavery in the Constitution Race has been an issue in the campaign Reverend Wright offends everybody Race is not the issue Historical injustices towards blacks: justification of Reverend's words Historical injustices towards immigrants Reverend's mistake: Progress has been made

Figure 2: Outline of the topics in the order shown

As we can see in figure 2, the positive side of the content outbalances the negative. The main purpose of this speech is to express the author's opinion about Reverend Wright's polemical words mainly on racism. In a way, everybody is expecting him to condemn the ideas of a person who has been his spiritual adviser for some decades. Yet he cannot disappoint black people as most of them agree with Wright's insistence on the injustices they have suffered historically. Obama is at a crossroads as every side expects something from him.

In fact, Obama manages the issue effectively as he satisfies everyone, openly condemning the words expressed by the Reverend but not offending him, either. The final message is supportive and optimistic.

3. Analysis of the text

Politics as discourse is a constantly redefined area. Some decades ago David Bell said that "we are all political beings in our everyday life" (Bell 1975: x) and added that if politics is communication, we must study who talks to whom and what they say (1975: 93). Thus, he admits that politics as discourse is a constant form of communication in every context and that text as a source of data cannot be taken out of it. Having said this, more specific types of speeches were analyzed. About those delivered by politicians Schäffner (1997: 1) admits that political language, political discourse and political texts themselves are vague terms and that political speeches are not a homogeneous genre. Instead, there is a range of subtypes determined by particular communicative situations. So, again, we find a wide spectrum of texts delivered in very different situations. Yet we may affirm that they have in common the fact that politicians try to achieve their goals through them. From this starting point our aim is to explore

the forms of language, how they simplify ideas and help to create the communicative function (Lakoff 1990: 4).

To do this, we have followed the model in figure 1 as it is suitable for the text to be analyzed and covers a wide spectrum of elements. In this approach we have started the analysis by asking what specific structures in the word choice serve to fulfill the speaker's strategies (Schäffner 1975).

3.1 Vocabulary

In our theoretical frame the first column covers the vocabulary used in the speech. For the study of the nouns different models have been proposed. Halliday & Hasan (1985) divide them into reiteration (this includes the same word, synonyms, superordinates and general words) and collocation (opposite meaning and typically associated) but it was extended in 1994 to repetition, synonymy and collocation. Källgren (see Heydrich 1989: 37) offered the following division: repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, comparison and inference. Due to the characteristics of our text, we have adapted these divisions into repetition, synonymy, positive and negative words, comparison and inference. Hyponymy is not noticeable in the text.

On the other hand, the use of metaphors in texts and in current life has been a source of interesting literature in recent decades (see, for instance, Van Remortel 1986, Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Goos 1995, Cameron 1999, Leezenberg 2001, Simon-Vand 2001, Ritchie 2006, Vega Moreno 2007, Parrill 2010). Metaphor used in the discourse genre of political rhetoric has been discussed since Aristotle (Cameron 1999: 9) and, recently, the link between metaphor and thought is accepted as thought is structured metaphorically and what flows is the surface of those complex mechanisms that form

it. In fact, Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 43) stated that “metaphor is an imaginative aspect of reason” to reinforce the idea that metaphor is in every act of communication. This idea is linked to Ritchie (2006: 6) when he admits that it is impossible to say much at all about abstract concepts without using some kind of metaphor and “race” would be included.

Taking metaphor as a matter of language Cameron states (1999: 107) that “a metaphor must include at least one lexical item (the Vehicle term) referring to an idea, entity, action, etc. (the Topic), and that the Vehicle term belongs to a very different, or incongruous, domain from the Topic.” This will be the basis of our next analysis.

3.2 Grammar

Column 2 in figure 1 refers to grammar. Within this chapter we shall review the frequency in the modality and what it expresses. We shall follow Palmer’s model (1990) in which he distinguishes between epistemic and deontic use of modals, making the former a judgment about the truth of the proposition (what von Wright called “modes of knowing”) and the latter concerning actions, states or events (what Von Wright called “modes of obligation”). But, as we shall see in next chapter, the use of “can” in this text is neither epistemic nor deontic, but rather dynamic; that is, “subject-oriented in the sense that it is concerned with the ability or volition of the subject of the sentence” (1990: 36). Added to this, despite the controversy about the consideration of “will” as a modal verb or a matter of tense (1990: 2) we have included it in this section as Obama uses it in an epistemic way.

We shall also study the tenses with their frequency and the use of pronouns. This will mostly be based on the use of the first person singular and plural with their different references. Lastly, we

consider the frequency of passive voice and whether the use of it is in order to omit the agent of the action or if on the contrary, there is no implicit agent. This will be mainly a quantitative analysis. The purpose is to define the mood of the speech.

3.3 Cohesion

The third column in our model covers cohesion. This, together with cohesiveness, has been regarded as taking different perspectives into consideration. Tankskanen (2006: 7) offers a definition of both concepts: “Cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical elements on the surface of a text which can form connections between parts of the text. Coherence, on the other hand, resides not in the text, but is rather the outcome of a dialogue between the text and its listener or reader.” In other words, he is talking about context.

As stated in figure 1, we have focused our research on connectives and parallelisms. Connectives have a close relationship with vocabulary as seen in column 1 and again the researcher had to base them on a model. To do this, different approaches are studied. Thus, Halliday & Hasan (1976) call two of the types of relation included in lexical cohesion, reiteration and collocation. Others prefer to refer to reiteration as repetition, meaning the repetition of a lexical item, either identically or in a modified form whereas collocation refers to the “keep each other company” (Tankskanen 2006: 12). Seemingly, different approaches refer to cohesion markers (de Beaugrande & Dressler 1981: 3; Brown & Yule 1983: 195; Ellis 1992: 148; Enkvist 1978; Hellman 1995; Lundquist 1985; Sanford & Moxey 1995) summarizing them in that “they are signals to the reader to look for a more or less well-defined relation between two discourse segments” (Rickheit, 1995: 193). For the purpose of this paper they will help to analyze the level of textuality.

I have tried to develop a model capable of encompassing all cohesively meaningful relations in this text. There have been several attempts in this area (Halliday & Hasan 1976, Heydrich 1989, Kehler, 2002, Tanskanen 2006). Traditionally, coherence can be analyzed from a syntactic or lexical perspective. Grammatical analysis is easier to develop as the frame is clearly established whereas other areas like lexical analysis have faced disagreement. We have adapted Tanskanen's proposal as far as it fits with the characteristics of the text. I shall offer the analysis of the following categories of lexical cohesion:

Lexical Cohesion
1. Simple repetition
2. Generalization
3. Specification
4. Contrast

Figure 3: Categories of lexical cohesion based on Tanskanen, 2006

Simple repetition (1) refers to words repeated identically or with a slight change in number or tense; generalization (2) refers to a superordinate or hyponymic relation; specification (3) is the opposite of generalization, that is meronymy, that is, the relation between an item and a more specific item; and contrast (4) or antonymy refers to the relation between an item and another item which has an opposite meaning.

Parallelisms are also included in this section. In some contexts they are called "poetic" features that contribute to cohesion (Collins 2010: 170). They can be used in order to remember the associations (linked meanings) more easily or to make them sound more literary; for example, phonological repetition (alliteration and rhyme).

3.4 Text structure

The fourth column of figure 1 refers to the text structure; that is, large scale organizational properties are analyzed. This is very important in speech genre as the speaker must have control over the message. Added to this, and according to Korzen & Herslund (1998: 9), causal relation is important as long as facts are only regarded as (real) facts when they have been motivated or explained. In a text of these characteristics, where the final aim is to give Obama's opinion about such a controversial topic as race and the Reverend's words, the need for reasoning is unquestionable. From a linguistic viewpoint, we are dealing with intertextuality. According to Fairclough (1992), this covers the texts that directly and explicitly cite earlier texts of all kinds. That is, the author uses appropriation to cover all instances in which a hearer may be expected to understand some shared cultural material.

4. Results

After a comprehensive analysis of the text based on the features explained above, the most relevant findings will be stated organized into sub-sections according to figure 1.

4.1 Vocabulary

Column 1 deals with vocabulary, and in the repetition and synonymy of nouns and adjectives section, the researcher has seen that the words "union" or "unity" appear no less than six times and are well distributed throughout the text. Inevitably, the word "race" or words related to it are very often used. In addition, at the beginning of his speech we have words related to slavery: "nation's original sin of slavery", "slave trade", "Slavery question" and "slave owners" but in the second half of his speech this expression is hardly used; instead we find compound words with race. So we have "racial laws", "racial tensions", "racial polarization", "racial reconciliation", "racial divide", "white racism", "racial injustice", "racial

divisions” or “racial wounds”. Although Obama clearly bases his opinion on the black community, he does not want to focus exclusively on it and also opens the problem to some other racial sectors, like Hispanic Americans.

Synonyms can be grouped in the categories of injustice and hope. Within the first group there are several words like “tyranny”, “persecution”, “perceived injustice”, “legalized discrimination”, “segregated schools” and “inequality”. Most of them have been used in order to justify the Reverend’s words. In the second group, or hopeful words, we find “promise”, “ideals”, “liberty”, “justice”, “common hopes”, “unyielding faith”, “decency”, “generosity” and “racial reconciliation”.

Words with negative content are also common. Thus, he repeats the words “discrimination”, “cynicism”, “stalemate” and “divisive”, and uses only once words like “inequality”, “despair”, “division” and “conflict”. Yet he mainly uses negative concepts through adjectives like “incendiary language”, “perceived injustice”, “distorted view”, “offending sermons” and “legalized discrimination”. Generally speaking, adjectives are not used frequently and in most cases in a positive way: “equal citizenship”, “full rights”, “unyielding faith”, “unequivocal terms”, “better health care, better schools, better jobs”, and “the highest office”. Taken as a whole, the vocabulary used is quite informal. He personalizes the American society in common jobs and professions, provides examples of routine tasks in everyday life and uses colloquial expressions like “on the cheap” or “mom”.

In general, then, despite the controversial purpose of the discourse and by stating that he condemns slavery, racial injustice and Reverend Wright’s words, Obama has tried not to exaggerate the intensity of the discourse by using negative adjectives or incendiary words.

Comparisons are positive. The adjectives “common”, “more”, “better” and “larger” are always used to highlight America’s virtues. Only when talking about segregation, does he

mention “inferior schools and inferior education” for those aimed at Afro-Americans. There is also an interesting comparison when he establishes a parallelism between Reverend Wright and his own white grandmother: “I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my grandmother”. In it he wants to establish once more the parallelism between blacks’ and whites’ attitudes by taking as an example two close people to him.

Inference is seen through the examples he offers. The Reverend’s incendiary words (as Obama himself calls them) are justified by the early years the Reverend experienced: the inheritance of a brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow (The Jim Crow laws were state and local laws enacted between 1876 and 1965. They mandated racial segregation in all public facilities). Another example would be his own story, the peculiarities of his own family in which he has relatives in three continents and of different races. And, thirdly, through a local story that happened between two unknown people in South Carolina he explains that unity is possible.

In terms of metaphors, these are not used frequently. We can divide them into two groups: the first group includes those that represent expressions commonly used and that do not reflect *per se* an intention to give specific images in order to evoke a feeling in the audience. That would be the case of the following examples: “They can write their own destiny”, “our society was static”, “America can change”.

The second group refers to minorities and black society and carries an emotive content. This would be the case of “I am married to a black woman who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners”, “it [my candidacy] is based solely on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase racial reconciliation on the cheap”,

“For all those who scratched and clawed their way to get a piece of the American Dream”, “To continue the long march of those who came before us” where he is making a clear reference to Martin Luther King and that march in which he uttered the famous “I have a dream” speech.

4.2 Grammar

The second column in figure 1 deals with grammar and the first element is modality. Here we see that modal verbs are not very frequent, the most common being “can” (23 times). But in no case does he use the most famous slogan of his campaign (“Yes we can”). The closest to this was “we can do that” used once. Other examples of the use of “can” are the following: “I *can* no more disown him than I *can* disown the black family. I *can* no more disown him than I *can* my grandmother”, “Working together we *can* move beyond some of our old racial wounds”, “Embarking on a program of self-help also requires a belief that society *can* change”, “America *can* change”, “We *can* accept a politics that breeds division, and conflict, and cynicism. We *can* tackle race only as a spectacle [...] We *can* play Reverend Wright’s sermons on every channel [...] We *can* pounce on some gaffe by a Hillary supporter as evidence that she is playing the race card, or we *can* speculate on whether white men will all flock to John McCain in the general elections regardless of his policies”.

As we see, the use of “can” is not deontic. On the contrary, it is dynamic as the speaker is concerned with the ability to perform a task. So the message is encouraging and supportive. He has also used parallelisms as a stylistic resource in some of the examples, as we shall see later.

The second most commonly used are “would” and “will” but only nine times each. The case of “would” is interesting as it is

epistemic but in a tentative form; i.e., it is not used to express necessity, but rather a reasonable assumption in hypothetical situations. “Will”, on the other hand, is epistemic in the first two examples below as the speaker expresses what it is reasonable to expect. The examples 3 and 4 are dynamic as far as they are concerned with the volition of the subject, and the last example, *would*, refers to the future. The examples are these: “What *would* be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part”, “There is no doubt that I *would* react in much the same way”, “I suppose the politically correct safe thing *would* be to move on from this episode”, “We do unto others as we *would* have them do unto us”, “As long as I live I *will* not forget that in no other country on Earth is my story ever possible”, “There *will* no doubt be those for whom my statements of condemnation are not enough”, “Investing in the health, welfare, and education of black and brown and white children *will* ultimately help all of America prosper”, “We want to talk about how we’ll show our patriotism by caring for them”, “It’s that the corporation you work for *will* ship it overseas for nothing more than a profit”.

“May” is used seven times and in all of them to express possibility; so, in these examples the modal verb could be paraphrased by “it is possible that” and never with the purpose of giving permission. Some examples are these: “We *may* have different stories”, “We *may* not look the same and we *may* not have come from the same place”, “They are full of dancing, clapping, screaming and shouting that *may* seem jarring to the untrained ear”, “As imperfect as he *may* be, he has been like family to me”, “While they *may* face challenges and discrimination in their own lives, they must never succumb to despair or cynicism”.

Modal verbs are hardly used in the negative form: “cannot”, “may not”, “will not” and “could not” are used eight times altogether. Others in affirmative form are used no more than five times each. In the case of

“might” and “could” they are used once in a quotation that he read from the book written by him “Dreams from My Father” to explain what he has always thought of the Trinity Church.

We can see the frequency of use of the modal verbs in the following figure:

Modal verb	Nº. of times
Can	23
Would	9
Will	9
May	7
Must	4
Should	3
Could	5
Might	3

Figure 4: Modal verbs and number of times they appear

As we can see, the number of modal verbs in the text is very low and the number of verbs in a conditional form is even lower. “Can” and “may” make up half of them. Modality refers to the attitude and opinion of the speaker (Lyons 1977: 452). In this way, it is quite common to see in texts of this kind a frequent use of words that express obligation to fulfill a task, or intention in a purpose. In the text we are dealing with, an astonishingly low number of modal verbs appear. In a text of 5,000 words only 59 are modal verbs in the affirmative or negative, two of them being included in a quotation taken from a book written by him. As seen, “can” is the most frequent stating reinforcement, possibility, having the power or capacity.

In terms of tenses, it is worth making an initial analysis of the tenses of the verb “to be” as this verb has been used very often in this text. Indeed, it is used 92 times in the following way:

Form	Nº of times
Am	5
Is	37
Are	15
Isn't	5
Are not	1
Was	12
Were	9
Weren't	3
There is	3
There were	1
Has been	3
Has not been	1

Figure 5: Frequency of the verb to be

As shown, the present tense doubles the use of the past or the present perfect and the most common form is the third person singular. This could have been substituted in many times by a lexical verb to refine the content of the sentence. Yet Obama prefers to use simple and straightforward sentences. The tenses in the remaining verbs are divided in the following way:

Tense	Nº of times
Simple present	132
Simple past	108
Present perfect	39
Present continuous	2
Past perfect	2
Past continuous	2
Imperative	4
Present perfect continuous	1
Past perfect continuous	1
Future continuous	1

Figure 6: Frequency of tenses

The number of tenses in the present is nearly the same as in the past but the simple tenses are strikingly more frequent than progressive or perfect tenses. In the case of imperatives, we find four examples and always with the verb “let” repeated in a sequence. Perfect tenses are all gathered in the last part of the speech when Obama is telling the story of North Carolina.

The reason for the relatively balanced use of present and past tenses could be found in the purpose of the discourse; that is, to explain the current situation and the reasons for it. He has to explain why he supports Reverend Wright and to do this it is necessary to give a view of the situation he had to face some decades ago. He acknowledges that the current situation is quite different and expresses his optimism. The fact that most tenses are simple can be explained because this reflects the oral side of the speech. He tries to explain facts with simple words and sentences.

The next element to be analyzed is the use of pronouns. The first person singular personal pronoun “I” is used 39 times, 37 of these referring to Obama himself and two others quoting another character. The reason for this important number is that he dedicates several lines to talking about his personal experience as an African-American with a white mother. The pronoun “you” is only used in one occasion when he addresses the audience: “many of you have heard remarks from your pastors, priests, or rabbis with which you strongly disagreed”.

The case of the first person plural personal pronoun “we” is remarkable as it is used 70 times with different meanings:

1. Democratic Party. This is one of the most frequently used and we can see this in examples like “tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign” or “we need unity”.
2. Everybody. Not just a political party but society. “We cannot solve the challenges of our time”.

3. My wife and I. “An inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters”.
4. This nation’s citizens. “We are truly one”, “We will never be able to come together”.
5. Black people. “Memories that we didn’t need to feel shame about”.
6. Politicians. “We still haven’t fixed them”.
7. Democratic voters. “This time we want to talk about the crumbling schools”, “It is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger”.

Analyzing the corpus summarized above, we can see that the varied number of uses of the pronoun “we” suggests that he wants to involve everybody, not in the racial problem, but in the building of a society. That is, everybody is part of and responsible for the problems of society and the construction of progress, no matter what his situation at birth may be. It is an intelligent tool to gather people together. What is more, it is not easy to guess the reference of the pronoun in all of the examples. Deliberately or not, the idea of unity as the main message of the speech permeates through the use of these pronouns too.

Lastly, verbs in the passive voice appear in 25 occasions, delivered in this way: Simple present, 9; simple past, 11 and present perfect, 5. The agent appears in only five occasions, being varied: “It was stained by the nation’s original sin of slavery”, “Those who were ultimately defeated by discrimination”, “The anger is exploited by politicians”, “They have been particularly privileged by their race”, “The lines in the emergency Room are filled with whites”.

But it is omitted in most cases as being obvious; firstly, when he refers to the media or society: “The comments that have been made”, “As if no progress has been made”. Secondly, when he refers to authorities. This is the most frequent: “Blacks were excluded from unions”, “Opportunity

was systematically constricted”, “When they are told to bus their children to school”. In two other occasions, society or media could be the agent: “When they are told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods”, “We have been stuck in for years”.

In other cases, the agent refers to the authors of the Declaration of Independence, Obama’s mother, Obama himself or his team, Reverend Wright and the immigrant community. As we can see in this sample, the harshest words are for the authorities and politicians that have allowed injustices towards black community but the number is not meaningful.

4.3 Cohesion

Cohesion is the third level in our analysis and connectives can be seen in the repetition of the words, already considered in the section dedicated to vocabulary. Many of them can be grouped under the umbrella of race: “black”, “white”, “slave”, “march” and “discrimination” are words repeated more than once as the purpose of the speech requires it. There is a second group of words that shall be named Administrative and include “unity”, “Constitution” and “Convention”, “ideal” and “divisive”. With these words Obama suggests what society should be like. The first group is more numerous than the second and the words related to race are frequent. The same thing happens when Obama also alludes to the “Declaration of Independence”, “document”, “founders”.

Examples of generalization and specification can be found in the final part of the speech when Obama exemplifies the historical injustice towards black people in matters like education, although he finishes by making a parallelism with other white discriminated communities. Racial divisions are also expressed in specific examples in which adults have suffered in recent times.

Contrasts or examples of antonymy are very frequent throughout the speech. They are easily distinguished in the concepts of liberty and

slavery, justice and injustice, black and white, static and progressive, rich and poor, old and young, finest universities and inferior schools, white Americans and African Americans, different stories and common hopes, affirmative action and incendiary language. In addition, when he talks about the Trinity Church, he describes it with a list of antagonistic terms: “The church contains in full the kindness and cruelty, the fierce intelligence and the shocking ignorance, the struggles and successes, the love and yes, the bitterness and bias that make up the black experience in America” and continues defining Reverend Wright with the words “He contains within him the contradictions –the good and the bad- of the community that he has served diligently for so many years.”

Even though the tone is conciliatory he wants to remind us of the situation that African Americans historically had suffered from as well as their more recent experience, establishing a clear contrast between whites and blacks. He describes how things have developed and in a way puts himself on the side of the blacks. It must not be overlooked that this is the first time he has talked about his condition of being black in a campaign where this issue was constantly in the media. He has not been weak in the message and has combined, quite remarkably, a balance between a description of unfair historic facts, a reproachful tone towards the Reverend and a conciliatory message to the audience.

It is necessary in a speech of these characteristics to refer to different contrasts that society faces. Obama has cleverly linked these contrasts through some parallelisms.

Having said that, we have already seen some examples of parallelism but it is not a distinctive feature in this text; the text is full of references to other events or people. For instance, “this was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign –to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America” as

mentioned above. In the next quotation, he is embracing everybody, blacks and whites, as a necessary condition for progress: “We may have different stories but we hold common hopes.” There is a sentence already quoted above that is interesting as Obama unites contrast and parallelism in the same idea. He says: “I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community. I can no more disown him than I can my white grandmother.” It is an interesting way of saying that he is part of both ethnic groups and that he loves and respects both of them. He goes on to say: “These people are part of me. And they are part of America, this country that I love”. Contrast and parallelism are expressed as something that is unavoidable in American society. Another parallelism is stated when he says: “But race is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now. We would be making the same mistake that Reverend Wright made in his offending sermons about America –to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative to the point that it distorts reality”. It is interesting that in this case he equates the controversial words he is trying to clarify with the topic of racism that is in everyone’s mind.

Structural parallelism is also seen at the end of the exposition when he repeats the verb “Let” four times: “Let us be our brother’s keeper, Scripture tells us. Let us be our sister’s keeper. Let us find that common stake we all have in one another, and let our politics reflect that spirit as well.” There is another example a few lines below in which the expression he repeats no less than six times is “This time we want to talk about...” in clear reference to stop talking about secondary matters and focus on the real problems of the country.

4.4 Text structure

The fourth level in our analysis is the text structure in relation to the external knowledge the reader must have. Intertextuality is seen in the quotations that appear in his speech and also in the reference to external

events. We can see that the text contains a quotation from Obama's own book that he reads and a quotation from William Faulkner: "The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past." (from *Requiem for a Nun*, 1951) There is another reference to the Scriptures. Also, at the beginning of the speech he starts with a quotation from the Declaration of Independence: "We the people, in order to form a more perfect union." We have mentioned that the concept of union is fundamental in the text. This unity is expressed when he says "Two hundred and twenty one years ago", which makes us recall Martin Luther King's famous speech when said "Five score years ago" referring to the Gettysburg address. Obama is not using this old formula but somehow this reference is linked with the purpose of the historic address.

5. Conclusions

Obama was at a crucial moment in his campaign because of the difficulty in the task he faced with this speech as he not only had to explain why Reverend Wright has been his spiritual leader for so long, but he also had to justify some declarations he disagreed with. Lastly, he was aware that he could not afford to disappoint the African American community as they support these kinds of sermons. To do all this, it was absolutely necessary to be straightforward in his message and avoid any misunderstanding that could extend the debate. The final result is a clear and balanced message.

This text has some characteristics of written discourse in the effective linkage of the different sides the topic contains. The message has been carefully organized and the well-chosen quotations are also denotative of a prepared text. However, Obama has tried to create a colloquial mood by using common expressions. He has avoided complicated structures and vocabulary in order to reach people. Plain language is seen not just in the scarce use of adjectives but in the frequent

use of the verb “to be”; in the preference for speaking with simple tenses and the lack of the passive voice throughout the text.

Secondly, contrast is the word that best defines the structure of the text to denote the complexities of the society we live in. Historical contrasts between blacks and whites, contrasts in Obama’s own family, contrast too between Reverend Wright’s words and his own opinion of the matter. Even the nouns mostly used are not contraries but opposing (union as an indivisible concept, and race as diversity) as well as the two most common synonyms (of injustice and hope). The same could be said of the tenses used: the number of present and past tenses is quite similar and reflect completely different situations. But all these oppositions are mitigated with the different referents of the word “we” and the remarkable high number of times it appears, and also with the concept of unity.

We have seen that negative words abound but comparisons are mainly positive and positive adjectives are more frequent than negative. The tone is conciliatory and can be seen in the balance between hard past times and progress made recently.

To sum up and as stated above, this speech was decisive in Obama’s race to the Presidency and he could not disappoint any of the elements involved: firstly, the black community that was devoted to him; secondly, Reverend Wright, who had been his spiritual leader for more than a decade; thirdly, the white community that believed in him; and fourthly, his own principles and opinion of the matter, which could not contradict the ones expressed in his books. That is why the message needed to be straightforward and unbiased. He condemns Wright’s words but justifies him; he recognizes the injustices towards the black community but believes in progress and in America. The weighting given to the positive side helps to reinforce the idea of hope. All these elements have been carefully and cleverly combined, and from a linguistic perspective they make this speech one of the most valued examples of oratory in the political field.

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