

Linguistic Description of the Rhetoric: Barack Obama's Political Speeches

Tom Mboya Otieno

Department of Linguistics and Languages, University of Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract: *The principal focus of this paper is linguistic description of the rhetoric. Rhetoric presupposes a persuasive speech effect on the audience by the speaker. This study investigated the existence of linguistic features that constitute meaning and persuasion in rhetoric, specifically in Barack Obama's political speeches. The study shows that there is existence of certain linguistic devices that are used in the art of persuasion. Even sound patterns, that have largely been considered and studied as poetic devices, are invaluable persuasive strategies. Obama relies immensely on such linguistic devices to provoke his audience's interest and to emphasize his vision for America.*

Keywords: *Barack Obama, graphology, linguistic description, rhetoric, speech*

I. Introduction

According to Bradford (1997:3) [1], "The term [rhetoric] is derived from the Greek *technerhetorike*, the art of speech, an art concerned with the use of public speaking as a means of persuasion." Similarly, Aristotle defined rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering all the available means of persuasion in any given situation" Corbett (1990:3) [2]. The common denominator in the above definitions is that there is a set of formal devices that should be used to achieve the desired persuasive or rhetorical effects. For a speaker to achieve this goal of persuasion, he or she must therefore be well-versed in such formal devices. It is such mechanics of persuasion that make an orator appeal to the emotions of listeners. As Charteris-Black (2005) [3] correctly observes, successful speakers, particularly in the area of political contexts, need to appeal to attitudes and emotions of their audience. This cannot be achieved by relying solely on lexical means. A speaker needs to combine a number of linguistic factors in order to spin a political speech that will not only communicate his or her message effectively, but will also stir emotions in the audience

Linguistic description refers to the exploration and classification of linguistic features of a given text and the linguistic features are reflected by style markers which are linguistic items, Dong (2006) [4]. Listeners always pay attention to the linguistic patterns only when the patterns are made significant by being foregrounded. Devardhal et al (2013:1) [5] assert: "Advocating stylistics as a means to develop language proficiency is committed to the value of conscious attention to details of linguistic features "foregrounded" in a text; whether through "deviance" of some kind or, simply as the consequence of repetitions, parallelism or other such salient patternings that contribute significantly to meaning". This is an area of study known as stylistics. In his approach to stylistic analysis, Widdowson describes the purpose of stylistic analysis as "to investigate how the resources of a language code are put to use in the production of actual messages," (1996:138) [6]. According to Bradford, rhetoric transformed into modern stylistics.

In Holliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), speakers have reasons for saying something and for saying it the way they do. Crystal and Davy (1969:10) [7] support this as expressed in their third sense of the term style: "style is given a more restricted meaning when it is used in an evaluative sense, referring to the effectiveness of a mode of expression." As a result, speakers must make choices. In making such choices, particularly in rhetoric, a speaker must endeavor to communicate at an emotional level and take perspectives that are morally correct. When listeners perceive that their beliefs and plight are understood and evidently supported by the speaker, then the speaker has succeeded in creating connections with the listeners.

One area where persuasive communication is vital is politics. Charteris-Black (2005:1) states: "Within all types of political system... leaders have relied on the spoken word to convince others of the benefits that arise from their leadership." In this paper therefore, I look at the art of spin and spin-doctors, and specifically at the linguistic spin in the USA president, Barrack Hussein Obama's speeches. I will consider his victory speech (2008) [8] and Inaugural speech (2009) [9], and also briefly compare them to Martin Luther King Jnr's most widely quoted speech, "I have a Dream," (1963) [10] at the "march on Washington". In my analysis, I will decompose complex rhetorical goals into simpler stylistic ones that can be related to phonological, graphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic choices that orators employ in the art of persuasion.

II. Phonological Level

A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics[11] defines phonology as “the study of sound systems of languages.” This level of description involves the basic sound units and combination of such sound units. Bilal et al (2012) [12] define phonological analysis of a text as the analysis of sound pattern in that text, formation of words and utterances by systematic use of sound in a language. It is at this level also where we examine possible syllabus structure of a given language and the various ways in which syllables can be combined to achieve certain effects and create aesthetic appeal. The phonological devices include alliteration, consonance, assonance, repetition, rhyme and onomatopoeia. In Obama's speeches, alliteration, consonance and assonance stand out.

1.1 Alliteration

Alliteration is the use of the same sound at the beginning of words which are close together. It is a sound device aimed at creating additional musical effect produced by the utterance of a speaker. The musical effect attracts listeners' attention by creating the desired political mood. In Obama's 2008 victory speech, the most outstanding illustration is the following:

- a) **bl**ock **by** **bl**ock, **br**ick **by** **br**ick, **c**alloused **h**and **by** **c**alloused **h**and
- b) ...the **l**ove of my **l**ife, the nation's next first **l**ady....
- c) ...to restore **p**rosperity and **p**romote the cause of **p**eace...

In (a), the sounds [b], [k] and [h] alliterate. The significance of this alliteration is two-fold: the first one is to create rhythm and the second and the most important one is to emphasize the strong resolve to remake or reconstruct America-it will be long and tedious. In (b) and (c), the alliterating consonant sounds [l] and [p] help add musical effect to the utterances. In the 2009 speech, there are a number of examples:

- a) **M**agnificent **M**all
- b) The **s**now was **s**tained with blood
- c) With old **f**riends and **f**ormer **f**oes
- d) **We** **w**ill **w**ork tirelessly

Apart from creating rhythm which makes the lines musical, in (a), there is emphasis on the prospect of a better life for Americans; (b) emphasizes the sacrifices made by the founding fathers; in (c), a sense of inclusiveness is expressed while in (d), both sense of inclusiveness and resolve to work are expressed. In “I have a Dream,” alliteration is used as follows:

- a) **S**weltering **s**ummer
- b) **B**attered **by** the **s**torms of **p**ersecution and **s**taggered **by** winds of **p**olice **b**rutality

Apart from intensity, alliteration in these lines contributes to the musicality of the speech.

1.2 Consonance

Consonance refers to the recurrence of final consonant sounds in two or more words in a given line. Just like alliteration, the main purpose of consonance is to hold the attention of the audience through the rhythm that it creates in a speech. The following are examples from Obama's speeches:

- a) Why **men** and **women** and **children**... (2009)
- b) ...fasci**sm** and communi**sm**... (2009)
- c) There are **mothers** and **fathers**... (2008)
- d) What free **men** and **women** **can** achieve...(2009)

1.3 Assonance

Assonance is the recurrence of a vowel sound in two more words in a sentence or utterance. The overall effect, just like alliteration and consonance, is to create rhythm. It is the rhythm that holds the interest of an audience. Here are examples drawn from Obama's speeches.

- a) Why **men** and **women** and **children**... (2009)
- b) ...fasci**ism** and communi**ism**... (2009)
- c) You **di**dn't do **thi**s to **wi**n an **e**lection...you **di**dn't do **i**t for **me**... (2008)
- d) So **i**t must **be** **wi**th **thi**s generation of Americans. (2009)
- e) **We** **w**ill **bu**ild the roads and **br**idges, **the** **e**lectric **gr**ids and **di**gital lines... (2009)
- f) **We** **w**ill **be**gin to **re**sponsibly **l**eave **I**raq to **i**t's people... (2009)

The two orators, Obama and Martin Luther King Jr., do not seem to use sound patterns as much as they use other linguistic strategies.

III. Graphological Level

According to Leech (1969:39) [13] "The term 'graphology' is somewhat wider than the more usual term 'orthography', as it refers to the whole writing system: punctuation and paragraphing as well as spelling." Leech and Short (1981:131) [14] posit that 'graphological variation is a relatively minor and superficial part of style, concerning such matters as spelling, capitalization, hyphenation, italicization and paragraphing.'" In this paper, we will consider the most prominent aspects of punctuation used in Obama's speeches, and they include internal punctuation marks such as commas, semi-colon, dash, ellipsis, parenthesis and quotation marks.

1.4 Commas

Obama uses commas extensively in his speeches to create points of pauses, which in turn create rhythm. Commas can also be used in enumeration as shown below.

- a) It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled – Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America. (2008)

The use of commas in (a) is meant for enumeration; Obama mentions each and every group of people his political leadership will endeavor to give an ear to. The pauses, marked by commas, also slow down the tempo of the speech and invite response from the audience by way of applause. The overall effect of this is to appeal to the emotions of the audience, the main goal of rhetoric. The same is exemplified in the following portions of the speech:

- b) And to those Americans whose support I have to earn- I may not have won your vote tonight, but I hear your voices, I need your help, and I will be your president too. (2008)

- c) It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this day, in this election, at this defining moment, change has come. (2008)

- d) On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. 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. (2009)

- e) 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 Gettys-burg; Normandy and Khe Sanh (2009)

- g) 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. (2009)

King, just like Obama, uses commas to create rhythm and separate items in enumeration. An example is given below.

When we allow freedom to ring-when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, we will be able to join hands and sing in the words of old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, Free at last, Great God almighty, We are free at last."

1.5 Dashes

Obama uses this punctuation in his speeches to heighten anticipation, hence creating suspense. Suspense is a very powerful tool in rhetoric as it holds the interest of listeners. Examples the following:

- a) To my sister Maya, my sister Auma, all my other brothers and sisters – thank you so much for all the support you have given me (2008)

- b) But above all, I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to – it belongs to you. (2008)

- c) This election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations. But one that's on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her ballot in Atlanta. She's a lot like the millions of others who stood in line to make their voice heard in this election except for one thing- Ann Nixon Cooper is 106 years old. (2008)

- d) They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America – they will be met. (2009)

Dashes are also used, in grammatical sense, to clarify certain information or set off additional information.

- e) 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. (2009)

- f) Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington-it began in the backyards of Des Moines and the living rooms of concord and the front porches of Charleston. (2008)
- g) For that is the true genius of America-that America can change.
- h) This is the source of our confidence-the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. (2009)

In (i) and (j), the punctuation is used to set off additional information.

- i) 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 the day-because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government. (2009)
- j) And yet, at this moment- a moment that will define a generation-it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all. (2009)

In King's speech:

- a) This note was a promise that all men-yes, black men as well as white men- would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
- b) When we allow freedom to ring-when we let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, we will be able to join hands and sing in the words of old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, Free at last, Great God almighty, We are free at last."

1.6 Semi-colon

Semi-colons are used to mark pauses longer than those of commas. These long pauses elicit reactions from listeners by way of applause. So by using them, a speaker is incorporating his listeners into his or her speech by giving them room to participate in the presentation of the speech. They are also used to create rhythm. Examples include the following:

- a) She was born just a generation past slavery; a time when there were no cars on the road or planes in the sky; when someone like her couldn't vote for two reasons – because she was a woman and because of the color of her skin. (2008)
- b) And tonight, I think about all that she's seen throughout her century in America – the heartache and the hope; the struggle and the progress; the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: Yes, we can. (2008)
- c) It grew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation's apathy; who left their homes and their families for jobs that offered little pay and less sleep; it grew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on the doors of perfect strangers; from ... (2008)
- d) 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. (2009)
- e) 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 the suffering outside our borders; nor can we... (2009)

Semi-colon is not evident in "I have a Dream."

1.7 Ellipses

This is the use of three spaced dots to show that a word or words have been left out. This is a way of allowing listeners to react to the speech; it is a way of actively involving the audience. It is more prominent in King's speeches than Obama's. The following are examples from King's speech:

- a) I have a dream...
- b) I have a dream today...
- c) Let freedom ring...

Obama uses ellipses in his inaugural speech (2009)

Our founding fathers ... our found 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.

It is also used in the direct speech of the father of the nation, the words he wanted 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."

Ellipses in the above quotation also serve to create suspense. This suspense "hooks" the audience into listening to the speech.

1.8 Quotation Marks

Quotation marks can be used for a number of reasons in a speech. In Obama's speeches, quotation marks are minimally used. In the 2008 speech, the following quotation is used:

She was there for the buses in Montgomery, the hoses in Birmingham, a bridge in Selma, and a preacher from Atlanta who told a people that "we shall overcome". Yes, we can.

As Lincoln said to a nation far more divided than ours: "We are not enemies, but friends...though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection."

This quotation was used to draw attention to the words spoken by the preacher as a way of whipping up public emotion. Most importantly, the words enclosed in quotation marks will be said in a manner that significantly differs in prosody from the other words in the same sentence. The quotation may even attract use of some paralinguistic features. The sum effect of it all is that the emotion of the audience will be conjured up.

In the 2009 speech, the father of the nation had ordered these words to be read to the people:

"Let it be told to the future world...that in 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."

Unlike Obama, King uses quotation extensively in his speech.

- a) America has given the Negro people a bad check... marked "insufficient funds"
- b) There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?"
- c) This will be the day when God's children will be able to sing with new meaning. "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing...let freedom sing."
- d) "Free at last, Free at last, Great God almighty, we are free at last."

The quotations in (a) and (b) are used to characterize, and hence ridicule the white men; they are traitorous. In this sense, quotation is used to create irony. In (c) and (d) the quotations are used to express the faith and hope the black men have that one day all will be well. By using quotation marks here, the speaker therefore juxtaposes the black men's problems with their faith and hope.

Other quotations used in King's speech include:

- e) We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their childhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites only."
- f) I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

IV. Lexical Level

According to A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, lexicon "in its most general sense...is synonymous with words." What gives rhetoric its creative beauty is how a speaker (a rhetorician) ingeniously spins lexical items to crystallize his or her thoughts, to conjure emotions and to concretize events and characters in their speech. A speaker's choice of words determines the aesthetic appreciation of his or her speech. This level of linguistic description therefore investigates the manipulation of language at word level.

1.9 Use Of Pronouns

Rhetoricians use pronouns creatively to achieve certain effects. Pronouns can be used to reduce or augment the distance between the speaker and the audience.

- a) So let **us** summon a new spirit of patriotism; of service and responsibility where each of **us** resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only **ourselves**, but each other. Let **us** remember that if this financial crisis taught **us** anything, it's that **we** cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers – in this country, **we** rise or fall as one nation; as one people. (2008)
- b) This is **our** chance to answer that call. This is **our** moment.
This is **our** time – to put **our** people back to work and open doors of opportunity for **our** kids; to restore prosperity and promote the cause of peace; to reclaim the American dream and reaffirm that fundamental truth – that out of many, **we** are one; that while **we** breathe, **we** hope, and where **we** are met with cynicism and doubt, and those who tell **us** that **we** can't, **we** will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: yes, **we** can. (2008)
- c) **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. (2009)

Obama uses first person plural pronouns such as we, us, our, ours to create a sense of unity of the speaker with the audience (this increases closeness by reducing the distance between the two). This gives a sense of inclusiveness; Obama and his audience are one indivisible entity. He is part of the society to which he speaks.

I know **you** didn't do this just to win an election and I know **you** didn't do it for **me**. **You** did it because **you** understand the enormity of the task that lies ahead. (2008)

Obama also uses pronouns **I** and **you** to conjure strong emotions in his listeners and to create informal relationship between the two. In other words, Obama is spreading out the responsibility to his listeners. He uses **I** to build what Aristotle calls **ethos** and to give personal gratitude as seen in the following extracts:

I congratulate him, I congratulate Governor Palin, for all they have achieved, and I look forward to working with them to renew this nation's promise in the months ahead. (2008)

In his inaugural speech of 2009, he uses **I** only three times:

- a) I stand here today humbled by the task before us...
- b) I thank President Bush for his service to our nation...
- c) Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real...

First person singular pronoun I is used to identify the person who takes responsibility for what is said. It is also used as a show of shared interests between the speaker and the audience thereby appealing to their emotion.

He has established his character and is therefore keen on bringing everyone on board. He uses pronouns other than **I** to suggest power and solidarity.

King uses **me**, **us** and **us** as an expression of power and solidarity and also to stir up emotions in his listeners.

- a) I must say to **my** people who stand...
- b) Let **us** not seek to satisfy **our** thirst of freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.
- c) **We** must not allow **our** creative protests to degenerate into physical violence
- d) **We** cannot walk alone
- e) **We** can never be satisfied...

1.10 Use Of Modality

Both Obama and King use carefully chosen modal verbs to emphasize certain aspects of their message. The most frequently used modals are **can**, **shall**, **will**, and **must**.

a) There **will** be setbacks and false starts. There are many who **won't** agree with every decision or policy I make as president, and we know that government can't solve every problem. But I **will** always be honest with you about the challenges we face. I **will** listen to you, especially when we disagree.

And above all, I **will** ask you to join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it's been done in America for 221 years – block by block, brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand. (2008)

In the extract above, Obama uses **will** to achieve three things: predict the future as being tough, show the people that he is willing to work with them, and to ask his listeners to join in the remaking of America.

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. (2009)

In this context, Obama uses **shall** to express promise, intention, and obligatory action and to express his determination. To express possibility of remaking America, Obama uses **can**, especially in the creed: yes, we **can**. King also uses the modal verb will as shown below to predict the future.

This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate content **will** not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality-1963 is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and **will** now be content **will** have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

King also uses **must** to appeal to his listeners that it is very important to fight for their rights-compulsion and strong obligation.

- a) We **must** forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline
- b) Again and again we **must** rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force
- c) And as we walk we **must** make the pledge that we shall always march ahead

3.3 Use Of Nouns

Generally, Obama uses simple language at word level. Proper nouns are used to indicate historical sites of past wars; where his campaign was hatched; where a memorable vote was cast; places where social injustice took place among others. Examples in the 2008 speech include:

- a) Our campaign was not hatched in the halls of Washington- it began in the **backyards of Des Moines** and the living rooms of **Concord** and the front porches of **Charleston**
- b) But one on my mind tonight is about a woman who cast her vote in **Atlanta**
- c) She was there for the buses in **Montgomery**, the hoses in **Birmingham**, a bridge in **Selma**...

In his 2009 speech the following is an example:

- d) For us, they fought and died, in places like **Concord** and **Gettysburg**; **Normandy** and **Khe Sahn**

To show the inclusivity of his leadership, Obama uses common and collective nouns.

- e) It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled, and not disabled... (2008)

In the two speeches, collective nouns such as the United States of America, or simply, America, men, women, mothers, fathers and generation are used.

In addition, abstract nouns are used to describe events, perceptions, moral and social qualities.

- f) Let us resist the **temptation** to fall back on the same **partisanship** and **pettiness** and **immaturity**... (2008)
- g) When there was **despair** in the dust bowl and **depression** across the land, she saw a nation conquer **fear** itself with a New Deal... (2008)
- h) In reaffirming the **greatness** of our nation, we understand that **greatness** is never given (2009)
- i) 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**... (2009)
- j) On this day, we gather here because we have chosen **hope** over **fear**, **unity** of purpose over **conflict** and **discord**(2009)

King also uses picture-building nouns to make his message more forceful and appealing. The following are a few examples.

- a) ...seared in the **flames** of withering justice.
- b) ...**manacles** of segregations and **chains** of discrimination
- c) ...**bitterness**, unspeakable, **horrors** of **police brutality**
- d) ...freedom left you battered by the **storms of persecution** and staggered by **winds of police brutality**

3.4 Use Of Adjectives

Adjectives are used to largely concretize the events and people being referred to.

- a) ...for so long by so many to be **cynical**, and **fearful**, and **doubtful** of what we can achieve (2008)
- b) ...it grew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the **bittercold** and **scorching** heat to knock on the doors of **perfect** strangers... (2008)
- c) ... because after 106 years in America, through the **best** of times and the **darkest** of hours... (2008)
- d) The words have been spoken during **rising** tides of prosperity and the **still** waters of peace...the oath is taken amidst **gathering** clouds and **raging** storm...we the people have remained **faithful** to the ideals of our forefathers and **true** to our founding documents. (2009)
- e) On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the **petty** grievances and **false** promises... and **wornout** dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics. (2009)
- f) 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...pursue **full** measure of happiness. (2009)

Adjectives are extensively used in King's speech. The following are just a few examples.

- a) ...seared in the flames of **withering** justice
- b) **Sweltering** summer; whirlwinds of revolt
- c) ...**jangling** discords of our nation into a **beautiful** symphony of brotherhood.
- d) ...**snowcapped** Rockies of Colorado
- e) ...**curvaceous** slopes of California

3.5 Adverbs of Time

Obama uses adverbs of time to indicate a new beginning: a fresh start devoid of atrocities of the past.

- a) ...still questions the power of our democracy, **tonight** is your answer. (2008)
- b) For even as we celebrate **tonight**, we know the challenges... (2008)
- c) Even as we stand here **tonight**, we know there are brave Americans... (2008)
- d) ... we hope for what we can and must achieve **tomorrow**. (2008)

- e) And **this year**, in this election... (2008)
- f) **Today**, I say that the challenges that we face are real. (2009)
- g) **On this day**, we gather because... (2009)
- h) Starting **today**, we must pick ourselves... (2009)

2. Grammatical Level

This level of description encompasses syntax and morphology. In morphology, morphemes are affixed to words which, in normal usage should not be affixed. This is not very common in speeches. At syntactic level, we consider incomplete sentences, exaggerated repetition, and unusual arrangement of words, sentence structure and enumeration among others.

4.1 Enumeration

Enumeration refers to the listing of more than two elements of the same meaning or similar character. This is meant for precision and to create rhythm. It also stirs up emotions in the audience. Obama uses enumeration as exemplified below.

- a) It's the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled – Americans who sent a message to the world that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of Red States and Blue States: we are, and always will be, the United States of America (2008)
- b) 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 (2009)

King also uses enumeration as shown below.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

4.2 Declarative/Complex Sentences

Obama interlaces compound/complex sentences with simple/declarative ones. A rhetorician, he is aware that long sentences may make his audience lose interest in his speech. Consequently, he uses complex sentences largely to describe situations. Short sentences are used to arouse emotion and to break monotony of long descriptive sentences.

- a) It grew strength from the young people who rejected the myth of their generation's apathy; who left their homes and their families for jobs that offered little pay and less sleep; it grew strength from the not-so-young people who braved the bitter cold and scorching heat to knock on the doors of perfect strangers; from the millions of Americans who volunteered, and organized, and proved that more than two centuries later, a government of the people, by the people and for the people has not perished from the Earth.
This is your victory. (2008)
- b) 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: (2009)

In King's speech an illustration is as follows:

I have a dream...I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the cooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with.

4.3 Inversion

Inversion is a syntactic structure where prominence, the informative center of a speaker's or writer's statement, is shifted from the subject to the other elements of a sentence. This makes the statement more emotionally appealing. Obama use inversion, more visibly in his inaugural speech of 2009. Examples include the following:

- a) Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real.
- b) On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

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.

c) 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 Khe Sahn

In (a) and (b), the emphasis is on a new beginning whereas in (c), the informative center is those who benefitted from the struggle (ourselves). Other examples of inverted statements include:

- d) Less measurable but no less profound is the sapping of confidence across our land...
- e) Nor is the question before us whether the market is a force for good or ill.

4.4 Parallelism

Parallelism is a device that expresses a series of structures, yet not identical structures. The structures match in their grammatical forms. Leech (1969: 65) argues that "in any parallelistic pattern, there must be an element of contrast," and that "linguistic parallelism is very often connected with rhetorical emphasis and memorability." Parallelism is a product of balanced arrangement achieved through repetition of the same syntactic form. Parallelism creates a sense of symmetry and rhythm. Its other function is to draw attention to a particular part of the message and to make it stand out from the rest of the speech. Parallelism is extensively used in Obama's inaugural speech of 2009.

- a) 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.
- b) **On this day**, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

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.

- c) **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 Khe Sahn

- d) **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.

King also uses parallelism in "I have a Dream."

We cannot walk alone.... **We cannot** turn back... **We can never be satisfied as long as** the Negro is the victim.... **We cannot be satisfied as long as** our bodies... **We cannot be satisfied as long as** the Negro's basic mobility.... **We cannot be satisfied as long as** the Negro in Mississippi....

Another example of parallelism as used by King is the following:

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Parallel structures as used in these speeches serve to create an effect of balance, thereby reinforcing the impact of the message of the speakers. Parallel structures not only create rhythm, but they also echo the intensity of the speaker's message.

4.5 Polysyndeton

Polysyndeton is the use of conjunctions successively in an utterance, even in situations where the conjunctions could be avoided. It is used to create rhythm in a given speech, underlying the significance of every element and making it more expressive and emotional. Obama uses polysyndeton in the two speeches.

- a) It's the answer that led those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, **and** fearful, **and** doubtful of what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day. (2008)
- b) **And** we will transform our schools **and** colleges **and** universities to meet the demands of a new age. (2009)

- c) **And** so to all the other peoples **and** 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. (2009)
- d) ... why men **and** women **and** children of every race **and** every faith can join in celebration... (2009)

4.6 Gradation

Gradation refers to a series of successive degrees. In the series, every next element is getting more and more or less and less intensive. This is used in Obama's inaugural speech.

- a) All these we **can** do. All these we **will** do. (2009)
- b) For as much as the government **can** do and **must** do... (2009)
- c) And what we have already achieved gives us hope for what we **can** and **must** achieve... (2008)

4.7 Use Of Imperative Statements

Imperative statements are used by both Obama and King in the parts of their speeches where they express their authority. Imperative statements are also used to foreground parts of the speeches that need immediate attention or actions. Examples include the following:

- a) **Let** us resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long. **Let** us remember that it was a man from this state who first carried the banner of the Republican Party to the White House – a party founded on the values of self-reliance, individual liberty, and national unity. (2008)
- b) "**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)." 2009)
- c) 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. (2009)

In King's speech examples of imperative statements include the following:

- a) **Let** freedom ring from the heightening.... **Let** freedom ring from the snowcapped.... **Let** freedom ring from the Lookout Mountain.... **Let** freedom ring from every hill....
- b) **Go** back to Mississippi, **go** back to Alabama, **go** back to South Carolina, **go** back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, **go** back to the slums and ghettos.

4.8 Epistrophe

This occurs when a word or a phrase is repeated at the end of two or more clauses. In Obama's victory speech (2008), the creed, yes we can is repeated at the end of several clauses. Apart from giving a speech a rhythmical pattern, epistrophe invites the participation of the audience in the delivery of the speech by allowing them to call out the repeated words. As a result, the belief (that Americans, especially black Americans are capable), is emphasized.

- a) ...the times we were told that we can't, and the people who pressed on with that American creed: **Yes, we can.**
- b) At a time when women's voices were silenced and their hopes dismissed, she lived to see them stand up and speak out and reach for the ballot. **Yes, we can.**
- c) When there was despair in the dust bowl and depression across the land, she saw a nation conquer fear itself with a New Deal, new jobs and a new sense of common purpose. **Yes, we can.**

4.9 Epiphora

This is the recurrence of a word or phrase at the final position of two or more sentences.

Our challenges **may be new**. The instruments with which we meet them **may be new**.

Just like epistrophe, epiphora helps create rhythm and allows audience involvement in the speech.

4.9.1 Ellipsis

A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics defines ellipsis as a term used in grammatical analysis to refer to a sentence where, for reasons of economy, emphasis or style, a part of the structure has been omitted, which is recoverable from a scrutiny of the context. There are examples in Obama's 2009 speech.

- a) Homes have been lost; jobs shed; business shuttered.

- b) For they have forgotten what this country has already done; what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage.

4.9.2 Rhetorical Questions

These are questions that do not require actual answers. They are merely asked for rhetorical effect but the answers are implied in the context. Rhetorical questions are emotive devices which are used to appeal to the emotions of an audience.

So tonight let, let us ask ourselves-if our children should live to see the next century, if my daughters should be so lucky to live as long as Ann Nixon Cooper, what change will they see? What progress will we have made?

V. Semantic Level

What is examined at semantic level is transmission of messages by using unconventional combinations of words. There two levels of meaning: the superficial (surface) meaning and deeper meaning. Many of the devices that belong here are referred to us **figures of speech**.

4.10 Metaphor

Simpson (2004: 41) [15] defines metaphor as “the mapping between two conceptual domains.” These are the source domain and the target domain. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) [16] posit that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” That is to say that the hearer is made to see an unfamiliar object and its qualities in an object that is quite familiar. Kovecses (2010:4) [17] states: “A conceptual metaphor consists of two conceptual domains, in which one domain is understood in terms of another.” The central claim of the proponents of the conceptual metaphor theory is that metaphor is grounded on more basic kinds of experiences, for example, war, journey, construction, height or size, light and darkness, animals, influence and so on. Metaphor is a kind of spice in good speaking. Obama uses metaphor extensively in his speeches.

4.10.1 Metaphors Of Construction

Structural metaphors generate new metaphors out of a single conceptual domain Lakoff and Johnson (1980). One such conceptual experience, especially in rhetoric, is that POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS CONSTRUCTION.

- a) The **rock** of our family... (2008)

Obama uses the above metaphor to paint a picture of the immeasurable support and invaluable role of his wife, Michele. She is the pillar of the Obama family.

- b)... the unsung hero of this campaign who **built** the best campaign... (2008)

For a political campaign to come off, it must be strong, with a sturdy foundation and meticulous execution, just like a building or construction.

- c) ... I will ask you to join in the work of **remaking** this this nation... (2008)

- d) ...your people will judge you on what you can **build**, not what you can **destroy**. (2009)

Obama would like his opponents to look at leadership in terms of **building**, a positive course, but not destruction which is negative.

- e) Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of **remaking** America. (2009)

By using this metaphor, Obama is telling Americans that they must shun old habits, which may not have been helpful, and adopt new habits. It is a new era, new habits and new political leadership intended to make a “new” America. Metaphors of construction are also evident in King’s speech.

- a) ...lift our nation from the **quicksands** of racial injustice to the **solid rock** of brotherhood
- b) ...**palace** of justice

5.1.2. Metaphors Of Journey

In this conceptual domain, political activity is conceived as a journey; it can be long and tedious and is therefore not for the faint-hearted; everybody should on board in this process. On this long rugged path, we must always make a forward movement; any backward movement is derailing the process and is therefore negative. Journey in this context refers to the American history.

- a) I want to thank my partner in this **journey**... (2008)

- b) My chief strategist David Axelrod, who has been a partner with me,**every step of the way**... (2008)

- c) The **road**ahead will be **long**. Our **climb** will be **steep**... (2008)

- d) It has never been the **path** of the faint-hearted...but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the **long rugged path** towards prosperity and freedom (2009)

- e) This is the **journey** we continue today... (2009)
- f) As we consider the **road** that unfolds before us... (2009)
- g) Where the answer is yes, we intend to **move forward**. (2009)
- h) ...our ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart-not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good.(2009)
- i) So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and **how far we have traveled**.(2009)

4.10.2 Metaphors Of Light And Darkness

Metaphors of light and darkness are largely used to imply hope, openness, a new beginning on one hand, and evil, atrocities and difficulties of the past on the other.

- a) And all those who have wondered if America's beacon still **burns** as **bright**... (2008)
- b) ...but our destiny is shared, a new **dawn** of America leadership is at hand (2008)
- c) ...through the best of times and the **darkest** of hours...(2008)
- d) Those ideals still **light** the world (2009)
- e) ...to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the **light of day**...(2009)
- f) ...we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that **dark chapter**...(2009)
- g) ...see a friend lose their job which sees us through our **darkest** hours.(2009)

In King's speech, the following metaphors of light and darkness are used:

- a) ...**flames** of withering justice
- b) ...**light** of hope
- c) ...now is the time to rise from the **dark** and desolate valley...

5.1.4 Metaphors Of War

POLITICAL ACTIVITY IS A WAR metaphor is a commonly used by politicians. Politicians conceptualize political processes such as elections as battlefields with political opponents as adversaries. However, in the two speeches, Obama portrays war as destructive; it leads to loss of life and incessant discord. Excessive use of energy is a threat to the planet.

- a) ...tonight we proved once more that that the true strength of our nation comes not from the **might of our arms** or the scale of our wealth...(2008)
- b) ...each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our **adversaries** and **threaten our planet**. (2009)
- c) ...the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages...(2009)
- d) On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over **conflict** and **discord**...(2009)

4.11 Personification

Personification refers to the transference of certain qualities from animate beings to inanimate objects. In other words, objects and things are treated as if they were human beings.

- a) For that is the true **genius** of America-that America can **change**. (2008)
- b) ... worn out dogmas... **strangled** our politics (2009)
- c) At those moments, America **has carried on** (2009)
- d) America's **birth** (2009)
- e) At those moments, America **has carried on** (2009)

Personification is also evident in King's speech.

- a) **America has defaulted** on this promissory note
- b) **America has given** Negro people a bad check

4.12 Metonymy

Metonymy is the act of referring to something by the name of something else that is closely connected with it. It is a "cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same domain, or Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM)" Kovecses (2002:145) [18]. In Obama's speeches, place-for-inhabitant and body-part metonymies are evident.

- a) We cannot have a thriving **Wall street** while **Main street suffers**-in this country, we rise and fall together (2008)
- b) For that is the **genius of America**-that America can **change** (2008)
- c) At those moments, **America** has carried on (2009)
- d) ...to nourish the **starved bodies and feed hungry minds**.
- e) ...at a time when **voices were silenced** (2008)

f) ...on our ability to extend opportunity to every **willing heart**...(2009)

In (a), (b) and (c), places-streets and a country (America)-are used to refer to the people inhabiting those places whereas in (d), (e) and (f), body parts- bodies, minds, voices and heart are used to refer to human beings. This is a way of making a speech more emotive and expressive.

King's speech employs whole-for-part metonymies. It is only a small section of America, the leadership, which has betrayed the black people.

- a) **America has defaulted** on this promissory note
- b) **America has given** Negro people a bad check

VI. Conclusion

From the analysis, we can conclude that in rhetoric, it is not only the content that matters, but how that content is relayed, hence the linguistic spin. Obama has been successful in politics largely due to his unequivocal oratory skills. His linguistic spin doctors have proved that they are among the best in the world, endearing Obama not just to the American populace, but to the whole world. Obama's speeches are not heavily built on phonological aspects of language, but they are largely anchored on graphological, syntactic and semantic levels of linguistic description. He uses, in a colossal measure, metaphors to not only build a convincing vision, but also to reinvigorate American dream and democracy. The metaphors are conceptual in nature; drawn from everyday experiences and so his audience can easily identify with them. His ingenious use of personal pronouns for instance, places him as a humble ordinary citizen inseparable from his compatriots. It is also noteworthy that whereas Martin Luther King relies on concrete adjectives and descriptive nouns to conjure up emotions, Obama uses simple vocabulary but intensifies the other levels of linguistic description such as metaphor, modality, personal pronouns and a variety of sentence structures.

References

- [1] Bradford, R. (1997). *Stylistics*. New York: Routledge.
- [2] Corbett, E. (1990). *Classical rhetoric for the modern student*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [3] Charteris-Black, J. (2005). *Politicians and rhetoric: the persuasive power of metaphor*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- [4] Dong, Q. (2008). *English stylistics: a new course book*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research.
- [5] Devardhi et al. (2013). *Stylistics analysis based on formalism*. *Eliteresearch of education and review*, 1(2), 6-11. Retrieved July 18, 2013, from www.eliteresearchjournals.org/erjer/index.htm
- [6] Widdowson, H.G. (1996). *Stylistics: An approach to stylistic analysis*. In the *stylistic reader: From Roman Jakobson to the present* (ed.). J.J. Weber, London: Arnold.
- [7] Crystal, D. & Davy, D. (1969). *Investigating English style*. London: Longman.
- [8] Obama, B. (2008). Presidential victory speech. Retrieved October 24, 2013, from www.obamaspeeches.com
- [9] Obama, B. (2009). Presidential inauguration speech. Retrieved October 24, 2013, from www.obamaspeeches.com
- [10] Martin, L.K. (1963). I have a dream. Retrieved October 24, 2013, from www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm
- [11] Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* 6th Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- [12] Bilal et al. (2012). *Stylistic analysis of The Voice*. *International journal of linguistics* 4(3): 433-442
- [13] Leech, G.N. (1969). *A linguistic guide to English poetry*. London: Longman.
- [14] Leech, G.N. & Short, M.H. (1981). *Style in fiction. A linguistic introduction to fictional prose*. London: Longman.
- [15] Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: a resource book for students*. New York: Routledge.
- [16] Lakoff G. & Mark J. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- [17] Kovecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [18] Kovecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press,