

Application of Text and Discourse Analytical Devices on Political Speech

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Abstract

This paper focuses on two inauguration speeches; one delivered by Barak Obama (American) and the other is presented by David Cameron (British). The two speeches were analysed based on the Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL). While the two speeches proved to have some similarities such as motivating the nations towards their national commitment, they tackled some different issues such as assisting other nations.

Keywords: Speech analysis, political discourse, text and discourse analysis

1 Introduction

I have a dream. These seem to be normal words; words we use every day. However, we know that they are unique and the impact we have when reading them does not resemble that of normal words. Actually, they are powerful words that changed the destination of a whole nation when Martin Luther King first said them. From here comes the importance of political discourse. I am going to analyse two political speeches that took place after winning

elections: 1) Election Night Victory Speech by the US president Barak Obama 2008, and 2) General election victory speech, 2010 by UK Prime Minister David Cameron. The two speakers' post-election talks are as important as that of Luther, but under different circumstances. ("Political discourse" refers to the study of political language where the focus is on aspects of language structure as it constitutes and displays specific political functions) (Wilson; 2015 p. 776). Subsequently, I will analyse both texts in terms of grammar representation and the relationship, if any, between the structure of the speech and the impact it can apply to the audience in addition to the people involved and the themes presented then interpret the findings.

2. Speeches Analysis

It is now well established that our intention of linguistic messages we want to send determines the way we organise our words, and organization of words leads to specific understanding (Hyland; 2002 p. 115, Wilson; 2015 p. 776). This type of genre analysis, suggested by Halliday, is known as Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) where we have a 'register' that is composed of three elements: *Mode*, *Field* and *Tenor* (Hyland; 2002 p. 115, Martin; 2002).

Halliday first mentioned the term "register" in his book *Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* in 1964 and after that, he further developed and perfected this concept. He defined three variables, namely, field, tenor and mode, and thought these three variables influenced language use in every context situation. (Wang, 2014 p. 136)

Mode is concerned with the linguistic activity as a medium leading to a specific linguistic role in a particular context (Wang, 2014 p. 136). The field of a register is not only what matters in general but also actions that participants are engaged in (Halliday 1978 p. 144; Wang, 2014 p. 136). Tenor is the linguistic investigation where we identify the participants and the connections between them (formality and social connections) when communicating (Doughty et al. 1972 p. 185; Wang, 2014 p. 136). The following lines will be about the register triangle on the two speeches, realizing the three components.

2.1 Mode

Obama started his speech by an interesting theme that he did not name at all (becoming the first black president). Then he talked about his opponents followed by three thankful messages to his own family, his party and to all the Americans in the mentioned order. These themes were acting as an introduction. Secondly, he described the people and

campaign of his party as victorious, promised to do his best, mentioned that he can commit mistakes unconsciously, involved international relations and Ann Nixon Cooper then promised to create a better country and concluded by thanking citizens and glorying America.

Cameron, on the other hand, began his talk by the Queen had appointed him as a prime minister. Next, he thanked the departing PM, who is the opponent's party representative, and declared alliance with the Liberal Democrats providing justifications. Moreover, he stressed political trust, cleaning up expenses, reforming parliament, guaranteeing public desires, working together to realize public goals, changing the society to have a more active role and taking care of old people. Then he talked about his government's values, promised of better economic and society, and political trust again. Before stepping down from the stage and thanking everybody, Cameron repeated the governments' values he talked about priorities with a focus on responsibility and cooperation.

Although "I" and "we" are the most important themes according to the situation, both texts avoided using them. They have also mentioned their rivals and promised to create a better environment. Controversially, there are different themes such as diversity for Obama and elderly for Cameron.

2.2 Field

The processes used in the texts are similar in their percentage reaching roughly 13% in Obama's and 14% in Cameron's. However, they differ in details. About 46% of Obama's processes are material, 44% relational and mental, 6% verbal and 4% existential. These figures are not reliable since a good deal of material verbs is used metaphorically to refer to a mental action e.g. "*make the change*" and "*poisoned our politics*". Whereas UK PM's actions reach up to 57% for mental and relational, 37% for material and 6% for verbal. The latter did not use any existential processes or material processes to replace mental ones. The variation of this distribution does not deny the fact that material verbs are greatly minimized in both speeches.

The most dominant participants for both speeches are "I" and "we". The US president's "we/us" is camouflaging, sometimes it refers to Americans in general such as "*we are, and always will be, the United States of America*", sometimes it refers to the party's members, for instance, "*we didn't start with much money*", sometimes it refers to anyone listening or watching him regardless being American "*we know that government can't solve every problem*" and his own family in "*the new puppy that's coming with us to the white*

house” while Cameron used it to address British, his party and his government. A main participant in Obama’s speech is *Ann Nixon Cooper*. Additionally, he involved the whole world as a participant then addressed peace seekers and criminals around the world as well as America’s enemies. The British speech was special in including the Queen and the parliament. There are mutual participants such as the opponents’ parties, elections, values and the nation.

2.3 Tenor

The opening of Barak’s speech looked as a normal sentence but it was not. In reality it was a rhetorical question where everybody already knows the answer. David’s started by a declarative message to all the citizens that it is definite that he is the PM without engaging his audience in a thinking process. These are two different orientations and they led to different audience. The first speech involved the president’s own family which also acts as a hint to the mass audience to judge him as a normal man who cares about the details of life concerning everyone. He has also awarded his supporters by telling them that he knows it was not an easy task to support the campaign. He talked to the communities’ layers with all their colour, gender, race, sex orientations and economic status varieties. In short, he involved the world.

The second speaker’s population were citizens, opposing parties and an allied party. More common attitudes were appreciation of the current situation as inefficient and needs changing or amendments, public values as being genuine and the new government as being the change everyone dreams of. Both talks judged the nationals by being responsible and therefore they are invited to participate in the new regime and cooperate.

3. Post Analysis

The analysis done above is based on Halliday and Hassan’s model (1985) where the three elements of the register are expressed as grammar, textual and interpersonal representations. The analysis depends mainly on the way the texts were structured and the effect that these structures gave to the audience. In general, political speeches are not spontaneous but they are actually written and well organised to achieve a communicative aim: convincing people of whatsoever has been said.

I want to draw a particular attention to the use of repetition in the texts. In Obama’s first paragraph (see Extract 1), “*who still*” was mentioned 3 times but there was no different information; the verbs coming after “*who*” had the same meaning (doubts, wonders and questions) and the complements following them were synonymous expressions. We were

really wondering and questioning ourselves at that moment and the speech was making it interesting.

Extract 1

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

In addition to the beginning, the repetition of “yes, we can” in the US speech was a remarkable one. It flowed like music at the end of paragraphs 22-26 preceded by different actions in a motivating and enthusiastic way. Surprisingly, this repetition has an echo on paragraph 28 when he said: “those who tell us that we can’t” referring back to all the actions previously said and he did not need to repeat them. Barak Obama deployed the right words in the right place just like an artist positioning touches to his drawing. He told us that he is dark-skinned but never said “black”. He has used an example of a black American lady who called for fighting racism and we were interested in the ending when she voted and won her battle like an ending of a film.

Turning to the British speech, David has repeated “I believe” 5 times, “I want” 4 times and “I think” 3 times. This was actually saying the same thing 12 times since “believe” and “think” are synonyms and “want” is classified in the same group as a mental process. The single sender of these mental processes was the Prime Minister himself. This suggests that he knows what his people want and he is speaking on their behalf. It can be considered in another way where he makes his own judgements for his people and understanding the text this way reverses the purpose it was written for.

Extract 2

One of the tasks that we clearly have is to rebuild trust in our political system. Yes that's about cleaning up expenses, yes that is about reforming parliament, and yes it is about making sure people are in control - and that the politicians are always their servant and never their masters.

In extract 2 (see page 4) of the same text, there is a repetition of the structure “yes that/it is about”, emphasizing that “trust” is lost and “we” have to do something about it. The three suggested ways of building trust, according to Cameron, did not only reveal a mechanism but also showed mistakes that previous regime had committed.

Having defined some structures used in both texts to deliver particular senses, it is now worth making a summarized comparison of the aspects the analysis came up with. Both speeches addressed their opponent parties at the beginning in a respectful way by thanking them or appreciating their work but actually they act as a farewell kiss; a message saying “yes, we did win and you did lose”. It was really astonishing that both speakers received calls from their rivals congratulating them which could be interpreted as a political norm or “face” for the opponents. They both tackled the issue of trust, however, it was highlighted in the British speech which suggests a public mistrust in the political map. They both urged people to work hard by telling them that they are “responsible”. While this word gives a task to the citizens, it carries obligation and threatening if one failed to do their task. Obama acknowledged the effort of his colleagues in the Democratic Party, promised the world to stand by their side, if they were right, using his power, showed simple people that he knows how much they suffer, sent gratitude to the army indicating that the country is on war indirectly and threatened US enemies. These element added strength to his speech and gave him the result he wanted, to be heard and trusted.

Both leaders avoided material commitment and used mental verbs as a gesture of actions but this is not obligating them to take steps and both concluded by thanking everyone. There is also a relationship between this type of political speech and the people involved/addressed. The US president wrote 1935 words and succeed in making them interesting whereas Cameron’s paper contained only 636. The use of metaphors grabbed the attention and added an element of suspension to the American speech while the direct language of Cameron had possibly allowed some people to pay less attention or no attention at all. To sum up, all these features affect those who listen, watch or read the speeches but hopefully their influence does not last long as the English proverb says, in one of its different versions, “Actions speak louder than words”.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Text 1

Election Night Victory Speech
Grant Park, Illinois
November 4, 2008

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen; by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the very first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different; that their voice could be that difference.

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

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.

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 to America.

I just received a very gracious call from Senator McCain. He fought long and hard in this campaign, and he's fought even longer and harder for the country he loves. He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine, and we are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader. I congratulate him and 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.

I want to thank my partner in this journey, a man who campaigned from his heart and spoke for the men and women he grew up with on the streets of Scranton and rode with on that train home to Delaware, the Vice President-elect of the United States, Joe Biden.

I would not be standing here tonight without the unyielding support of my best friend for the last sixteen years, the rock of our family and the love of my life, our nation's next First Lady, Michelle Obama. Sasha and Malia, I love you both so much, and you have earned the new puppy that's coming with us to the White House. And while she's no longer with us, I know my grandmother is watching, along with the family that made me who I am. I miss them tonight, and know that my debt to them is beyond measure.

To my campaign manager David Plouffe, my chief strategist David Axelrod, and the best campaign team ever assembled in the history of politics – you made this happen, and I am forever grateful for what you've sacrificed to get it done.

But above all, I will never forget who this victory truly belongs to – it belongs to you.

I was never the likeliest candidate for this office. We didn't start with much money or many endorsements. 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.

It was built by working men and women who dug into what little savings they had to give five dollars and ten dollars and twenty dollars to this cause. 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; 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 this Earth. This is your victory. 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. For even as we celebrate tonight, we know the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime – two wars, a planet in peril, the worst financial crisis in a century. Even as we stand here tonight, we know there are brave Americans waking up in the deserts of Iraq and the mountains of Afghanistan to risk their lives for us. There are mothers and fathers who will lie awake after their children fall asleep and wonder how they'll make the mortgage, or pay their doctor's bills, or save enough for college. There is new energy to harness and new jobs to be created; new schools to build and threats to meet and alliances to repair.

The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even one term, but America – I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you – we as a people will get there.

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 join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it's been done in America for two-hundred and twenty-one years – block by block, brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand.

What began twenty-one months ago in the depths of winter must not end on this autumn night. This victory alone is not the change we seek – it is only the chance for us to make that change. And that cannot happen if we go back to the way things were. It cannot happen without you.

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.

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. Those are values we all share, and while the Democratic Party has won a great victory tonight, we do so with a

measure of humility and determination to heal the divides that have held back our progress. 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." And to those Americans whose support I have yet to earn – I may not have won your vote, but I hear your voices, I need your help, and I will be your President too.

And to all those watching tonight from beyond our shores, from parliaments and palaces to those who are huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of our world – our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand. To those who would tear this world down – we will defeat you. To those who seek peace and security – we support you. And to all those who have wondered if America's beacon still burns as bright – tonight we proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from our the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope.

For that is the true genius of America – that America can change. Our union can be perfected. And what we have already achieved gives us hope for what we can and must achieve tomorrow.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

When the bombs fell on our harbor and tyranny threatened the world, she was there to witness a generation rise to greatness and a democracy was saved. Yes we can.

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.

A man touched down on the moon, a wall came down in Berlin, a world was connected by our own science and imagination. And this year, in this election, she touched her finger to a screen, and cast her vote, because after 106 years in America, through the best of times and the darkest of hours, she knows how America can change. Yes we can.

America, we have come so far. We have seen so much. But there is so much more to do. So tonight, 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?

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. Thank you, God bless you, and may God Bless the United States of America.

Her Majesty the Queen has asked me to form a new government and I have accepted.

Before I talk about that new government, let me say something about the one that has just passed.

Compared with a decade ago, this country is more open at home and more compassionate abroad and that is something we should all be grateful for and on behalf of the whole country I'd like to pay tribute to the outgoing prime minister for his long record of dedicated public service.

In terms of the future, our country has a hung parliament where no party has an overall majority and we have some deep and pressing problems - a huge deficit, deep social problems, a political system in need of reform.

For those reasons I aim to form a proper and full coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

I believe that is the right way to provide this country with the strong, the stable, the good and decent government that I think we need so badly.

Nick Clegg and I are both political leaders that want to put aside party differences and work hard for the common good and for the national interest.

I believe that is the best way to get the strong government that we need, decisive government that we need today.

I came into politics because I love this country. I think its best days still lie ahead and I believe deeply in public service.

And I think the service our country needs right now is to face up to our really big challenges, to confront our problems, to take difficult decisions, to lead people through those difficult decisions, so that together we can reach better times ahead.

One of the tasks that we clearly have is to rebuild trust in our political system. Yes that's about cleaning up expenses, yes that is about reforming parliament, and yes it is about making sure people are in control - and that the politicians are always their servant and never their masters.

But I believe it is also something else. It is about being honest about what government can achieve. Real change is not what government can do on its own - real change is when everyone pulls together, comes together, works together, where we all exercise our responsibilities to ourselves, to our families, to our communities and to others.

And I want to help try and build a more responsible society here in Britain. One where we don't just ask what are my entitlements, but what are my responsibilities.

One where we don't ask what am I just owed, but more what can I give.

And a guide for that society - that those that can should, and those who can't we will always help.

I want to make sure that my government always looks after the elderly, the frail the poorest in our country.

We must take everyone through with us on some of the difficult decisions we have ahead.

Above all it will be a government that is built on some clear values. Values of freedom, values of fairness, and values of responsibility.

I want us to build an economy that rewards work. I want us to build a society with stronger families and stronger communities. And I want a political system that people can trust and look up to once again.

This is going to be hard and difficult work. A coalition will throw up all sorts of challenges.

But I believe together we can provide that strong and stable government that our country needs based on those values - rebuilding family, rebuilding community, above all, rebuilding responsibility in our country.

Those are the things I care about. Those are the things that this government will now start work on doing.

Thank you very much.

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