

RHETORIC IN OBAMA’S SPEECH, “AGAINST GOING TO WAR WITH IRAQ”

Sofia DildarAlvi

Lecturer in English, Government College University, Faisalabad Pakistan

Abdul Baseer, PhD Candidate

Lecturer in Applied Linguistics Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Abstract

Obama has emerged as a master rhetorician and a wonderful orator. He has the ability to convince and persuade his listeners of his propositions. The present study reports at his rhetorical and linguistic ability while pointing out the use of his different techniques: story telling, rhetorical questions and answers, appeal to authority, salutations as emotion booster, use of free Verbal Repetitive constructions, Verbal / Syntactic Parallelism, logical selection of lexical expressions are the few. He develops through this linguistic craftsmanship his credible image in the minds of his listeners, and convinces them. In this speech on Iraq war in 2002, he talks for and against the war by using logical lexemes and expressions from both sides, yet his rhetorical ability convinces the audience that war in the present context (in the year 2002) is not the solution.

Keywords: Rhetoric, Barack Obama, Speeches

Procedure

The analysis is based on the text of speeches provided by Olive (2008) in his anthology, *The American Story*. We assigned numbers to the paragraphs of the text for the convenience of the readers.

Analysis Of “Against Going To War With Iraq”

October 2, 2002

Chicago, IL

Ethos Applied

Story Telling

Credibility, strength and authenticity of a person, proposition, ideology, perception or approach gets strengthened if the emotional bond of the person involved gets strength. Telling a story of a historical fact stirs the emotions positively as it has been proved by time, already.

Democratic politicians are often good storytellers, adept with compliments and able to charm even some of their critics. On the strength of these talents, they enjoy the popularity of a successful general without having mastered the art of war. They have mastered a different art, a certain way of speaking to their fellow citizens. While they may seem to talk for many reasons—to amuse, to inspire, often just to pass the time—they usually have an additional purpose. They talk to bring people to their side (Garsten, 2006).

Obama was addressing an anti-war (US War against Iraq) rally at a time when 65% of Americans were supporting the war, and at that time Obama’s preference of anti-war policy might have thrown away his political career (Olive, 2008), he preferred to tell the audience a true story, a fact from history to prove that his patriotism is beyond doubt, intention purely national, as he belongs to a practically brave and loyal- to- state family. He remarks that despite his addressing a rally against going to war with Iraq, he is not against “all wars”.

In paragraph two he recounts that his own grandfather joined US army and fought under Patton (a leading US military commander in WW II). He told that his grandfather fought bravely for US, suffered every physical, mental and emotional pain for the victory of the United States. He fought for the triumph of Truth. “He fought in the name of larger freedom, part of that arsenal of democracy that triumphed over evil, and he did not fight in vain” (Olive, 2008). He fought for a cause. So all wars are not to be opposed. This story telling of an episode from his own family history in fact provided a firm pedestal on which he could develop the confidence of the audience in that he is not against benefits of his nation in his opposition of Iraq war. Rather he is a great beneficiary to the state and the nation. Obama’s four times use of the third person pronoun “he” at the thematic position of every clause marks his grandfather as subject and agent of the action of fight. This four times use of

the pronoun reinforces the positive image of the speaker as the listeners get emotionally motivated by the active patriotism of the speaker's ancestor.

Rhetorical Questions and Answers

Paragraphs seven and eight have three examples of rhetorical verbal repetition of intermittence, i.e. PLOCE. Rhetorical questions, "You want a fight, President Bush?" is exactly repeated forcefully. President Bush is addressed here through the use of APOSTROPHE. This figurative expression of addressing the most powerful statesman of the world in a political speech has the effect of generating a reverent impression of Obama in listeners. Obama is well aware of the use and effect of the repetitive linguistic structures. He uses these repetitive elements in one or the other form frequently. If his rhetorical questions involving apostrophic address to President Bush are the examples of PLOCE, his answers of his questions show a masterful use of the technique of verbal parallelism.

Appeal to Authority

The very first sentence just after using an unconventional "Good afternoon" formulates an appeal to the audience, seeking their permission to allow the speaker to proclaim what he wishes:

"Let me begin by saying that ..."

The imperative verb "let" is giving the addressees a place of prominent authority, a group of people with a feel of possessing the power to allow something to someone. Moreover, this permission seeking imperative is used just after the use of a two-word unconventional greeting expression, producing a liquid atmosphere of pleasant informality by minimizing the distance between the speaker and the audience and paving the way to speaker's credibility. So this consent seeking sentence at the very opening of a speech on a politically and internationally significant theme seems a smart use of words by its speaker: it gives the audience a sense of supremacy and authority.

In first sentence of paragraph two, Obama builds his credibility by quoting a well-known proper noun, "Patton". General George S. Patton (1885-1945) was a renowned US military commander who fought in WW II. Obama devotes the second paragraph of his speech in telling the audience that his grandfather was a time-tested and historically proven patriot who fought for the US under Patton army. Now, Patton is the authority beyond doubt in matters of bravery, patriotism and nationalism. By quoting his grandfather as a soldier in

Patton's army, Obama gets confidence and trust of the audience, hence his credibility and reliability increase.

Paragraphs four, five, six, seven and eight have some proper nouns taken from the contemporary history. Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz (First was the chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee in Bush administration, and second was the deputy Defense Secretary and a leading champion of Iraq war), Karl Rove (Chief political strategist in Bush administration), Exxon and Mobil (Exxon Mobil Corporation, an oil company in US) are the real well-known people and corporation. An open reference and direct comment on their policies enhances the image of Obama as a resourceful person and his account authentic and reliable. Hence emerges a credible Obama.

Pathos Applied

Salutations as Emotion Boosters

Obama comes out of the conventionally established distance zones created by appropriate linguistic expressions. At the very start of the speech he makes use of the expression, "Good afternoon", an expression which is conventionally used between two or among a very few members of a community at routine occasion of daily meetings. This expression establishes rapport between new acquaintances and strengthens relationship between those who know each other for a fairly long time. The use of this two-word routine informal expression of greetings to open a political speech by personnel of politically responsible stature is not a routine speech habit. This novel use of this expression certifies Obama's success at minimizing his distance with the addressees. Moreover, this expression gives them all a sense of oneness and singleness of being: the 'beings' of audience become a 'being' producing the effect as the speaker of this expression and the audience are only two persons between whom this expression of greetings works. The effect is obviously the sense of unity among audience, their emotional approval of speaker's views, and a sense of inclusiveness and unity with the speaker.

Amplification of the Situation through Thesis and Antithesis

First paragraph has four sentences. First sentence is a two-word expression. Fourth sentence is a five-word declarative expression, emphatically conveying that all wars are not worth opposing. Sentence two and sentence three amplify the situation through thesis and antithesis. In an antiwar rally against going to war with Iraq, he shows both sides of the

mirror. Calling to the minds of public, the history of the Civil War and all its bloodshed, suddenly he stirs their emotions by attaching the religious connotation oriented word “crucible” with the word “sword”. The Civil War ----- one of the bloodiest in history ----- attains the status of martyrdom-field where the sacrifice of the multitudes perfected the unity of the Americans and due to which omission of the scourge of slavery from the soil was possible. The dependent clause containing the lexeme “although” of the first sentence introduces the theme of the rally, i.e. antiwar procession. This dependent clause is followed by the independent clause (I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances) conveying the real message the speaker wants to pass on to the mob. Since antithesis is the belief of the speaker, it should be conveyed in more emphatically expressive way. Hence an independent clause has been introduced. If thesis of the sentence is introduced by dependent clause, antithesis has been introduced by the independent clause. The first independent clause of third sentence (The Civil War was one of the bloodiest in history) is conveying general impression of the mass mind against war, by the use of lexeme “bloodiest”, establishing a thesis of “antiwar”. But in the very next two dependent and relative clauses, (and yet it was only through the crucible of the sword, the sacrifice of multitudes, that we could begin to perfect this union) he comes up with his strong belief of the positive inevitability of wars. In these clauses and in the last independent clause (and drive the scourge of slavery from our soil) he introduces his antithesis of unavoidable need of wars. Hence in the very first paragraph, by using just two sentences of thesis and antithesis structural patterns he touches the emotions of the audience, and stirs them with a closing short declarative sentence “I don’t oppose all wars” (Olive, 2008).

Emotion Stirring Narratives

In the second paragraph Obama uses a narrative from his own family history to stir the emotions of the audience. In an anti-war rally, his narrative regarding his grandfather’s brave encounters in the war swirls the emotions of the audience and prepares the ground for Obama to distinguish between the two types of wars; just wars and dumb or rash wars. By using the noun phrases “crucible of the sword” and “sacrifice of multitudes”, he makes the audience emotional and enhances his emotional appeal. Obama’s story of his grandfather who “saw the dead and dying across the fields of Europe” and who “fought in the name of a larger freedom” not only increases the integrity and sincerity of Obama’s family but also wins the hearts of American people. They get convinced that Iraq war is merely a dumb war

and a cynical attempt to thrust certain ideological agendas down their throats. The Bush administration has nothing to do with lives lost and hardships borne.

Free Verbal Repetition and Verbal / Syntactic Parallelism

Pathos is the process of “creating positive emotions and connotations in the minds of listeners” (Halmari, 2004). When a speaker employs this strategy, the listeners are more easily persuaded. There are too many instances where Obama deliberately awakes the emotions of the audience. Free verbal repetition and verbal / syntactic parallelisms are the linguistic techniques to evoke the emotions of the listeners as repetition at the levels of sound, grammar, and lexicon produce musicality and an emotion to be pursued. Free verbal repetition is the exact copying of some previous part of a text (word, phrase, or even sentence). “Traditional rhetoric distinguished two categories of free repetition: that of immediate repetition, or EPIZEUXIS (e.g. come away, come away, death), and that of intermittent repetition, or PLOCE” (Leech, 1989). For verbal parallelism “the repetition should be felt to occur at the beginning of equivalent pieces of language, within which there is an invariant part and a variant part” (Leech, 1989). Hence parallelism is a partial repetition.

Paragraphs two and three show the example of free verbal repetition of Ploce:

“I don’t oppose all wars”

The emphatic declarative sentence of SP (neg) C structure at the end of paragraph two is exactly repeated in the third paragraph. This intermittent repetition of exact lexemes arranged in a syntactically parallel way strikes the listeners as having “a deliberate rhetorical effect” (Leech, 1989).

The three times repetition of Wh- clause in paragraph four and two times (with addition of “That’s” at one place) in paragraph five is the example of verbal and syntactic parallelism. These repetitions are the combination of invariant part (What I am opposed to is) and variant parts:

(...a dumb war)

(...a rash war)

(...the cynical attempt...)

(...the attempt by...)

(That’s ...)

This saying of the same thing through the invariant part hammers home the content. The quality of sound imitating sense carries a declamatory force, “the power of emphasis

which makes it a stock device of political oratory and of emotionally heightened language” (Leech, 1989). So the emotions of the listeners are artistically engaged against the leading advocates of Iraq war in Bush administration as their names are presented to the listeners through the variant parts of above-mentioned examples of verbal parallelism.

In paragraph five the variant part of the previous paragraph sentences (A dumb war. A rash war) are working as a full clause. These nominal groups convey the complete message in their contexts. Their use here is only for repetitive and rhetorical purpose; to stir the emotions and pursue the audience. Same category of use is displayed in the nominal group sentence “A ruthless man”. Three times verbal parallelism of “ I know” in paragraph six points towards Obama’s awareness of the real facts as the variant parts of these constructions reflect his knowledge of the affairs of the world at large, Iraq and Iraqi government, its military, and Middle East situation.

The single independent clause in paragraph six (even a successful war against Iraq will require a US occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost with undetermined consequences) having SPCAA structure has syntactic parallelism in its last items, i.e. AA. The ‘q’ part of the item ‘C’ (of undetermined length) has syntactic parallelism with the adjunct (at undetermined length), and adjunct (with undetermined cost), as all these items have ‘pc’ structure in common. Moreover, the initial part of ‘c’ component (undetermined) is repeated in both adjuncts, and in ‘q’ part of C. Both these lexical as well as syntactic parallelism produce the element of pathos among audience. The repetition of same structural three-word items (‘q’ part of C and both adjuncts) creates a musical effect among audience responsible for creating pathos.

Paragraphs seven and eight have three instances of rhetorical verbal repetition of intermittence, i.e. PLOCE. Rhetorical questions, “You want a fight, President Bush?” is exactly repeated vehemently. President Bush is addressed here by applying apostrophe. This figurative expression of addressing the most influential statesman of the world in a political speech has the effect of producing a respectful impression of Obama in listeners. Obama is well conscious of the use and outcome of the repetitive linguistic structures. He brings into play these repetitive elements in one or the other form repeatedly. If his rhetorical questions involving apostrophic address to President Bush are the examples of PLOCE, his answers of his questions demonstrate an outstanding use of the technique of verbal parallelism. All the three-time uttered rhetorical questions are followed by the answers which display verbal parallelism.

“Let’s finish the fight ...” (Paragraph 7)

“Let’s fight ...” (Paragraph 8)

These sentences are the combination of the invariant and variant elements. Invariant parts are the forceful imperatives beginning from “Let” and using the material process of action, “fight”. The variant parts, after the repetitive parallelism of invariant parts, gather too much force of acceptability by the listeners, as the musicality of the repetitions has a rhetorical effect of persuasion. So Obama’s list of suggestions regarding the end of fight with Bin Laden through other than war means, respect of UN resolutions, better system of looking after nuclear weapons in Pakistan and India, way of tackling opposition of US in Middle East, etc. is introduced in the variant parts of the verbally parallel structures. This is a wise persuasive technique.

Logos Applied

Logical Selection of Lexical Expressions

Logos is “persuasion through reasoning” (Beard, 2000). It is the way of convincing by employing logical arguments. Aristotle has classified logos as an argument from reason; one of the three types of persuasion. Logos has some advantages:

- It is difficult to manipulate the data as it is complicated to argue against a logical point.
- It renders the speaker look equipped and well-informed to the audience, increasing his credibility.

Appeal to logic is one of the most effective ways of persuasion. Barack Obama uses this technique of convincing his voters by a very conscious and logical selection of words and expressions. In this speech his strategy to employ logic can be marked out by using two sets of words and expressions belonging to two opposite semantic fields. One set of expressions expressed a fully convincing account of the positive and useful aspects of war and the places where war becomes inevitable. The other set of expressions provides a full range of connotations of his proposition “against going to war with Iraq”. The following tables provide these expressions and the frequency of their occurrence in the speech.

Table 1: Agenda word and list of connotative lexemes/ phrases

Lexical Items/ Phrases	Paragraph No.	Frequency
Anti-war (Agenda word)	01	1
Dumb war	04, 05	1+1
Rash war	04,05	1+1
Cynical attempt	04	1
Lives lost	04	1
Hardships borne	04	1
To distract from ... poverty rate ... medium income ... corporate scandal	05	1
Undetermined cost	06	1
Undetermined consequences	06	1
Consequences of war are dire	09	1
Sacrifice immeasurable	09	1
Sacrifice in vain	09	1

Table 2: lexemes/ phrases supporting Anti-agenda proposition

Lexical Items/ Phrases	Paragraph No.	Frequency
Civil war	01	1
Crucible of the sword	01	1
Sacrifice of multitudes	01	1
Drive ... slavery	01	1
I don't oppose all wars	01, 02, 03	1+1+1
Fight in the name of larger freedom	02	1
Arsenal of democracy	02	1
September 11 th ... carnage and destruction	03	1

Agenda word or the proposition of the speech is “Anti-war”. Table 1 demonstrates all the connotative expressions which support Obama’s proposition of anti-war against Iraq. These connotative expressions are in fact the repetition of the same idea, i.e. war with Iraq is

not the solution, and rather it is destructive in every respect. “The exposure to the same information again and again invites the addressee” (de Saussure, 2006). Two times repetition of “dumb war”, “rash war”; one time “cynical attempt” and the rest of the expressions in table 1 logically convince the audience of the destructive and extremely negative consequences of war against Iraq. Obama is fully aware of the way how to extend his proposition through logical argumentation. It is logical to answer satisfactorily the questions of listeners unasked yet. Only when a logical speaker succeeds at showing both sides of the coin, s/he could convince the listeners of her/him proposition. To convince the audience Obama talks enough of the positive effects of war and the place where it is needful.

Table 2 presents the expressions supporting the other side of coin. Expressions like “Crucible of sword”, “sacrifice of multitude”, “light in the name of larger freedom”, “arsenal of democracy” strongly propose that it is not always when war is an undesirable thing. His reference to “civil war” and its effect of liberty from slavery and establishment of democratic governance proves war inevitable in certain situations.

Conclusion

Obama speaks from both sides and gives logical arguments for and against a proposition. This way of rhetoric is highly logical which convinces the audience the way Obama chooses.

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