

OBAMACARE – A TRADEMARK OF THE PRESIDENT. A SPEECH ANALYSIS

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Having come to an end with his two terms as president, Barack Obama's activity can be summed up in a few reforms, some international agreements, some adopted laws and some renewed diplomatic relationships. But the most important asset of the American leader is still to be seen in his abilities of a great political communicator. Having stated this position since 2004, he managed to keep up with this label during his both mandates as the president of the United States.

The aim of this paper is to reveal a good blend between a well-delivered political speech and a reform that put him in the eyes of media. The sample of the research will include the speech delivered on September 9th, 2009, having as main topic the American health reform. Using the critical discourse analysis as a research tool, our aim is to create a connection between the qualities of a great political communicator and the audience's adherence to a speech. The passion behind the idea of health reform is capable of transforming an opaque subject into a great speech. Suffering from all sorts of controversies, the Obamacare represents a trademark of the current president of the United States.

Key words: Barack Obama, Obamacare, discourse analysis, political speeches, trademark

Introduction

Politics represents the art of persuasion and the best argument to support this statement is the political speech. Characterized by elements of rhetoric, pragmatic, linguistic, culture, history and so on, a political speech can emphasize the qualities of a political actor. Many researchers try to establish the guidelines that are to be followed when delivering a good speech, but the most important part of a speech relies on the political actor: his charisma, his oratorical abilities, his arguments and the awareness he or she has on the context, can define the way a political discourse is perceived. Moreover, the professionalization of the

political speeches puts so much pressure on today's politicians, who are no longer ignoring the power of this instrument of communication. Hopefully, in a few years, we will be able to say that the era of demagogues and poor communicators is coming to an end.

The American political scene has known great political communicators. Looking back at the Founding Fathers and continuing with Lincoln, Kennedy, Reagan, the American presidents made a clear statement of the importance of efficient communication skills, of well-balanced speeches, based on good arguments. They represent the most important political communicators of all times, as they have created a trend on the American political area and as well, on the international arena. Nowadays, the American politicians have to keep up with this legacy, as they can't afford to not engage in efficient acts of communication. It is a fact that the field of political communication grew as an important field of the social sciences in the USA and has spread to Europe and the other continents. Even nowadays, the essence of the American politics is a combination between efficient policies and the way an actor is capable of delivering this information to the electorate.

As stated before, the American legacy is taken forward by most of its presidents. Nevertheless, the current president of the USA is a perfect example of a great political communicator. He made a clear statement of his qualities of a good political communicator in 2004, at the Democratic Convention, where he stated his oratorical abilities. Throughout his political career, the policies he proposed didn't put him in the eyes of media, but he certainly managed to do that with a political speech. He can be defined by his qualities of an efficient political communicator, by his charisma, by his well-argued discourses, by his persuasive skills. All in all, Barack Obama's two terms as the president of the United States can be defined by his charisma and the way he made use of this asset.

Theoretical framework

A good political discourse becomes a weapon for a political actor and at the same time, it becomes a manipulating tool. It is considered to be a persuading instrument and it can create an advantage against the contra candidate. "*A discourse can influence the audience through its logical order, through the fundamentals that generate the discourse.*" (Sălăvăstru, 2009) Thus, they are very important "*Speeches are important, because they are one of the great constants of our political history.*" (Coyle, 2008) The political speeches mark important moments in time and they are what the electorate will remember, the real electoral program of a political actor. Moreover, the political discourse is considered to be very important due to its capacity of persuading the electorate and in a way, it represents a theatrical

movement. Goffman (2007) considers that *“the speech of the political leaders has a powerful dramaturgical foundation.”* It is more than obvious that the effects that a speech produces rely on the framing of the moment. Delivering a speech represents an art and this is very basic information that we have about the political speech from back in the Antiquity. Aristotle considered that a good speech is based on rhetoric (Molina, Spicer, 2004), being constructed on arguments and persuasive elements that emphasize the importance of the communicative act.

Furthermore, the importance of the political speech is to be seen in the functions that represent an integrating part of the whole process. These functions are: the structural function, the decisional one, the pedagogical function and the therapeutical one. (Bălan, 2005). All of these functions explain the effect a speech can have as it establishes a strong connection between the political actor, the media and the electorate. It represents a bridge between all these entities as it represents a tool for negotiation, a tool for sharing information and knowledge and the perfect tool for creating an image. We consider the political discourse one of the most important and efficient tools of the political arena, due to its capacities of creating a balance between persuasion and adherence to an idea, to a political actor or to a political party.

Methodology

The critical discourse analysis (CDA) represents the perfect research method that will manage to reveal the most important aspects of a political speech, thus, will contribute to efficient results in what our main goal concerns. We consider this method suitable for our research as it offers both a qualitative and a quantitative perspective, with main focus on qualitative perspective. Also, this method allows us to analyze a text having in mind the power relation that are presented and the social context that contributes to the creation of the speech and its effects. The critical discourse analysis represents a *“multidisciplinary, and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture.”* (van Dijk, 2015). The social context that creates the need for a discourse is very important, as well as the effects it produces. *“CDA is so useful because it provides multiple points of analytic entry.”* (Janks, 2008) While undertaking the analysis, we will take into consideration aspects that concern the ideological part of the discourse, the main themes that are presented, the aspects of a liberal discourse, the most frequently used words and connotations. The analysis of word frequencies and ranking of the words, takes us to a qualitative approach. In order to undertake this part of the analysis, we will use the textalyser software.¹

¹ The software can be found at <http://textalyser.net/index.php?lang=en#analysis>

The data analysis will include the transcript of the *Obamacare* speech, delivered on the 9th of September 2009 and the video recording of it.

Social context

The *Obamacare* represents a trademark of the current American president, Barack Obama. The United States of America face serious problems in what the health care system concerns, as it represented a never-ending subject of any American political agenda. Obama put lots of effort in not only bringing the subject on the table, but in convincing his colleagues it is time to take action. He proposed a new plan that was supposed to reform the health American system, ensuring benefits even for those in the lower classes. It is not a mystery that all the reforms and all the policies that Obama promoted during his years as president and as senator were directed towards middle class people and poor people. He is considered to be a liberal, but many of his policies seem left-sided or center based. Obama represents a minority himself, that being a possible explanation for the fact that he put much effort in working for the minority in all his adult life. Even though he is their representative, he considers that “*the responsibility of cutting off the differences can’t only rely on the Government; the minorities, individually and collectively have their own responsibilities.*” (Obama, 2008)

The *Obamacare* reform represents one of the best assets of his two terms as president of the USA. The president was supposed to reform a very important field, but most crucial, to improve it. The new health care system is not working properly even nowadays, but the ongoing reform ensures a good perspective for the next president to continue with or better yet, to find new ways of improving it. The lack of a real reform in the health system, transformed the first years as a president for Obama, in a struggle to improve a not-well functioning system. The last reforms known as *Medicare* or *Medicaid* were approved back in the 1965. This can give us an idea of the necessity of improvement and most important, the necessity of updating an old, rusty system. The main purpose of the *Obamacare* is to commute the financial, clinical and technological practices towards efficient medical outcomes that are centered on the patients as well as on the medical staff. Moreover, the secondary purposes were to endure lower costs of the medical services and to improve the methods of distribution and accessibility.

The purpose of the analysis is to reveal the structure of a speech that is able to persuade through its logical order and to ensure adherence to the main themes that are revealed. Moreover, another aim of the analysis is to emphasize the qualities of the political actor and its capacities of transforming a dull subject, into a trademark of his mandates.

Themes of the speech

A much elaborated speech, with a well-balanced amount of information, the *Obamacare* discourse represents a call for action and a plan to be followed in the years to come. Roughly a technical speech, the president delivers a classical obamite discourse, following the same structure like in most of his addresses. This emphasizes the consistency of his discourses and his qualities of a good public speaker.

During the first paragraphs of the speech, he is focusing his attention on the plenary meeting, as he presents his address in front of the Joint Session of Congress. His first remarks underline the effects of the financial crisis that America was still striving to overcome in 2009. His first years as the president of the USA were marked by the economic crisis, that, according to Obama “*this nation was facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.*” Continuing this idea, he underlined the joint efforts of the American political class, in order to overcome the deficits that were attacking the roots of all domains of activity. The best way to show the impact of the crisis was by pointing out the challenges the American people are facing: “*We were losing an average of 700,000 jobs per month. Credit was frozen. And our financial system was on the verge of collapse.*” Of course, the solutions relies on their hands: “*And I will not let up until those Americans who seek jobs can find them - until those businesses that seek capital and credit can thrive; until all responsible homeowners can stay in their homes. That is our ultimate goal. But thanks to the bold and decisive action we've taken since January, I can stand here with confidence and say that we have pulled this economy back from the brink.*” By analyzing this discourse, we can see a fair-play side of Obama, as he admits the common efforts that are driven in order to overcome the difficult moments. During the great majority of this speech, he will emphasize the work put together by democrats and republicans, at the same time.

He starts to introduce the main topic of the address in the 5th paragraph of the speech, as he begins with the classical remembrance of the American past. By putting the American health care system on the table, he aims to underline the continuous efforts that were made in order to ensure progress and safety to the American people. “*I am not the first President to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last... And ever since, nearly every President and Congress, whether Democrat or Republican, has attempted to meet this challenge in some way.*” Furthermore, he admits the failure of the system, but he only sees that as a learning tool, as every mistake is a way to improve in the future. A great part of this speech is concentrated in the effort of explaining the leaks and damages of the current health care system. “*Many other Americans who are willing and able to pay are still denied insurance due to previous illnesses or conditions that insurance companies decide are too risky or too expensive to cover.*” Also,

Obama puts pressure on the Congress, by presenting the reality of the American policies: “*We are the only democracy -- the only advanced democracy on Earth -- the only wealthy nation -- that allows such hardship for millions of its people.*” He goes on and presents those who are really affected by a scarce system: the poor, the small businesses and the uninsured. These people are those who are most affected and those who need to be paid more attention to.

As stated before, the structure of the discourse is a classical one and is to be kept during most of the obamite speeches. The president moves forward by presenting real cases, of real people, that were confronted with a poor-working system. By pointing this out, he again emphasizes the need of working on solutions to the problem and underlines the importance of his plan. The next paragraphs present the image of the dysfunctional health system, governed by the insurance companies that rule the whole system. He presents a really alarming financial report on health care system, which triggers the whole mechanism down. During this first part of his address, Obama presents a short-working system, only to introduce his future plans, in what American health care system is about to experience, during his term as president. As researchers, we will admit that the structure of the discourse is a well-balanced one, as he uses the main principles of the Aristotelian construction of the text. These are known as: *Exordium, Propositio, Narratio, Confirmatio, Refutatio, Peroratio*. (Roventă-Frumușani, 2005). Also, we can find the typical guidelines of the Aristotelian rhetorics: *Ethos, Pathos* and *Logos*. (Molina, Spicer, 2004) These guidelines represent constructionist strategies that consider not only the verbal character of the text, but also about the engagement of the actor in delivering the information.

Continuing with our analysis, the president presents in the next paragraphs successful health care systems, presenting Canada as a benchmark in terms of proper functioning health care systems. The next part of the speech focuses its attention on presenting the struggles that the Congress faced in elaborating policies and bills in the health system. Obama shows the wasted efforts of such debates, calling on politicians to concentrate their energy on action: “*Now is the season for action. Now is when we must bring the best ideas of both parties together, and show the American people that we can still do what we were sent here to do. Now is the time to deliver on health care.*” By using this imperative tone, he suggests the problem is real and there is no time for showing the need for dominance in the Congress. He goes on with his fair-play character that dominated the whole speech. “*And it's a plan that incorporates ideas from senators and congressmen, from Democrats and Republicans -- and yes, from some of my opponents in both the primary and general election.*” This strategically approach of the speech, emphasizes his human character and it is meant to present himself as a trustworthy political actor.

The main part of the speech is constructed around the proposed plan for action and the “*dos and don'ts*” of this plan. Thus, he focuses his attention on the three entities he considers to be more affected by the not-so-good-working health system: uninsured, small businesses and poor people. “*We'll do this by creating a new insurance exchange -- a marketplace where individuals and small businesses will be able to shop for health insurance at competitive prices.*” The plan proposed by Obama and the whole team, appears to be as rather less complicated one, a more affordable one and a more secure one. Of course, we will all agree that a speech is meant to persuade the public; therefore, the presentation will be hyperbolized. His strategy of persuading is concentrated on a fair-play character: “*In the meantime, for those Americans who can't get insurance today because they have preexisting medical conditions, we will immediately offer low-cost coverage that will protect you against financial ruin if you become seriously ill. This was a good idea when Senator John McCain proposed it in the campaign, it's a good idea now, and we should all embrace it.*” Obama puts great accent on the joint work of both republicans and democrats, using this as a strategy of creating an image of a good-hearted, human and honest president. On the other hand, he acknowledges all the problems that might appear, as he comes up with solution for this. Having long term consequences, the new health care system is costly and its effects are to be seen in the years to come. The new system is a reform that appears to be a very important one for the recently elected president. “*And I have no doubt that these reforms would greatly benefit Americans from all walks of life, as well as the economy as a whole.*”

During the next minutes of his address, the American leader exposes the situation of the American insurance companies, who are to change their approach towards the patients, by following the guidelines of this new plan. Of course, all in favor of the American people. He explains the way everything is going to work, according to *Obamacare*. In order to reduce the worries and all the controversies that governed the American scenario, Obama states very clear that: “*I will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits -- either now or in the future. I will not sign it if it adds one dime to the deficit, now or in the future, period. And to prove that I'm serious, there will be a provision in this plan that requires us to come forward with more spending cuts if the savings we promised don't materialize.*” His strong convictions place him on a positive side of the approval rates, or so he hopes after delivering this discourse. He does not put aside Medicare and Medicaid (the former health care systems), but his plan is to improve these plans and to work on the good values they promote: “*Medicare is there for future generations*”. One of the secondary purposes of this discourse is to clarify and to shade away any trace of doubt that was put on the information regarding the new health care system. “*So don't pay attention to*

those scary stories about how your benefits will be cut, especially since some of the same folks who are spreading these tall tales.” Presenting the benefits of the new system is also a very important part of the message: “best practices by doctors and medical professionals throughout the system -- everything from reducing hospital infection rates to encouraging better coordination between teams of doctors.”

On the other hand, even though he wants to be fair-play and present the best practices proposed by his opponents and even by the former president Bush, he needs to make a clear cut between his new policies and the old, inefficient ones: *“Now, add it all up, and the plan I'm proposing will cost around \$900 billion over 10 years -- less than we have spent on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and less than the tax cuts for the wealthiest few Americans that Congress passed at the beginning of the previous administration.”* He presents his plan as a long term one, a working one and he states the need of taking immediate action: *“I will not waste time with those who have made the calculation that it's better politics to kill this plan than to improve it. I won't stand by while the special interests use the same old tactics to keep things exactly the way they are. If you misrepresent what's in this plan, we will call you out.”* While delivering this discourse, Obama presents himself as a determined chief of the state, putting the popular interests above the particular ones.

During the last paragraphs of the speech, he presents an endorsement for this program, made by the senator Ted Kennedy, the brother of the former president J.F.K. and a great supporter of the renewed health care system. Known as a great supporter for progressive plans, he died of a brain tumor in 2009. He uses his endorsement to the health care system, in order to present the importance of adopting his proposal. Ted Kennedy has a “*closer*” relation to the health care system, as two of his children passed away due to terminal diseases. That is why most of his efforts as senator were focused on improving the system. Obama uses him as an endorser, in order to underline the need of adopting the new plan. By the end of his speech he reaffirms the need for republicans and democrats to work together in this issue, as he restates the twisted history of the American health care system and the struggles the previous political actors faced. As he states, their only aim should be fulfilling in an honorable way the need of the American people. He ends his address with two typical obamite strategies: encouraging the people to work for the future: *“We did not come to fear the future. We came here to shape it. I still believe we can act even when it's hard.”* and with the classical American presidential address: *“God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.”*

The themes of the discourse follow a classical pattern of construction, as the president begins most of his discourses by addressing to the American people and he goes on with putting great emphasize on the

glorious American past, underlines the current needs of the society, presents his plans for a better future and the actions that are to be taken and closes his addresses by underlining the need of working together as a nation, in order to succeed. Another thing that is always present in his speeches is the real-life story that is meant to present him as a popular president, who knows people closely and goes around the country to see himself the problems the Americans face. All in all, the themes are wisely chosen and they perfectly match the social context in which they are presented, putting a great emphasize on the public speaking abilities of the president.

The ideological approach of the speech

Barack Obama is considered to be a liberal, as he states in his book, *The Audacity of Hope*. His speeches are built around the main principles of the liberal ideology, having liberty and progress as the main guidelines. He follows the liberal principals stated by Hobbes, Locke and Mill. (Obama, 2008) Also, even if he is a member of the democrat party, he feels more connected to Lincoln, a republican president, more specifically, to his liberalism. (Thomas, 2009).

While delivering this speech, he made a clear statement of the liberal principals that he follows, basing his health care reform on concepts such as progress, improvement, in order to ensure well-being to the American people. The progressiveness of his ideas is to be seen in this speech: *“thanks to the bold and decisive action we’ve taken since January, I can stand here with confidence and say that we have pulled this economy back from the brink.”* Going forward, we can see marks of his liberal convictions: *“My guiding principle is, and always has been, that consumers do better when there is choice and competition. That’s how the market works.”* Encouraging the free market is a clear statement of liberalism. Also, encouraging competition on the market is a liberal principal that Obama is aware of. Ensuring a great variety of insurance companies for people to choose from will benefit both the people and the companies as well. Another proof of his liberal convictions relies in these words: *“I still believe we can replace acrimony with civility, and gridlock with progress. I still believe we can do great things.”* The progressive thinking, the hope for a better future reveals a liberal view, which shapes an open-minded perspective on the policies to be adopted. His socialist views are to be found in the great majority of his speeches, as he promotes the idea of equal rights to all the American citizens. His plans to ensure equality among people is by providing them fair health insurances and high quality services. Obama is known for his socialist political options, as his policies are constructed in order to provide better quality of life, equality, all these being socialist approaches. Moreover, some of the ideological approaches of this

speech are situated on the center of the political spectrum. According to the centrist politics, this ideology proposes a moderate acceptance of the reform and in this speech the centrism is to be found in the policies that are directed towards small businesses. According to our analysis, Obama takes a walk along the both center-sides of the political spectrum. Thus, his discourse is a complex one, as it incorporates a wide range of views on the health care system.

Moreover, according to the frequency analysis, the speech has a number of 2994 words and a lexical density of 40,6%. In order to undertake the quantitative analysis we used the textalyzer software, software that makes a summing up of the most frequent words and phrases that are used in a text. (Appendix 1 and 2) The most frequent words that appear in this discourse are: *insurance, health, care, plan, coverage, companies*. These words reveal the main subject that is presented during this speech, the health care system. This is a very specific subject that is tackled by the president and it represents one of the most important policies of his first term as president. From a linguistic point of view, the most part of the verbs are in present tense that indicates Obama's engagement in this issue and the need to take an active position on the matter. These strategies are meant to simplify the way a speech is received, as well as its effects on the public. Even the Biblical references are meant to create consistency with the American legacy and to his own speeches. The ending formula of the American presidential speeches is resumed in the following words: "*God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.*"

The construction of the obamite speeches are consistent during the years and this speech perfectly fits this rule. Besides the fact that the verbal information is filled up by the nonverbal communication, there is a rigorous attention paid to the arguments, the rhetorical principals and to the rules of pragmatics.

To sum up, the *Obamacare* represents the trademark of Barack Obama. This speech is a perfect demonstration of his oratorical qualities, as he manages to crystalize some opinions and he manages to perfectly blend well-balanced arguments with constructionist strategies. All in all, this discourse managed to improve a perspective on a rather controversial subject and emphasized the image of an engaged president, sharing his strong views on subjects that are of real interest.

Appendix 1:

Total word count :	2994
Number of different words :	1215
Complexity factor (Lexical Density) :	40.6%
Readability (Gunning-Fog Index) : (6=easy 20=hard)	9.3
Total number of characters :	33355
Number of characters without spaces :	18628
Average Syllables per Word :	1.68
Sentence count :	362
Average sentence length (words) :	15.9
Max sentence length (words) :	76

Appendix 2:

Word	Occurrences	Frequency	Rank
insurance	67	2.2%	1
you	49	1.6%	2
health	48	1.6%	2
our	45	1.5%	3
care	40	1.3%	4
now	32	1.1%	5
plan	31	1%	6
those	30	1%	6
coverage	25	0.8%	7
companies	24	0.8%	7

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