

An Analysis of Rhetorical Devices in Barack Obama's Inaugural Speeches

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Abstract

This thesis explores the strategic use of rhetorical devices in Barack Obama's first and second inaugural addresses, highlighting how these rhetorical devices enhance the persuasiveness and depth of his messages. This research employs a qualitative approach to elucidate the rhetorical devices in Barack Obama's addresses, using Jones and Peccei's (2004) Rhetorical Model for analysis. The study utilizes purposive sampling to select relevant speech excerpts, providing a comprehensive examination of the rhetorical devices that enrich Obama's inaugural speeches. In his first inaugural address, Obama employs more rhetorical devices to vividly convey complex ideas and emotions, fostering a strong connection with his audience. In his second inaugural speech he uses less number of rhetorical devices compare to the first which means that his first inaugural speech is more persuasive than his second one.

Keywords: Rhetorical Analysis, Rhetorical Devices, Inaugural Speeches, Barack Obama

Introduction

Communication plays an important role in human life as it makes individuals able to transfer their thoughts, and feelings and provide solutions (Kurniawati, 2019). Moreover, communication can be fruitful when collaborative interaction happens between the interlocutors while expressing their interests, knowledge and feelings in oral as well as in written communication. Oral communication can happen through speaking, discourse, and everyday conversation. The speaker employs some strategies to make his/her message easier to understand while delivering an address.

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion in language, entirely beneficial in developing implicit meaning comprehension. (King, 2010). In the realm of politics, politicians employ various strategies to persuade people. Politics involves resolving differences through discussion and persuasion, with communication playing a central role. (Chilton, 2004). Historically, the language of politics has an in-depth connection with persuasion. (Wróbel, 2015 and Almahasees, 2022). Politicians use tools like campaigns, commercials, posters, and mass media to reach out to society. Language is a crucial element in these media, as it helps convey legitimacy and authority. The relationship between language and politics is significant. Highlight that politics is not just about the text and talk; it's a professional and media discourse. (Fetzer and Bull, 2012). Therefore, examining how language is used in political communication becomes essential in understanding political behaviour. This research explores how politicians, particularly in the case of Barack Obama, use rhetorical devices in their speeches to influence and engage the public.

In this research, the researcher delves into analyzing Barack Obama's inaugural speeches by applying Jones and Peccei's (2004) model of rhetorical analysis. In this research, the researcher focuses on analyzing speeches as a primary source of data. One of the techniques frequently employed in speeches is the use of rhetorical devices. Rhetorical devices are methods that speakers use to persuade their audience by sharing their perspectives and stirring up emotions in their listeners (John & Peccei, 2004; Thomas, 2004). These devices are commonly used in politics, especially during campaigns, but the researcher aims to explore how they are utilized in other political contexts, such as inaugural speeches. This study has been undertaken to shed light on this intriguing aspect.

The primary focus of this study center on the examination of rhetorical devices and their effects. This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical devices employed by Barack Obama in his inaugural speeches. This endeavor involves the analysis of rhetorical devices within each speech, followed by a more detailed examination of the effects generated by the most prominent devices across all speeches. This approach illuminates how and why specific devices were employed to persuade

and resonate with the audience or the general public. The corpus for this study is two inaugural speeches delivered by Barack Obama as he was president of America twice.

Statement of the Problem

The analysis of Barack Obama's inaugural speeches within the framework of Jones and Peccei's model (2004) serves several critical purposes. To begin with, how rhetorical devices are employed in these speeches can provide insights into the art of political communication. In addition, this analysis aims to uncover the subtle and strategic linguistic choices made by Barack Obama to persuade and influence his audience. Furthermore, this research addresses a significant gap in the field of Linguistics. It explores how linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies intersect in political discourse, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping political narratives. Thus, political discourse is supposed as a form of action intended to employ a sense of pressure on the public to legalize political influence. (Golubovskaya, 2022; Kurmanova, 2021; Labastía, 2023). Additionally, it sheds light on the applicability of the model in contemporary political analysis, offering valuable insights for both linguists and political analysts. This analysis is important because it enriches the field of Linguistics by demonstrating the relevance and effectiveness of the aforementioned model in dissecting and understanding political rhetoric.

Research Questions

- What are the prevalent rhetorical devices employed in Barack Obama's inaugural Speeches: on 20 January 2009 and 20 January 2013?
- How far do Barack Obama's inaugural Speeches have similarities and differences in terms of the rhetorical devices used?

Research Objectives

- To investigate the prevalent rhetorical devices employed in Barack Obama's inaugural Speeches: on 20 January 2009 and 20 January 2013.
- To find out the similarities and differences in terms of the rhetorical devices used in Barack Obama's inaugural Speeches.

Literature Review

Rhetoric

Rhetoric has historically been employed to influence individuals, with skilled rhetoricians possessing the power to sway large groups of people. During the ancient era in Greece, the importance of public communication in addressing issues grew as democracy emerged. In ancient times, rhetoric was the study of persuasive techniques taught by philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. (Trenholm, 2013). Pernot (2005) states that in Athens, public prosecutors were absent, requiring individuals to present their own cases in court. This emphasised the significance of rhetoric in public affairs and the need for proficient persuasive abilities. Charteris-Black (2014) argues that the traditional perspective on rhetoric emphasised teaching individuals how to sway others through persuasion in public situations, viewing rhetoric as a means to impact communities and society.

Rhetorical Devices

Our comprehension of rhetorical methods and words is rooted in the perspectives of ancient antiquity. However, their aim is to influence the audience of a text, such as through persuasion. Rhetorical devices, often known as figures of speech, are classed differently based on the selected division. An example of this is analysing them as tropes and schemes. Tropes are considered to be elements that pertain to the meanings of words, as opposed to schemes which involve rearranging words in unconventional ways. (Kelen, 2007). Lanham (1991) explains that tropes include words in discourse having a meaning different from their original connotation, whereas schemes maintain the literal meanings of words but arrange them in a different meaningful pattern. A metaphor is a type of trope, whereas alliteration is a type of scheme. Kelen (2007) defines metaphors as methods that are essentially deceptive, as they are employed to assert that one thing is another, when in reality it is not.

Empirical Studies

Abban et al. (2024) analyzed rhetorical devices in social media posts by Ghanaian celebrities on Instagram and Twitter using Michalik-Suchanek's framework. They examined 130 Instagram posts and 70 Twitter posts from April 2022, identifying 22 rhetorical devices, with syntactic devices being the most common. Ghanaian celebrities primarily use Standard English and rhetorical devices to connect with followers, persuade actions, and enhance post meaning. The study highlights the effectiveness of these devices in enriching social media language. Further research is suggested to explore rhetorical elements used by various public figures in Ghana. Abban et al. (2024)

Raza et al. (2024) analyzed Joe Biden's and Donald Trump's inaugural speeches using Van Dijk's (2005) model to identify discursive techniques for positive self-representation and negative portrayal of others. Trump's speech emphasized unity and collective agency, while Biden's focused on democratic values and healing. Both leaders used techniques like victimization, lexicalization, populism, metaphors, and modality to enhance their leadership personas and policy objectives. The study reveals how

similar rhetorical devices achieve distinct communicative goals. This research enriches our understanding of political rhetoric. Raza et al. (2024)

Amairah (2023) conducted a rhetorical analysis of Joe Biden's speeches, focusing on his use of various rhetorical devices to persuade audiences. Analyzing 40 speeches from January 2021 to February 2022, the study examined logical, ethical, and emotional appeals. Biden's strategic use of first-person pronouns 'I' and 'we' and emotional terms like 'hope' and 'love' fosters a sense of connection and positive sentiments. The study also noted Biden's use of logical appeals, including statistical data and authoritative references. This research sheds light on Biden's persuasive strategies in political communication. Amairah (2023)

Umam and Laili (2023) analyzed the rhetorical devices in the 2021 US presidential inauguration speech using Jones and Peccei's framework and Van Dijk's CDA approach. They identified 16 rhetorical devices, with parallelism being the most dominant. The study highlighted the use of metaphor, parallelism, the rule of three, and pronouns while noting the absence of euphemisms. These findings suggest that rhetorical devices enhance the effectiveness and memorability of political speeches. The research contributes to understanding how rhetorical strategies and discourse analysis create compelling political communication. Umam and Laili (2023)

Haryanto et al. (2023) examined metaphorical euphemisms in online comments on President Joko Widodo's Facebook posts, reflecting the trend of politicians using social media for public communication. Using a qualitative approach and content analysis, the study found that netizens' use of metaphorical euphemisms is shaped by their beliefs, experiences, and socio-cultural perceptions of politics. The findings highlight the role of metaphorical language in political discourse on social media. This research contributes to understanding rhetorical strategies in Indonesian political communication. Haryanto et al. (2023)

Onebunne and Chukwu (2023) studied euphemism in political discourse, focusing on its functions and role in shaping ideologies. Analyzing President Buhari's Arise TV interview from June 10, 2021, using Leech's Politeness Principle Maxims, they found euphemisms serve manipulative purposes. Euphemisms help politicians avoid criticism, distort truth, and reshape public ideologies. The study revealed that euphemisms project a self-image of civility and sophistication while masking harsh realities. This research highlights euphemism as a strategic tool in political communication. Onebunne and Chukwu (2023)

Gufron et al. (2022) examined rhetorical devices in Indonesian presidential speeches using Mann and Thomson's theory. Analyzing speeches from Presidents Megawati Soekarno Putri, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Joko Widodo, they found extensive use of metaphors, the rule of three, euphemisms, and pronouns. Metaphors were the most frequently used device. Each president addressed specific themes, such as terrorism, democracy, and budgeting. The study highlights the strategic use of rhetorical devices to convey messages and engage audiences effectively. Gufron et al. (2022)

Methodology

This exploratory study examines the persuasive techniques in Barack Obama's inaugural speeches through Jones and Peccei's (2004) rhetorical analysis. Using a qualitative methodology to uncover hidden meanings, the researcher uses purposive sampling to select two inaugural speeches of Barack Obama, applying Jones and Peccei's (2004) model, which includes Metaphor, Euphemism, the rule of three, Parallelism, and Pronouns. The study utilizes Obama's inaugural speeches from January 20, 2009, and January 20, 2013, to explore the rhetorical devices used. Data analysis involves collecting, organizing, and examining the speeches using the specified rhetorical techniques, following the framework provided by Jones and Peccei (2004). This approach aims to reveal how Obama employs these devices for rhetorical purposes in his political discourse.

Results and Discussion

Barack Obama's first and second inaugural speech analysis

Metaphor

The definition of metaphor involves the comparison of two distinct notions, as stated by Jones and Peccei (2004). A speaker, particularly a politician, plays a crucial and essential role in captivating and engaging the audience by delivering eloquent and captivating speeches. Charteris-Black (2011) provides an alternative definition of metaphor, stating that the symbolic meaning of a word is decided by the connotations it evokes in its usual literal usage.

Extract 1: "The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often, the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms."

Extract 2: "We remain a young nation. But in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things."

Extract 3: "Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less."

In his first inaugural speech, Barack Obama uses vivid metaphors to convey resilience, growth, and perseverance. He acknowledges the varying conditions under which presidential oaths have been taken, evoking images of "rising tides of prosperity" and "still waters of peace" to symbolize periods of growth and tranquility, while "gathering clouds and raging storms" represent times of turmoil and challenge. Drawing on a biblical reference, he urges the nation, still young and full of potential, to "set aside childish things," calling for maturity and a more responsible approach to contemporary challenges. Furthermore, he describes the nation's

progress as a "journey," emphasizing that it has never involved "short-cuts or settling for less," highlighting the importance of hard work, determination, and the refusal to compromise on values and aspirations. Through these metaphors, Obama underscores the enduring spirit of the nation and his call for unity, resilience, and hope.

Extract 1: "Each time we gather to inaugurate a President we bear witness to the enduring strength of our Constitution."

Extract 2: "Through blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, we learned that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free."

Extract 3: "Today we continue a never-ending journey to bridge the meaning of those words with the realities of our time."

In his second inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs powerful metaphors to highlight the enduring strength of American principles and the ongoing journey to fulfill them. He begins by emphasizing the continuity and resilience of the nation, noting that each presidential inauguration is a testament to the "enduring strength of our Constitution," which symbolizes the stable foundation and unyielding principles upon which the nation is built. Reflecting on the nation's painful history, he references the Civil War with the metaphor "blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword," illustrating the brutal struggles that taught the nation the necessity of a union based on liberty and equality, rejecting the untenable division of "half-slave and half-free." Finally, he underscores the ongoing effort to align the nation's founding ideals with contemporary realities, describing this endeavor as a "never-ending journey" to bridge the promises of liberty and equality with the present-day challenges. Through these metaphors, Obama underscores the enduring spirit of the Constitution, the lessons learned from historical struggles, and the relentless pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

Euphemism

As stated by Jones and Peccei (2004, p. 48), euphemism employs gentle and courteous language to mitigate the impact of the speaker's statements. The use of euphemisms is strongly tied to the practice of politeness, as it serves to inhibit incorrect associations and maintain a sense of respect for the person being addressed, in accordance with societal standards. This type of language is frequently employed to discuss sensitive topics, such as euphemistically referring to death as "passing away" or using the phrase "making love" instead of "sexual intercourse."

Extract 1: "Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred."

Extract 2: "Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age."

Extract 3: "...the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics."

In his first inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs euphemisms to address serious issues while maintaining a tone of optimism and resolve. When he states, "Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred," he uses a euphemism to refer to terrorism and extremist groups, framing the conflict in terms of a struggle against abstract concepts rather than specific enemies. Addressing the economic crisis, Obama notes, "Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age." Here, he employs euphemism to soften the harsh realities of the economic downturn and the culpability involved, framing it as a shared failure and a call to collective action and responsibility. Finally, when he speaks of "the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics," he uses euphemistic language to critique the dysfunction in the political system, avoiding direct attacks on specific individuals or parties and instead focusing on the need for renewal and cooperation. Through these euphemisms, Obama addresses complex and sensitive issues in a way that promotes unity and forward-thinking solutions.

Extract 1: "The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob."

Extract 2: "We understand that outworn programs are inadequate to the needs of our time."

Extract 3: "A decade of war is now ending."

In his second inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs euphemisms to address critical issues while maintaining a tone of optimism and resolve. When he states, "The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob," he uses euphemism to critique modern inequalities and undemocratic practices, suggesting that contemporary issues of privilege and mob rule contradict the founding ideals without directly condemning specific groups or individuals.

Addressing the need for governmental reform, Obama notes, "We understand that outworn programs are inadequate to the needs of our time." This euphemism gently suggests that certain government programs are outdated and no longer effective, avoiding harsh criticism and instead implying the need for modernization and improvement. Finally, when he says, "A decade of war is now ending," he uses euphemism to acknowledge the conclusion of prolonged military engagements without delving into the complexities and controversies of those wars, thus focusing on the hopeful prospect of peace and renewal. Through these euphemisms, Obama addresses sensitive issues in a manner that promotes unity and forward-thinking solutions.

The Rule of Three

According to Jones and Peccei (2004), the three-part statement is well-recognized as a commonly employed technique in political discourse. This mechanism is an exceptionally sturdy framework that politicians utilize, even if they possess only a single argument.

Extract 1: "We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We'll restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories."

Extract 2: "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, 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."

Extract 3: "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."

In his first inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs the rule of three to emphasize key points and create a memorable and persuasive rhetoric. He outlines a comprehensive vision for national improvement by stating, "We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We'll restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories." This triad of infrastructure, scientific advancement, and renewable energy highlights his multi-faceted approach to progress. Additionally, he underscores America's unity and hope for global peace by declaring, "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, 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." This triad emphasizes religious diversity, cultural integration, and the overcoming of historical adversity. Finally, Obama addresses the urgent need for reform in health care, education, and energy by stating, "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." By grouping these challenges together, he underscores their interconnectedness and the necessity for a comprehensive approach. Through the rule of three, Obama effectively highlights his administration's priorities and goals, creating a powerful and resonant message for his audience.

Extract 1: "For we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it."

Extract 2: "We do not believe that in this country freedom is reserved for the lucky, or happiness for the few."

Extract 3: "We will defend our people and uphold our values through strength of arms and rule of law. We will show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully — not because we are naïve about the dangers we face, but because engagement can more durably lift suspicion and fear."

In his second inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs the rule of three to emphasize key points and convey a comprehensive vision for America's future. He begins by stating, "For us, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it," highlighting the importance of economic equity and opportunity for all citizens. This triad of economic fairness, prosperity for the majority, and shared success underscores his commitment to addressing income inequality and promoting a thriving middle class. Additionally, he declares, "We do not believe that in this country freedom is reserved for the lucky, or happiness for the few," emphasizing the principles of equal rights and opportunities for all Americans. This triad of freedom, equality, and inclusivity reinforces his vision of a nation where everyone has the chance to succeed and thrive. Finally, Obama outlines his approach to national security and international relations by stating, "We will defend our people and uphold our values through strength of arms and rule of law. We will show the courage to try and resolve our differences with other nations peacefully — not because we are naïve about the dangers we face, but because engagement can

more durably lift suspicion and fear." This triad of defense, diplomacy, and engagement highlights his commitment to protecting American interests while also promoting diplomacy and cooperation on the global stage. Through the rule of three, Obama effectively communicates his administration's priorities and values, presenting a cohesive and compelling vision for America's future.

Parallelism

Politicians utilize parallelism to emphasize specific parts of their message by expressing many concepts in a sequence of similar structures. Emphasizing the equal significance of concepts helps create symmetry and rhythm in a speech, making it more memorable. (Jacobson, 1960). Parallelism in political speech serves to express the message of the discourse more fully. Parallelism enhances inventiveness in political speeches. Politicians utilize parallelism to sway and persuade their audience. (Al-Ameedi, 2017).

Extract 1: "The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works -- whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified."

Extract 2: "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."

Extract 3: "On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord."

In his first inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs parallelism to convey a cohesive and impactful message. He begins by reframing the debate about government size, stating, "The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works -- whether it helps families find jobs at a decent wage, care they can afford, a retirement that is dignified." This parallel structure highlights the focus on effective governance and its impact on the well-being of families. He then addresses global leaders, using parallelism to emphasize the importance of constructive action, stating, "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." This parallel construction underscores the message that constructive efforts are valued over destructive actions. Finally, Obama celebrates the choice of hope and unity, using parallelism to contrast positive values with negative alternatives, declaring, "On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord." This parallel structure reinforces the themes of optimism and collective purpose. Through parallelism, Obama effectively conveys his administration's priorities of effective governance, constructive global engagement, and the power of hope and unity.

Extract 1: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Extract 2: "Through blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, we learned that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free."

Extract 3: "Together, we determined that a modern economy requires railroads and highways to speed travel and commerce, schools and colleges to train our workers." "Together, we discovered that a free market only thrives when there are rules to ensure competition and fair play." "Together, we resolved that a great nation must care for the vulnerable, and protect its people from life's worst hazards and misfortune."

In his second inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs parallelism to underscore fundamental principles, lessons learned, and collective resolutions. He begins by echoing the Declaration of Independence, stating, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This parallel structure reinforces the enduring importance of equality and individual rights. He then reflects on historical lessons, using parallelism to emphasize the impossibility of a divided nation, stating, "Through blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, we learned that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free." This parallel construction underscores the need for unity and the rejection of divisions based on inequality. Finally, Obama outlines collective achievements and resolutions, using parallelism to highlight key elements of progress, stating, "Together, we determined that a modern economy requires railroads and highways to speed travel and commerce, schools and colleges to train our workers. Together, we discovered that a free market only thrives when there are rules to ensure competition and fair play. Together, we resolved that a great nation must care for the vulnerable, and protect its people from life's worst hazards and misfortune." This parallel structure reinforces the collaborative effort needed for economic prosperity, fair market practices, and societal welfare. Through parallelism, Obama effectively communicates foundational beliefs, historical lessons, and shared goals, creating a cohesive and impactful message in his second inaugural speech.

Pronoun

Jones and Peccei (2004) argue that political speakers employ pronouns to denote either themselves or their audience, and this can constitute a substantial component of the message. When employed in communication, namely in speech, this device demonstrates the interplay between the listener and the speaker. Subsequently, the listener experiences the emotions conveyed by the speaker's words and might establish their own standpoint by employing pronouns.

Extract 1: "Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America: They will be met."

Extract 2: "We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week, or last month, or last year."

Extract 3: "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."

In his first inaugural speech, Barack Obama strategically employs the form of pronouns to foster a sense of collective responsibility and unity. Addressing the nation directly, he emphasizes, "Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America: They will be met." Here, Obama uses "we" and "you" to create a shared sense of duty and determination. He further reinforces unity by highlighting the nation's strengths, stating, "We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week, or last month, or last year." The repeated use of "we" underscores the collective capabilities and resilience of the country. Lastly, Obama calls upon the nation's collective efforts to preserve its legacy and address new challenges, asserting, "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." Through the strategic use of pronouns, Obama effectively conveys a message of shared responsibility, strength, and unity, inspiring collective action and cooperation.

Extract 1: "For we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it."

Extract 2: "We, the people, still believe that every citizen deserves a basic measure of security and dignity."

Extract 3: "We, the people, still believe that our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but to all posterity."

In his second inaugural speech, Barack Obama employs the form of pronouns to underscore the collective responsibility and shared values of the American people. He begins by asserting, "For we, the people, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it." Here, Obama uses "we" and "the people" to emphasize the collective understanding of the nation's challenges and the necessity for inclusive prosperity. He continues by affirming, "We, the people, still believe that every citizen deserves a basic measure of security and dignity," reinforcing the shared belief in fundamental rights and dignity for all citizens. Additionally, Obama asserts, "We, the people, still believe that our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves, but to all posterity," highlighting the enduring commitment to future generations and the broader global community. Through the strategic use of pronouns, Obama effectively conveys a message of unity, shared values, and collective responsibility in his second inaugural speech.

Findings

In Barack Obama's inaugural speeches, he strategically employs a range of rhetorical devices, including metaphor, euphemism, parallelism, the rule of three, and pronouns, to enhance the message's persuasiveness and emotional depth. In his first speech, Obama uses these devices to portray America as resilient and progressive, addressing issues like economic recovery and sustainable energy, while using euphemisms to soften harsh realities and the rule of three for emphasis, as seen in "homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered." Pronouns like "we" and "our" foster unity and collective responsibility. In his second speech, Obama enriches themes of democracy, unity, and progress by making historical and social dynamics accessible and emotionally resonant. Metaphors like "bear witness" and euphemisms such as "blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword" underscore shared struggles and responsibilities. Parallelism and the rule of three, exemplified in "Our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers, and daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts," add rhythm and impact, while inclusive pronouns reinforce the message of collective effort and shared ideals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Barack Obama's inaugural speeches exemplify the effective use of rhetorical devices to convey a vision of resilience, unity, and progress. Throughout his first and second inaugural addresses, Obama employs a range of rhetorical techniques—metaphor, euphemism, parallelism, the rule of three, and pronouns—to enhance the persuasiveness and emotional impact of his messages, making complex ideas more accessible and fostering a strong connection with his audience. In his first inaugural speech, Obama strategically uses metaphors to paint a picture of America as a resilient, diverse, and progressive society. He addresses critical topics such as resilience through adversity, economic recovery, innovative and sustainable energy, and the importance of mature governance. For example, his metaphor of America as a nation that can "weather any storm" and "emerge stronger" conveys a message of hope and strength. Euphemisms like "economic challenges" instead of "economic crisis" soften the harsh realities of the time, making difficult topics easier for the audience to digest. Parallelism and the rule of three are also prominent in Obama's first inaugural speech, creating rhythm and emphasis that make his words more memorable and impactful. He uses the rule of three in phrases like "homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered" to emphasize the widespread impact of the economic downturn. This technique not only highlights the severity of the situation but also reinforces the need for collective action and perseverance. Pronouns like "we" and "our" are frequently used to forge a sense of unity and collective responsibility, as seen in lines such as "we will rebuild, we will recover, and we will emerge stronger."

In his second inaugural speech, Obama continues to masterfully employ a variety of rhetorical devices to articulate and enrich his themes of democracy, unity, and progress. His use of metaphor, euphemism, parallelism, the rule of three, and pronouns not only makes complex historical and social dynamics accessible but also resonates emotionally with his audience. For example, he transforms the inauguration into a profound communal experience with the metaphor "bear witness," which highlights the audience's role in the democratic process and emphasizes continuity and shared responsibility. Euphemisms in the second speech address historical pain without dwelling on its brutality. For instance, "blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword" reminds listeners of the struggles against slavery and the Civil War while acknowledging the sacrifices made. Parallelism and the rule of three add emphasis and rhythm, exemplified in "Our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers, and daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts." This construction not only underscores the ongoing struggle for gender equality but also connects past struggles to contemporary issues, urging continued action. Pronouns like "we" and "our" are again used to encourage a collective effort and a sense of shared purpose. Lines such as "We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths—that all of us are created equal—is the star that guides us still" reinforce the idea of a unified nation working together to uphold its foundational ideals.

The speech also features metaphors suggesting the ongoing effort required to align America's foundational ideals with contemporary realities, such as the "never-ending journey" and truths being "self-evident" yet not "self-executing." These metaphors, along with parallel structures, urge active participation and highlight the need for continuous engagement in democracy. Additionally, Obama describes democracy as a legacy passed through generations, portraying it as a sacred trust and emphasizing the responsibility each generation holds in preserving democratic ethos. Furthermore, Obama uses expansive metaphors to paint a picture of America's limitless potential and the importance of adaptability and innovation in facing modern challenges. For instance, metaphors like "America's possibilities are limitless" and "new responses to new challenges" promote an image of boundless opportunity and the necessity for evolving responses that adhere to timeless principles. He also metaphorically describes the stewardship of natural resources as maintaining "our national treasure," positioning environmental conservation as a crucial duty. These rhetorical devices collectively enhance the speeches' emotional and intellectual appeal, reinforcing Obama's vision of a united, progressive nation. Through the strategic use of metaphor, euphemism, parallelism, the rule of three, and pronouns, Obama effectively communicates his message of hope, resilience, and shared responsibility, inspiring his audience to work together toward a brighter future. His speeches serve as powerful examples of how rhetorical techniques can be used to articulate complex ideas, evoke emotional responses, and foster a sense of unity and collective purpose.

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