

Högskolan Dalarna
Engelska C-uppsats
Supervisor: Soraya Tharani

Persuading the Public

A Linguistic Analysis of Barack Obama's Speech on "Super Tuesday" 2008

Spring 2008
Mikael Assmundson
800326-7112
h04mikas@du.se

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Abstract

This essay examines the persuasive side of language in a speech given by Senator Barack Obama on Super Tuesday in February 2008. It studies how Senator Obama utilizes language to convince and persuade his audience. This is done from an Aristotelian point of view, meaning that the study focuses foremost on how the senator's word choices relate to Aristotle's three means of persuasion, *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. Those basic guiding principles are relevant to use since Aristotle's work on the subject of rhetoric is still today one of the most relevant works in that field. The analysis is basically performed through personal observations guided by previous studies, within the frame of Aristotelian rhetoric. The results show how Senator Obama enforces the three means of persuasion through language and how it can be considered persuasive. The study might add to rhetoric studies from a linguistic perspective since it reaches a better understanding of language used in the field of politics, where rhetoric is a prominent component.

1. Introduction

Human language is used to elucidate thoughts and ideas, and to communicate. It can take several different forms and contain many different aspects. Therefore knowledge of a specific form of language is required if a person is to understand what is being intermediated. Consequently, language has to be studied in order to fully understand all of its components, although, it is important to have in mind that the study of language alone cannot explain all parts of a language. Words, or a combination of them, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire text might contain ideas that are hard to grasp without knowing the context and cultural significance in which they are uttered. For example, a separate use of words like *affirmative* and *action* does not necessarily carry any meaning beyond their dictionary significance. However, combined they create the term “affirmative action”, which incorporates the “practise of choosing people for a job, college etc who are usually treated unfairly because of their race, sex etc” (Longman 2003: 25). So, history and other aspects might be weaved into the meaning of a word or a combination of words. Additionally, words tend to vary and shift meaning, which makes it even harder to learn a language. That is one reason why language studies are important – to grasp how language is, and has been used throughout time. The term “affirmative action” could be explained as a political term, since it is used to summarize a political policy in a specific country (USA). New words or

phrases might be invented for the sake of politicians and their need to convey their ideas in the most effortless and persuasive way possible. However, new words and terms are also created to avoid using words with negative meaning, like the term *Native-Americans* instead of the negatively charged *Indians*. Furthermore, the language of politics is rather special in general, as politicians might twist it to argue for a cause or an idea. They use different approaches, or techniques of persuasion, to try to convince people. One portion of politics where this is visible is in political speeches.

Speeches are made to convince, and orators use different tools to persuade the audience in order to attain their goal. A well-known technique to accomplish this has been available for over 2,000 years, namely rhetoric. The word *rhetoric* might have a negative ring to it, as in the Longman dictionary: “language that is used to persuade or influence people, especially language that sounds impressive but is not actually sincere or useful [...]” (2003: 1412). However, even in situations where sincere views are expressed, rhetoric skills will still be needed to catch the audience’s attention and to persuade them (Beard 2000: 36). Furthermore, rhetoric, as described by the ancient philosopher Aristotle, has been used and is still being used in many situations in daily life, not just in political speeches, to successfully convey messages to an audience. One example is the use of rhetoric to convey messages in documentary film (Häll 2006), or how rhetoric can be used to perform successful presentations (Tropiano 2006).

This essay will review how persuasive language is used in the scene of political speeches, or more closely, how Senator Barack Obama uses it in the contemporary, highly topical presidential candidacy nomination process in the USA, where he and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton are at the time of writing racing towards becoming the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate. Political speeches in America are interesting because they concern such a number of people, which means that a speaker, at least one involved in a presidential candidacy, must attract the attention of many different minds. Trying to gain the trust and to persuade 300 million people of your capability as president, requires excellence in many fields, where the power to speak with

brilliance is an important aspect. Therefore, political speeches are, under such circumstances, interesting to examine. Senator Obama is interesting to observe since his skills as a speaker have, during this current campaign, been compared with prominent speakers like Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan (Gallo 2008: 18). Simultaneously, he has also been criticized for delivering empty rhetoric as opposed to concrete propositions.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this essay is to examine Senator Barack Obama's speech on Super Tuesday 2008, trying to reveal ways of persuasion utilized by the orator, to see how he appeals to the wide range of American people – in an attempt to learn more about the persuasive side of language. The speech is interesting to examine linguistically because the words in the speech are probably chosen deliberately and may hide persuasive features and meanings that are not obvious at a first glance. The study is therefore relevant in attempting to reach a better understanding of language used in the field of politics, which many people find to be complex.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Previous Studies

At the time of writing there are not too many previous studies available on speeches by Senator Obama. This is not all terribly strange considering he first became a future name in American politics after his keynote address to the Democratic National Convention in 2004. An essay studying that speech explains the impact the narrative of the American dream has had on American voters' political alignment since the time of Ronald Reagan – how the narrative has become associated with political conservatism and has subsequently aided the Republican Party. Furthermore, the essay details how Senator Obama, with his speech, recast the American dream into a liberal story (Rowland & Jones 2007). Although the essay focuses more on politics than on

the subject of linguistics, it is well worth mentioning since it discusses a subject shared with this essay – to persuade via the American dream narrative.

The art of persuading and convincing is quite a popular subject of study, not just within politics but in many other fields as well. The spread of fields in which it is studied is actually quite broad. Halmari (2004) and Häll (2006) present a range of fields, including persuasion in the area of advertising, business negotiations, judicial argumentations, and Film Studies. What many studies of persuasion have in common is that the persuasion process involves rhetoric to some extent, except for the field of business negotiations because that process involves two parties trying to persuade each other, while the others involve addressing an audience (Halmari 2004: 27). What differs them all from one another is that the persuasive acts occur in different surroundings, or different contexts, and they are directed at different audiences.

Halmari (2004) makes a comparative study of persuasive language used in speeches by former U.S. presidents Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan. The study investigates the State of the Union addresses by both former presidents. Of course, these speeches were set in a quite different context than that this essay is set out to examine. However, the study mentions several persuasion elements, which are interesting and therefore examined in this essay as well. These are *appeal to authority*, *pronouns*, and *appeal to logic*. Other elements that are examined have been collected and combined from either Gallo (2008), that is on how Senator Obama uses rhetorical skills, or Beard (2000), for the language of politics. Furthermore, the Halmari study mentions that an Aristotelian approach is used to analyse the data (Halmari, 2004: 116), though this is not thoroughly pursued; i.e. the author does not pursue clearly enough how the persuasive elements (such as those listed above) connect to Aristotle's three means of persuasion (*ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*), a connection that ought to be demonstrated more clearly if the approach is said to be Aristotelian. There is also a need for a more precise explanation of what an Aristotelian approach really means. This will be attempted in this essay, starting with a brief explanation of Aristotelian rhetoric, below.

2.2 Aristotelian Rhetoric

Rhetoric as described by Aristotle still seems to have great significance in the world of persuasion. Even though it was outlined more than 2,300 years ago, many people still refer to Aristotelian rhetoric when discussing and analysing the subject of persuasion (see Beard 2000, Halmari 2004). This essay will also discuss persuasion from an Aristotelian point of view because his book, *The Rhetoric*, is still considered “a primary text for the study of rhetoric to this day” (Frogel 2005: 23). Although Aristotle supposedly wrote several works on rhetoric, what has been rediscovered and passed on to this day are three books on rhetoric, which are collected in the work today known as *The Art of Rhetoric* or, as stated above, simply *The Rhetoric*. This essay will mostly focus on the second book of these three because that is where he describes the three means of persuasion, *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, which will be discussed more thoroughly below. Before that, in order to claim that the essay uses an Aristotelian point of view, it is important to set the frame of this point of view, and, to start with, determine just how he viewed rhetoric and the position of a rhetorician:

Aristotle defines the rhetorician as someone who is always able to see what is persuasive [...]. Correspondingly, rhetoric is defined as the ability to see what is possibly persuasive in every given case [...]. This is not to say that the rhetorician will be able to convince under all circumstances. Rather he is in a similar situation as the physician: the latter has a complete grasp of his art only if he neglects nothing which might heal his patient, though he is not able to heal every patient. Similarly, the rhetorician has a complete grasp of his method, if he discovers the available means of persuasion, though he is not able to convince everybody. (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>)

The quote mentions that the rhetorician can control the art of rhetoric *only* if s/he “discovers the available means of persuasion”, which is to say that the basis for persuading are never the same. Instead a rhetorician must consider the context in which the persuasion is to be performed, and act according to the special circumstances.

Furthermore, Aristotle believed that knowledge in the art of rhetoric is something everyone can gain from, not just those who wish to persuade an audience while hiding their real intentions. His idea is that even a person who only tries to convey a true and honest point needs the tools of

persuasion, provided by the art of rhetoric. That is because even though that person might possess great knowledge, or expertise in the subject s/he tries to convey, it is not certain that the audience will listen and grasp the message. Therefore, the messenger needs rhetorical knowledge to be able to catch the attention of, and convince an audience. The ability to seem like a credible person and to keep the audience in a sympathetic mood is achieved through persuasiveness, not knowledge (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). Nevertheless, this ability to capture the minds of an audience may not rest solely on the speaker's rhetorical skills but also on other aspects of persuasiveness, like performance skills (Halmari 2004: 131). Yet, however important these other aspects may be, this essay is restricted to interpretations of language and word usage only. The basic frame for Aristotle's view on the persuasion process is set in his three means of persuasion, *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. These terms will now be explained further.

2.2.1 Ethos

Ethos, in Aristotle's sense, involves making the speaker seem credible, because, by doing so, "the audience will form the second order judgement that propositions put forward by the credible speaker are true or acceptable" (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). Thus, it puts the speakers in a position where they can more easily persuade the audience about their cause. The speaker manages to appear as a credible person by displaying (a) practical intelligence, (b) a virtuous character, and (c) good will. If a speaker demonstrates all three characteristics it "cannot be rationally doubted that his suggestions are credible" (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). Though, in Aristotle's meaning, this cannot be accomplished by simply acting virtuous, it must be achieved through words (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). In short, ethos is "persuasion through personality and stance" (Beard 2000: 37).

2.2.2 Pathos

The second means of persuasion, pathos, can be described very shortly as the process of "creating positive emotions and connotations in the minds of the listeners" (Halmari 2004: 116).

By doing so, the addressees will often be more “easily ready to accept, believe and act upon the propagated information without thorough coherence checking” (de Saussure 2006: 175). Aristotle meant that the orator has to stir up emotions precisely because “emotions have the power to modify our judgments” (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). The essential thing a rhetorician needs to know, in order to evoke a particular feeling among an audience, is the definition of that particular emotion. That knowledge will then allow the orator to highlight certain characteristics of the emotion, which are likely to evoke that certain feeling in the audience (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). Furthermore, it could be argued that a successful appeal to pathos will strengthen the ethos, since it would probably make the speaker seem more credible.

2.2.3 Logos

Logos is simply “persuasion through reasoning” (Beard, 2000: 37). It is the principle of convincing by using arguments that appear to be, or are logical. “We persuade by the argument itself when we demonstrate that something is the case” (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). Aristotle distinguishes two types of arguments: deductions and inductions. Deduction can be defined as “the process of using the knowledge or information you have in order to understand something or form an opinion, or the opinion that you form [...]” (Longman 2003: 409). An induction, on the other hand, might be described as “a process of thought that uses known facts to produce general rules or principles” (Longman 2003: 829), although, in Aristotle’s rhetoric, the inductive argument is the example which does not necessarily produce general rules, as opposed to the Longman definition. The deductive argument in rhetoric is something Aristotle calls *enthymeme* (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>). The *enthymeme* is a rhetorical syllogism. As opposed to a logical syllogism, which is a three-part statement where the first two parts prove that the third is true, the rhetorical syllogism does not have to include all the premises for deduction, and they do not necessarily have to be true either (Froegel 2005: 26). The *enthymeme* is

Aristotle's essential rhetorical argument, and the "body of persuasion" (Rapp 2002: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>).

Conclusively, according to Aristotle, persuasion is mainly achieved through logical argumentation since the appeal to logic is the most effective way of persuading, and because if an argument appears to be logical it would be illogical to oppose it. Yet, it is insufficient to try to persuade simply by using logical argumentation (logos). It must include the other two aspects, ethos and pathos, as well. That is what differs rhetoric from logic (Froegel 2005: 43). This essay will use Aristotelian rhetoric as the frame to examine how Senator Obama uses language to persuade an audience.

3. Method and Data

This essay aims to study persuasive elements in the speech Senator Barack Obama gave on Super Tuesday this year, 2008. The point of view from which the speech will be interpreted has been presented above, namely Aristotelian rhetoric. The three means of persuasion, ethos, pathos and logos, will be the starting point of the analysis, and at the same time the template for interpretation.

Additionally, to maintain the focus of the essay, a structure, or a set of predetermined guidelines will be presented and followed. The guiding principles this essay rests upon are chiefly taken from the comparative study of the two former U.S. presidents Reagan and Clinton (Halmari 2004), as mentioned earlier, but also from the book *The Language of Politics* (Beard 2000). The terms borrowed will be presented in the analysis part, where they are also categorized according to what means of persuasion they appeal to. This will hopefully make the interrelation more evident. The main data, the speech, will be analysed qualitatively with the previous study by Halmari (2004) as the main reference. The occurrence of particular words will partly be counted by a computer-driven analysis provided by the website <<http://www.wordcounter.com/>>, but

they will also be counted manually. The results from the analysis will rest on personal observations and interpretations with reference to what has previously been established by Halmari (2004) and Beard (2000).

3.1 Primary data and context

The primary data for this essay is a transcript of Senator Barack Obama's speech, given on Super Tuesday on February 5 2008 in Chicago, Illinois as the results from the primary election started to filter in. *CQ Transcription* provides the transcript, posted on *Washingtonpost.com*. Though, the speech may also be accessed from Barack Obama's website: <http://www.barackobama.com/>. However, the speech as transcribed on Senator Obama's website does not include the first few sentences of the speech, which is why the other transcription was chosen. That transcription is provided in the appendix.

The length of the speech is, according to *MS Word*, 2,213 words. The objective of the speech is to motivate people to vote for Senator Obama and to persuade those who have not yet voted that he is the one to vote for. His slogan during the campaign is "Change We Can Believe In", and his speeches most often carry that message alongside the call for hope (for Obama speeches see <http://www.barackobama.com/>). Beard claims that "politicians nowadays tend to make most of their public speeches to invited audiences of their own supporters" (Beard 2000: 37), and this is the case here. Senator Obama addresses his own supporters face to face, although, he is also addressing an external audience since the speech is broadcasted via the media to the rest of the nation and to other nations as well, given the fact that it can be found on the Internet.

Furthermore, "the nature of the persuasive strategies characterizing a genre [...] depends highly on the situational factors such as whether the president is in charge of choosing the topic (as in the case of the State of the Union addresses) or not (as in the case of answers to questions by reporters)" (Halmari 2004: 108). It can be argued that Senator Obama is indeed choosing the topic of his speech, similarly to the State of the Union address. The speech should be considered

a monologue, even though the attending audience occasionally shout a few words, or cry out their sympathy, because no one else but the senator is given the floor. Additionally, the attending audience might even be considered as part of the persuasive process, since their audible support enhances Senator Obama's arguments. The situation in which the speech is given is that of a presidential nomination process, where the two primary Democratic Party candidates are Senator Obama and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. At the time of the speech, both candidates have become aware of the results from the Super Tuesday primary elections, when a total of 24 states held elections. The results showed how Barack Obama won more states than Hillary Clinton, but Senator Clinton won states with higher delegate counts. Consequently, neither candidate could be declared final Democratic Party representative, and the race continued (<http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/>). However, the results showed that Senator Obama was still in the race, against the more well-known Senator Clinton, towards becoming the Democratic candidate for presidency. For more information on the American presidential nomination process, visit <http://www.usa.gov/>.

The main reason why Senator Obama's speech was chosen for examination in this essay is because some people have, as mentioned in the introduction, likened him to famous rhetoricians like Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. Additionally, at this time of the campaign, his name had started to draw more attention from the media around the globe, and he had become a force to be reckoned with in the nomination process, which is why that particular speech was chosen. Moreover, the speech is interesting because of the media attention drawn to the campaign, obviously because whoever of the two becomes the Democratic candidate, America might experience either its first female president, or first black president. One interesting point to take into consideration is media's function in the persuasion process, since "all talk is shaped by the context in which it is produced, and where talk is being observed and recorded that becomes part of the context" (Cameron 2001: 20). Linguistically it would be highly interesting to examine how the candidates are represented, for example, in different newspapers,

because, really, the media is the candidates' connection to the general public. Hence, the media are in a position where they might determine the outcome of an entire campaign, depending on what they report and how they report it. Hopefully though, but not at all necessarily, the reportage remains unbiased throughout the process – although, it is debatable whether or not there is such a thing as a neutral press. However, the media's influence on Senator Obama's speech will not be any primary concern of this essay. The main focus is on the persuasive language. This analysis will follow below.

3.2 Restrictions

The essay will be restricted in length, which is also why all persuasive aspects of Senator Obama's speech cannot possibly be covered. Other aspects that might help the persuasive process of a given speech are, for example, “voice quality, pitch, volume, speed, modulation and even vibrato” (Joseph 2006: 112), but also gestures and other visual aids (if the audience is able to see the speaker).

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Ethos Applied

As stated earlier, ethos is the process of making the speaker seem credible. If the speaker is perceived as credible, the audience will judge that propositions suggested by the credible speaker are true or acceptable. This credence may be gained by the use of several different approaches, though, as mentioned above, in Aristotle's meaning, credibility is gained by showing: (a) practical intelligence, (b) a virtuous character, and (c) good will. However, these three credibility attractors could be interpreted as simply the same basic terms all over again: (a) logos, (b) ethos, and (c) pathos. There is a point in that argument, because many of the means used to support ethos also seem to appeal to the other persuasive means. Examples of these will be discussed below.

4.1.1 Appeal to authority

One thing showing proof of practical intelligence and perhaps a virtuous character is the appeal to authority, or old wisdom. This might be done in order to justify a point of view or an action or simply to back up one's ideas (Halmari 2004: 118), though, as can be seen below, an authority may also be addressed in order to clearly show a standpoint in certain debatable questions.

Senator Obama does it on a few occasions in his speech. In example (1) he addresses his senior Senator Richard J. Durbin by first name/nickname, Dick.

- (1) [...], as **Dick** said, we stood on the steps of the old state capitol to reaffirm a truth that was spoken there so many generations ago, that a house divided cannot stand... That we are more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are and always will be the United States of America.
- (2) This isn't about me and it's not about **Senator Clinton**. As I've said before, she was a friend before this campaign, she'll be a friend after it's over. I respect her. I respect her as a colleague. I congratulate her on her victories tonight. She's been running an outstanding race. But this fall – this fall, we owe the American people a real choice.
- (3) And if I am your nominee, my opponent will not be able to say that I voted for the war in Iraq, because I didn't, or that I gave **George Bush** the benefit of the doubt on Iran, because I haven't, or that I support the **Bush-Cheney** doctrine of not talking to leaders we don't like, because I profoundly disagree with that approach.

In the first example it is quite obvious that he is appealing to Senator Dick Durbin to strengthen his own argumentative position. He uses Dick's name followed by the pronoun *we* to show a kind of bond between the two, and connecting Dick's good reputation and high political position as senator with his own character – thereby strengthening his own credibility. Then he goes on, in the same example, using the pronoun *we* a second time, this time referring to all American people as united with the speaker, and united regardless of political colour in *more than a collection of red states and blue states*, simply *the United States*.

The second example is a bit more interesting. At first Senator Obama is respecting and praising Senator Clinton in several sentences with words such as *respect* and calling her a *colleague*. Then all of a sudden he completely crushes her by implying that she is not a real choice, first innocently by implying that she *has been* [running an outstanding race] not that she *is* running, then changing the situation radically by using the conjunction *but* in the next sentence, which

diminishes all good things said earlier about Senator Clinton, and instead assumes that she is not a good enough candidate for presidency – explained in the sentence following the conjunction, where *we* (as perhaps in the Democratic Party) *owe* (an obligation appealing verb) *the American people a real choice* (assumes all in all that Senator Clinton is an unrealistic choice). Another point to reflect upon in that passage is the sentence *she was a friend before this campaign, she'll be a friend after it's over*, indirectly stating that they are not at all friends at the present moment.

The third example illustrates how Senator Obama takes a stand in several highly debated questions, *the war in Iraq* and *Iran* (which many see as complete failures), by appealing to President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney and contrasting that *I didn't* [vote for the war in Iraq]. Further, he claims to *profoundly disagree with that approach* [the Bush-Cheney doctrine], which, since a huge part of the audience might sympathize with this stand, can be argued to show proof of Senator Obama's good will. The word *profoundly* is really strengthening his stance, and at the same time makes the Bush-Cheney doctrine seem even more wrong (at least for those who do not like the politics of the current president Bush). Consequently, the appeal to authority is a means toward establishing ethos and is as such a persuasive tool.

4.1.2 Pronouns

It can be argued that the use of personal pronouns display all three characteristics of how to gain credibility, depending on what is said and where. The most interesting pronouns to look for are those who involve some sort of responsibility, hence, the first person singular *I*, and the first person plural *we*. “An analysis of which one [the speakers] use, and where, can give considerable insight into what they are saying and how they want to be viewed” (Beard 2000: 46). The benefit of using the singular *I* is that it shows the speaker's personal contribution, which is particularly favorable when good news is delivered. However, if something goes wrong, it also shows unmistakably where the blame lies. The plus side of using the plural pronoun *we* is that it helps to spread the responsibility during more uncertain state of affairs. Moreover, it may also move the

speaker closer to the audience; “In their broadest reference [the forms of the pronoun *we*] can show the politician in touch with all of the country, even all of the world”. The downside is that the speaker does not gain the individual credit if things go well (Beard 2000:45). Yet, “getting, or keeping, the audience on the side of the speaker is the central purpose of persuasion” (Halmari 2004: 123). So, the use of pronouns might either bring the speaker and the audience closer to each other, or show the good sides of the speaker, which, as a result makes her or him seem more respectable and trustworthy. Consequently, this will be strengthening ethos. The second person singular/plural *you* might be used to show how the speaker (*I*) is separate from the audience (*you*) (Halmari 2004: 126).

Table 1 below shows the occurrence of the first and second person pronouns.

Table 1. Pronoun usage (approximate percentage numbers)

	Counted occurrence	% of counted pronouns (161)
1st person singular:		
<i>I (I'm, I'll)</i>	38	24
<i>me</i>	3	2
<i>my</i>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>
	45	28
2nd person:		
<i>you</i>	25	15
1st person plural:		
<i>we</i>	68	42
<i>us</i>	6	4
<i>our</i>	<u>17</u>	<u>11</u>
	91	57
Total:	161	100

The percentage shows clearly the extent of focus put on the first person plural *we* (42%). This is interesting. This might mean that Senator Obama intentionally wants to emphasize the *we*-ness, perhaps as in *we* Obama supporters, or *we* the American people, or simply *we* the party. “The fact that the pronoun can be interpreted as inclusive is the key persuasive feature” (Halmari 2004: 127). The following examples in (4) show inclusive *we*:

(4) *Maybe this year **we** can finally start doing something about health care **we** can't afford.*

*[...] maybe **we** don't have to be divided by race and regions and gender...*

*This time **we** have to write a new chapter in American history.*

***We** are the ones **we**'ve been waiting for.*

It is interesting that the senator says that *we can't afford* health care, because he himself *can* probably afford it. Yet, if he had chosen the pronoun *you* instead, he would not have gained much trust among the audience. By using *we* he makes the cause more personal, which in turn makes him more reliable. Furthermore, after establishing a feeling of unification between the speaker and the audience, like in the examples above, it can be argued that Senator Obama implies his position as the natural leader of this created unit by contrasting *we* and *I*. The following examples in (5) exemplifies this:

(5) *That's what **we**'re going to do when **I'm** president of the United States*

*When **I'm** president, **we** will put an end to the politics of fear [...]*

By talking about him as the future president he puts himself on a high pedestal, although he does include other people in his plans, *we will* and *we are going to*. This latter is strategic because it means that he does not have to bear responsibility alone if the plans are not followed through. So, this particular pronoun usage in this particular context is probably intended. The examples show how the pronoun usage in the speech makes the audience feel included and presents the speaker as the unifier, hence, persuading by strengthening ethos. Whether or not it is successful is of course dependent on how the speaker succeeds in establishing the other persuasive means as well. Yet, as with the other ethos enhancing strategy, it might be discussed whether or not the use of pronouns can function to evoke any of the other persuasive means additionally. There seems to be a dubious line between the three persuasive means, though this might just simply be another evidence of why all three (ethos, pathos and logos) are needed in order to be successfully persuasive. They interact.

4.2 Pathos Applied

Pathos, as described above, is the process of “creating positive emotions and connotations in the minds of the listeners” (Halmari 2004: 116). By employing this strategy, the listeners will often be more easily persuaded. Remember that the essential thing a rhetorician needs to know, in order to evoke a particular feeling among an audience, is the definition of that particular emotion.

Whether or not Senator Obama knows this technique is hard to prove. However, it is possible to look for instances where he deliberately awakes the emotions of the audience, which will be attempted through the examples below.

Although this might be a technique used in several countries, this is something that is particularly useful in America, and it is noticeable in many Hollywood blockbusters, the idea of America and the American people as a unit, the liberators, the republic of freedom, the idea of America as the land of the free and the home of the brave, a national spirit that is typical American. Addressing the ordinary American citizen and how s/he strives towards fulfilling the American dream might stir up some deeply rooted emotions. Moreover, “Obama speaks in the uplifting rhetoric of hope” (Gallo 2008: 18), and hope is the foundation of America and has been so since the first settlers took their first steps on American soil. For this reason, addressing the ordinary American’s hope and wants while promising a bright future could be seen as very persuasive because those hopes and wants are deeply entrenched in the American spirit.

Examples (6) through (11) show some evident places in the speech where this is utilized:

- (6) *They reached the coast of South Carolina, when people said that maybe we don't have to be divided by race and regions and gender [...] that we can come together and build **an America that gives every child everywhere the opportunity to live out their dreams.** This time can be different.*
- (7) *So tonight, I want to speak directly to all those Americans who have yet to join this movement, but still hunger for change. [...] We need you to stand with us. We need you to work with us. We need you to help us prove that together **ordinary people can still do extraordinary things in the United States of America.***
- (8) *We are the change that we seek. **We are the hope** of those boys who have so little, who've been told that they cannot have what they dreamed, that they cannot be what they imagine. Yes, they can.*

- (9) ***We are the hope** of the father who goes to work before dawn and lies awake with doubt that tells him he cannot give his children the same opportunities that someone gave him. Yes, he can.*
- (10) ***We are the hope** of the woman who hears that her city will not be rebuilt, that she cannot somehow claim the life that was swept away in a terrible storm. Yes, she can.*
- (11) ***We are the hope of the future**, the answer to the cynics who tell us our house must stand divided, that we cannot come together, that we cannot remake this world as it should be. We know that we have seen something happen over the last several weeks, over the past several months. We know that what began as a whisper has now swelled to a chorus that cannot be ignored, that will not be deterred, that will ring out across this land as **a hymn that will heal this nation, repair this world**, make this time different than all the rest.*

The national spirit in the examples above is awakened through the use of imagery. The words create mental pictures in the minds of the listeners (Gallo 2008: 18). In a way, this relates to the *we*-ness, as discussed above (§4.1.2, this essay). Though, it is the combination with loaded imagery that stirs up emotions. Example (9) is a typical example of this, since it contains the *we*-ness and rich imagery, which speaks directly to a basic human emotion: to be able to provide for your children. The words *goes to work before dawn* create a mental picture of a honorable, hard-working man, who goes to work early to make ends meet, but who *lies awake* because his children will not have the same *opportunities* as he has had. The word *opportunity*, which also occurs in example (6), is in a sense connected to the idea of the American dream, and so is the concept of hard work. The American dream is based on the premise that every person has the same *opportunity* and if s/he works hard s/he can accomplish anything. Now, since the father *lies awake with doubt* (example 9), it is implied that the dream is deferred unless Senator Obama and the nation (*we*) reaches presidency, because if so, *Yes, he can* [give his children the same opportunities]. The same pattern can be seen in the other examples above as well. This probably rouses emotions among an American audience, which, together with the feeling of *we*-ness between the audience and the speaker, would surely help the speaker attain pathos. By connecting to the audience, using the notion of *we* in a situation where pathos is attained, the speaker will also strengthen ethos.

4.3 Logos Applied

As stated earlier in the essay, logos is simply “persuasion through reasoning” (Beard, 2000: 37). It is the principle of convincing by using arguments that appear to be, or are, logical. Aristotle talks about the *enthymeme* as a rhetorical syllogism, which does not have to include all the premises for deduction, or even true ones (Froegel 2005: 26). So, the appeal to logic is the most effective way of persuading, because if an argument appears to be logical it would be illogical to oppose it (§2.2.3, this essay). A few examples of how logos is applied in Senator Obama’s speech will now be presented.

The appeal to the audience’s logical reasoning is the main persuasive feature of a speech, simply because it is very hard to argue against something that is taken to be logical. To oppose logic would really be illogical. Example (12) below shows how the senator utilizes this element of persuasion by first stating (through a presupposition) that the ruling government, here referred to as *Washington*, is not solving the problems of the country, causing families to move, split up and become unemployed. Then he suggests the logical conclusion, that people cannot expect change to come if they do not change the basis, namely change government. He states it through a sports metaphor (*game, players*) to make it sound even more reasonable. He then goes on with a couple of metaphors focusing on the future, *turn the page, write a new chapter in American history*, which is also the logical solution when the past has been determined as splitting families and causing unemployment.

(12) *And while Washington is consumed with the same drama and divisions and distractions, another family puts up a "for sale" sign in their front yard, another factory shuts its doors, another soldier waves goodbye as he leaves on another tour of duty in a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged... and goes on and on and on. But in this election, at this moment, you are standing up all across this country to say "not this time, not this year." The stakes are too high and the challenges too great to play the same Washington game with the same Washington players and somehow expect a different result. This time must be different. This time we have to turn the page. This time we have to write a new chapter in American history. This time we have to seize the moment.*

The example (12) above also contains a lot of repetition, which can be used in order to attain logical appeal and emotional appeal, and at the same time show speaking skills. “It is well known

that the exposure to the same information again and again invites the addressee” (de Saussure 2006: 174). In that sense, repetition could be considered persuasive. In the beginning of example (12), the most obvious word repeated is the adjective *another*, which is used to demonstrate repeatedly what happens while *Washington* (the ruling government) is occupied with unimportant matters (*drama, divisions and distractions*). This is followed by even more repetitive phrases: a war that *should have never been authorized and should have never been waged... and goes on and on and on*. This latter three-part repetition is a very common persuasive method:

Whatever the nature of the speech act, political speech or casual conversation, the three-part list is attractive to the speaker and listener because it is embedded in certain cultures as giving a sense of unity and completeness: ‘on your marks, get set, go!’ is the traditional way to start a race; omit either of the first two components and the runners are unlikely to respond. (Beard 2000: 38)

This three-part repetition is perhaps not entirely logical, even though it is used to such an extent in speeches that it somehow feels logical, but it is still a common persuasive feature worth mentioning. Whatever kind of repetition he uses, it all serves the same purpose, namely to convince people, either of how something negative needs a change, or to encourage positive changes. This is achieved by emphasizing his point through the means of repeated arguments, which finally appear to be logical. The last repeated phrase in example (12), which is *This time*, is combined with a second, urging, almost demanding verb phrase. For example, *This time must be different*, or the last three that also include the first person plural pronoun *we*, making the cause more personal and clarifies who has to act: *This time we have to [turn the page, write a new chapter in American history and seize the moment]*. All in all these lines become almost compulsory since they argue for a change from a scene of poverty (*another factory shuts its doors*) and a scene where American soldiers *wave goodbye* to go fight a pointless war (*a war that should have never been authorized*). The solution to the implied despair appears logical, change is needed and together *we* (with Senator Obama as president) can provide it.

Example (13) and (14) further exemplify the urge to focus on the future, which is Senator Obama as president, by implying the negativity of the past. Such arguments, just as the one

presented above, are hard to challenge logically. In example (13) it is, again, the pronoun *we* that specifies who needs to act, to *choose*. The choice is between *looking backwards* and *looking forwards*, towards *the future* or to *the past*. The logical thing to do is obviously to look forwards, towards the future. In (14) the opposing party, *the Republicans/they*, are *tied to the past* and are *running on the politics of yesterday*, which is a negative characteristic. The Democratic Party *must be the party of tomorrow*, which is a positive feature, and *I* (Senator Obama) *intend to lead* that party as president. The urge to logically focus on the future is obvious.

(13) *We have to choose between looking backwards and looking forwards. We have to choose between our future and our past.*

(14) *The Republicans running for president have already tied themselves to the past. They speak of 100-year war in Iraq. They talk about billions more in tax breaks for the wealthiest few, who don't need them and didn't even ask them, tax breaks that mortgage our children's future on a mountain of debt, at a time when there are families who can't pay their medical bills and students who can't pay their tuition. Those Republicans are running on the politics of yesterday and that is why our party must be the party of tomorrow, and that is the party I intend to lead as president of the United States of America.*

Additionally, in the study of the two former presidents' State of the Union speeches, there is an example of how the word "heal" evokes positive associations, and by arguing that something that needs healing must have been in bad shape, Halmari also claims "the logical thing to do is to support the process of healing" (2004: 120). Senator Obama also uses that word, and another similar one, *repair*, in the very end of his speech.

(15) *We know that what began as a whisper has now swelled to a chorus that cannot be ignored, that will not be deterred, that will ring out across this land as a hymn that will **heal** this nation, **repair** this world, make this time different than all the rest.*

The above example (15) practically contains a small slice from all the aspects discussed throughout this essay; the personal pronoun *we*, logical implications, and it is spoken in the inspiring language of hope that evokes the national spirit. The chain that builds momentum in example (15) is progressed through the verbs: first there *began a whisper* that *has swelled to a chorus* that *will ring out* and *will heal this nation* and *repair this world*, and finally, *make this time different*. This progression is also logical; something began in the past, progressed until this day, and now faces the future. Moreover, as discussed above, it is hard to argue against the

presupposition that the nation is damaged and needs to be healed because even if the presupposition is negated (e.g. *will not heal this nation*) it still exists, and the reasonable thing to do is to nourish the course of healing. This also contains a touch of pathos since the hope of a complete and whole nation is something that addresses every American citizen's heart – the national spirit of America. Furthermore, throughout the examples above (12 through 15), Senator Obama is not only convincing people by using logical arguments, he also, by continuously using the pronouns *we* and *I*, makes it clear who the bringer of logical solutions is and is therefore also strengthening ethos.

5. Conclusion

This essay set out to examine persuasive aspects of language and how they are used in a speech given by Senator Barack Obama in February 2008. Barack Obama was interesting to observe since his orating skills have been compared with well-known speakers like Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy. In addition, Senator Obama might become the next president of the United States.

The linguistic analysis was done from an Aristotelian point of view, where the three means of persuasion *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* made the foundation upon which the interpretation of the data rested. This also constituted as the method in the sense that it created a frame for the analysis to work within. Additionally, the method was to analyze the data both manually and with the help of a computer-driven analysis. The results were to rest on personal observations and interpretations, referring to what had earlier been recognized on the subject by Beard (2000) and Halmari (2004). The primary data, Senator Obama's speech on Super Tuesday 2008, is a speech held during a campaign where Senator Obama had, at that moment, become one of the primary candidates in the race to become the Democratic Party's nominee in the presidential election.

The senator is addressing his own supporters directly, but also indirectly the entire nation (through the media). The speech's objective is to motivate people to vote for the senator.

The analysis and the results show several examples of the persuasive sides of language, and how Senator Obama uses several persuasive strategies in his speech, including a thought-out use of personal pronouns and an appeal to authority. Examples of these, guided by previous studies by Halmari (2004), also showed how they could relate not only to the persuasive means of ethos, but also to the other two persuasive means, pathos and logos, something that was not expected because no source had mentioned that phenomenon, though it makes sense since all three persuasive means (ethos, pathos and logos) must, according to Aristotle's rhetoric, collaborate in order to persuade successfully. The most obvious example from the results of how they all collaborate is presented in example (15), where the national spirit is addressed at the same time as *we* inclusion is reached, and the argument strives towards a logical solution to a presupposed problem. Although all three persuasive means tended to collaborate, the one persuasive means that was most generally present throughout the analysis was ethos, as it tended to permeate the other two, pathos and logos. However, it is not clear whether or not Senator Obama is strictly bound to classical rhetoric simply because he uses persuasive techniques that fit the frame of Aristotelian rhetoric.

Furthermore, the analysis and results also showed how imagery might enhance the persuasive means of pathos by addressing the national American spirit. This was done mainly through the inspiring word *hope* but also the word *opportunity*, which in the context related to the American dream, and hence, people's desire. Yet again, it also proved to be collaborating with the other ancient persuasion criteria, especially ethos and inclusive *we*. Moreover, the appeal to logic showed how logical arguments may be powerfully persuasive.

In conclusion, language can be persuasive and Senator Barack Obama is persuasive through language. He might have been proven even more persuasive if this study had included an interpretation of additional elements, such as voice and appearance. Perhaps a more thorough

investigation of verbs, conjunctions and pronouns would have found a more complete picture of how persuasion is accomplished. Furthermore, the method used in this essay is of course debatable. It might be hard to replicate this investigation and reach the same results. Though, all qualitative examinations must to some extent include interpretations. Hard facts can only be reached if the study is quantitative in its nature, which perhaps could have been accomplished if the study had compared several speeches by the same speaker. Additionally, some proof of whether or not this particular speech was successfully persuasive would indeed have been an excellent aid in proving the senator's persuasiveness, i.e. to see if he won any extra votes after delivering this speech. Such facts are hard to find though. However, this is something someone else might build on.

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Appendices

Obama on Super Tuesday: 'Our Time Has Come'

CQ Transcripts Wire
Wednesday, February 6, 2008; 12:39 AM

SPEAKER: SEN. BARACK OBAMA, D-ILL.

[*]

OBAMA: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Well, first of all, let me just say I could not have a better senior senator than our great senator from the State of Illinois, Dick Durbin.

(APPLAUSE)

I have too many friends to mention each one of them individually, but it is good to be back home. It is good to be home.

(APPLAUSE)

It is good to be home. It is good to have Michelle home.

(APPLAUSE)

The girls are with us tonight, but we asked them did you want to come on stage, and Malia, our nine-year-old said, "Daddy, you know that's not my thing."

(LAUGHTER)

So they're upstairs, doing what they do.

(LAUGHTER)

Before I begin, I just want to send my condolences to the victims of the storms that hit Tennessee and Arkansas today. They are in our thoughts and in our prayers, and we hope that our federal government will respond quickly and rapidly to make sure that they get all the help that they need.

(LAUGHTER)

The polls are just closing in California.

(APPLAUSE)

And the votes are still being counted in cities and towns across America. But there is one thing.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (OFF-MIKE)

OBAMA: You know I love you back.

(LAUGHTER)

But there is one thing on this February night that we do not need the final results to know. Our time has come.

(APPLAUSE)

Our time has come. Our movement is real, and change is coming to America.

(APPLAUSE)

Only a few hundred miles from here, almost one year ago to the day, as Dick said, we stood on the steps of the old state capitol to reaffirm a truth that was spoken there so many generations ago, that a house divided cannot stand...

(APPLAUSE)

That we are more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are and always will be the United States of America.

(APPLAUSE)

What began as a whisper in Springfield soon carried across the cornfields of Iowa, where farmers and factory workers, students and seniors stood up in numbers we have never seen before.

(APPLAUSE)

They stood up to say that maybe this year we don't have to settle for politics where scoring points is more important than solving problems.

(APPLAUSE)

Maybe this year we can finally start doing something about health care we can't afford.

(APPLAUSE)

Maybe this year we can start doing a thing about mortgages we can't pay. Maybe this year, this time can be different.

(APPLAUSE)

Their voices echoed from the hills of New Hampshire to the deserts of Nevada, where teachers and cooks and kitchen workers stood up to say that maybe Washington doesn't have to be run by lobbyists anymore.

(APPLAUSE)

Maybe the voices of the American people can finally be heard again.

(APPLAUSE)

They reached the coast of South Carolina, when people said that maybe we don't have to be divided by race and regions and gender...

(APPLAUSE)

... that the crumbling schools are stealing the future of black children and white children...

(APPLAUSE)

... that we can come together and build an America that gives every child everywhere the opportunity to live out their dreams. This time can be different.

(APPLAUSE)

And today, on this Tuesday in February, in states north and south, east and west, what began as a whisper in Springfield has swelled to a chorus of millions calling for change.

(APPLAUSE)

It's a course that cannot be ignored, a course that cannot be deterred. This time can be different, because this campaign for the presidency of the United States of America is different.

(APPLAUSE)

It's different not because of me. It's different because of you...

(APPLAUSE)

... because you are tired of being disappointed...

(APPLAUSE)

... and you're tired of being let down.

(APPLAUSE)

You're tired of hearing promises made and plans proposed in the heat of a campaign, only to have nothing change when everyone goes back to Washington.

OBAMA: Nothing changes because lobbyists just write another check or politicians start worrying about how to win the next election instead of why they should or because they focus on who's up and who's down instead of who matters.

And while Washington is consumed with the same drama and divisions and distractions, another family puts up a "for sale" sign in their front yard, another factory shuts its doors, another soldier waves goodbye as he leaves on another tour of duty in a war that should have never been authorized and should have never been waged...

(APPLAUSE)

... and goes on and on and on.

But in this election, at this moment, you are standing up all across this country to say "not this time, not this year." The stakes are too high and the challenges too great to play the same Washington game with the same Washington players and somehow expect a different result.

This time must be different. This time we have to turn the page. This time we have to write a new chapter in American history. This time we have to seize the moment.

(APPLAUSE)

This isn't about me and it's not about Senator Clinton. As I've said before, she was a friend before this campaign, she'll be a friend after it's over.

I respect her. I respect her as a colleague. I congratulate her on her victories tonight. She's been running an outstanding race.

But this fall -- this fall, we owe the American people a real choice.

(APPLAUSE)

We have to choose between change and more of the same. We have to choose between looking backwards and looking forwards. We have to choose between our future and our past.

It's a choice between going into this election with Republicans and independents already united against us or going against their nominee with a campaign that has united Americans of all parties, from all backgrounds, from all races, from all religions, around a common purpose.

(APPLAUSE)

It's a choice between having a debate with the other party about who has the most experience in Washington or having one about who is most likely to change Washington, because that's a debate that we can win.

(APPLAUSE)

It's a choice between a candidate who's taken more money from Washington lobbyists from either Republican in this race and a campaign that has not taken a dime of their money, because we have been funded by you. You have funded this campaign.

(APPLAUSE)

And if I am your nominee, my opponent will not be able to say that I voted for the war in Iraq, because I didn't, or that I gave George Bush the benefit of the doubt on Iran, because I haven't, or that I support the Bush-Cheney doctrine of not talking to leaders we don't like, because I profoundly disagree with that approach.

And he will not be able to say that I wavered on something as fundamental as whether or not it's OK for America to use torture, because it's never OK.

That is the choice in this election.

(APPLAUSE)

The Republicans running for president have already tied themselves to the past. They speak of 100-year war in Iraq. They talk about billions more in tax breaks for the wealthiest few, who don't need them and didn't even ask them, tax breaks that mortgage our children's future on a mountain of debt, at a time when there are families who can't pay their medical bills and students who can't pay their tuition.

Those Republicans are running on the politics of yesterday and that is why our party must be the party of tomorrow, and that is the party that I intend to lead as president of the United States of America.

(APPLAUSE)

I'll be the president who ends the tax breaks to companies that ship our jobs overseas and start putting them in the pockets of hardworking Americans who deserve them and struggling homeowners who deserve them and seniors who should retire with dignity and respect and deserve them.

(APPLAUSE)

I'll be the president who finally brings Democrats and Republicans together to make health care affordable and available for every single American.

We will put a college education within the reach of anyone who wants to go. And instead of just talking about how great our teachers are, we will reward them for their greatness with more pay and better support.

(APPLAUSE)

And we will harness the ingenuity of farmers and scientists and entrepreneurs to free this nation from the tyranny of oil once and for all and we will invest in solar and wind and biodiesel, clean energy, green energy that can fuel economic development for generations to come.

That's what we're going to do when I'm president of the United States.

(APPLAUSE)

When I'm president, we will put an end to the politics of fear, a politics that uses 9/11 as a way to scare up votes. We're going to start seeing 9/11 as a challenge that should unite America and the world against the common threats of the 21st century, terrorism and nuclear weapons, climate change and poverty, genocide and disease.

(APPLAUSE)

We can do this. We can do this. But it will not be easy. It will require a struggle and it will require sacrifice. There will be setbacks and we will make mistakes.

And that is why we need all the help we can get. So tonight, I want to speak directly to all those Americans who have yet to join this movement, but still hunger for change.

They know it in their gut. They know we can do better than we're doing. They know that we can take our politics to a higher level.

But they're afraid. They've been taught to be cynical. They're doubtful that it can be done. But I'm here to say tonight to all of you who still harbor those doubts, we need you.

We need you to stand with us. We need you to work with us. We need you to help us prove that together ordinary people can still do extraordinary things in the United States of America.

(APPLAUSE)

I am blessed to be standing in the city where my own extraordinary journey of service began. You know, just a few miles from here, down in the Southside, in the shadow of a shuttered steel plant, it was there that I learned what it takes to make change happen.

I was a young organizer then. In fact, there are some folks here who I organized with. A young organizer intent on fighting joblessness and poverty on the Southside, and I still remember one of the very first meetings I put together.

We had worked on it for days. We had made phone calls, we had knocked on doors, we had put out flyers. But on that night, nobody showed up. Our volunteers, who had worked so hard, felt so defeated, they wanted to quit. And to be honest, so did I.

But at that moment, I happened to look outside and I saw some young boys tossing stones at a boarded-up apartment building across the street.

They were like the boys in so many cities across the country. Little boys, but without prospects, without guidance, without hope for the future.

And I turned to the volunteers and I asked them, "Before you quit, before you give up, I want you to answer one question. What will happen to those boys if we don't stand up for them?"

(APPLAUSE)

And those volunteers, they looked out that window and they saw those boys and they decided that night to keep going, to keep organizing, keep fighting for better schools, fighting for better jobs, fighting for better health care, and I did, too.

And slowly, but surely, in the weeks and months to come, the community began to change.

You see, the challenges we face will not be solved with one meeting in one night. It will not be resolved on even a super-duper Tuesday.

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for.

(APPLAUSE)

We are the change that we seek. We are the hope of those boys who have so little, who've been told that they cannot have what they dreamed, that they cannot be what they imagine.

Yes, they can. We are the hope of the father who goes to work before dawn and lies awake with doubt that tells him he cannot give his children the same opportunities that someone gave him.

Yes, he can.

We are the hope of the woman who hears that her city will not be rebuilt, that she cannot somehow claim the life that was swept away in a terrible storm.

Yes, she can.

We are the hope of the future, the answer to the cynics who tell us our house must stand divided, that we cannot come together, that we cannot remake this world as it should be.

We know that we have seen something happen over the last several weeks, over the past several months. We know that what began as a whisper has now swelled to a chorus that cannot be ignored, that will not be deterred, that will ring out across this land as a hymn that will heal this nation, repair this world, make this time different than all the rest.

(APPLAUSE)

Yes, we can. Let's go to work. Yes, we can. Yes, we can. Yes, we can.

Thank you, Chicago. Let's go get to work. I love you.

END

Source: CQ Transcriptions