

# President's speech portrait

*Lyudmila Grichenko*<sup>1</sup> and *Lyudmila Gushchina*<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Southern Federal University, Bolshaya Sadovaya str., 105/42, Rostov-on-Don, 344006, Russia

**Abstract.** The research of the speech portrait of a politician's personality in the framework of several linguistic paradigms including pragmalinguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and political discourse contributes to a multidimensional, comprehensive study of this phenomenon, meeting the requirements of the nowadays scientific demands. The appeal to this topic is due to insufficient knowledge of the system of linguistic and pragmatic means that form the speech portrait of modern politicians. The purpose of this paper is to describe the specifics of Barak Obama's speech portrait during the period of his presidency in 2015-2016. The authors point out that the speech portrait of Barack Obama is formed by multi-level linguistic means, whose use is determined both by the cognitive picture of the politician's world and peculiarities of the language system, cultural and historical experience of the nation, as well as by the rules and norms of political communication. The paper reveals the specifics of Barak Obama's implementation of a communicative strategy of positive presentation and self-representation by using a number of speech influence methods. The article offers the linguistic analysis of Barak Obama's public speeches and their pragmatic specifics that contribute to the detailed and precise creation of a modern politician's speech portrait.

## 1 Introduction

It is known that political communication, as well as mass communication in general, is aimed at the speech impact of the language personality on a wide audience. The addressees' language personality and their speech portrait are formed and fully revealed in political communication. As a socialized individual, the social essence of man, a synthesis of biological and social, innate and acquired properties, as well as a native speaker, who generates texts using the means of a specific language for the subsequent presentation of the surrounding reality (picture of the world perception), the linguistic personality of a speaker is an obligatory component of political communication and political discourse.

---

\* Corresponding author: [lgushchina@sfedu.ru](mailto:lgushchina@sfedu.ru)

From the viewpoint of speech influence, a language personality assumes a set of individual communicative strategies and tactics, cognitive, semiotic, motivational preferences [1, 2].

A speech portrait is formed by a linguistic personality, representing a set of linguistic and speech characteristics of a person (speaker) or a society in a particular period of the history. It can be noted that it is a communicative characteristic of a person or a linguistic personality embodied in speech. The main function of a speech portrait is to form a holistic personality image. In political communication, the speech portrait of the linguistic personality is characterized by its peculiarities and is mainly formed by a conscious choice of verbal (linguistic) means [3, 4]. It should be mentioned that the outcome and the effectiveness of political communication directly depend on the language personality, the speaker's choice and usage of a set of verbal and non-verbal means of speech influence on the audience. In its turn, the speech portrait of a linguistic personality is influenced by several factors: cognitive characteristics of a linguistic personality, systemic capabilities of the language, stereotypes of the nation's communicative behavior, a set of extralinguistic factors.

Means, techniques and methods for the correct information presentation in political communication are aimed at the active invasion of the linguistic personality into the emotional-volitional sphere of the audience. For this reason, public speeches of politicians, as a rule, are well thought out and logical; they are relevant to the situation and meet the addressees' demands [5]. The means of communication (verbal and non-verbal) chosen by the linguistic personality not only form and constitute the speech portrait, but also serve as a kind of markers, indexes or stereotypes of the communicative behavior, any deviation from which during communication can be perceived as a special signal or as a sign of the partner's belonging to another culture.

The speech portrait of the famous politician, the former US President, Barack Hussein Obama is no exception: it is characterized by a clear structure, logic of presentation, as well as a wide range of multi-level linguistic means of speech influence, which have significant pragmatic and stylistic potential [6]. The adherence to the rules of communicative behavior, correct choice of means, methods and techniques for the information presentation contribute to the formation of a positive speech portrait of Barack Obama.

## **2 Methodology**

The speech portrait of a linguistic personality is the subject of a significant number of scientific studies of Russian and foreign scientists of the mid-20th – early 21st centuries.

Discovering zones of intersection with a number of different sciences and linguistic directions, issues of speech portrait and linguistic personality were actively considered by psychologists, sociologists, linguists, psycholinguists, cognitologists and pragmalinguists (E. Agapova, S. Agapova, M. Antropova, E. Bern, G. Bogin, G. Burton, R. Dimpleby, A. Dobrovich, A. Dzyubenko, V. Goldin, E. Ivantsova, V. Karasik, Yu. Karaulov, M. Kitaygorodskaya, V. Konetskaya, G. Matveev, V. Melikyan, M. Merkulova, Y. Milkevich, M. Panov, N. Rozanova, L. Sedov, E. Severina, T. Tarasenko, A. Volkov, M. Zheltukhina, I. Zyubina, etc.).

Fundamental works in the field of speech portrait and description of the linguistic personality are devoted to the issues of identifying and presenting models of the communicative and linguistic personality (Yu. Karaulov, V. Konetskaya); language personality components (language ability; communicative demand; communication competence; linguistic consciousness; speech behaviour) (V. Karasik); properties of the language personality (P. Tarasenko); communicative features of personality, validity and correctness of choice of linguistic means by a speaker in specific conditions of

communication (S. Agapova, E. Bern, I. Sternin); identifying and comparing the pragmlinguistic potential of some language means [7-10].

A number of scientists (I. Cohn, L. Krysin, etc.), referring to the issues of speech portraying, focus on cognitive operations that are responsible for the logic of presentation, the nature and choice of the method of argumentation; others (E. Agapova, I. Churilina, Y. Milkevich, E. Severina, etc.) study the characteristics of motives that regulate behaviour, control speech and text production, determining the hierarchy of meanings and values in the speaker's linguistic and cultural pictures of the world.

Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scientific discussions have been focused on political discourse. Such names of researchers as D. Bolinger, V. Davidson, O. Ermakova, S. Ermolenko, E. Kazakevich, Yu. Levin and others are associated with the development of this paradigm. The key aspects, analysed by these researchers, are: the identification of the mechanisms of creation, decoding and perception of political texts, the description and classification of strategies in political communication, the analysis of political metaphors, comparisons, etc. [11].

Despite the significant development by domestic and foreign scientists of the theoretical and practical aspects of speech portrait and language personality, certain issues require further coverage. Within the framework of this study, it is relevant to consider the speech portrait of the famous politician Barack Obama and expand the ideas about the features of his speech behavior. The appeal to this topic is due to insufficient knowledge of the system of linguistic means that form the speech portrait of Barack Obama. The consideration of the speech portrait of a linguistic personality in the framework of several linguistic paradigms (pragmalinguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and political discourse), providing a multidimensional, comprehensive study of this phenomenon, meets the requirements of the nowadays science.

Our analysis is based on Barak Obama's public speeches in 2015-2016, selected by the method of continuous sampling. The total sample size is 500 examples.

### **3 Results**

The speech portrait of the famous American politician Barack Hussein Obama, like any speech portrait, is the embodiment of personality in language. The choice of linguistic and extralinguistic means of the audience influence and information representation is initially carried out at the level of cognition, and then gets its verbalization in the language picture of the world of the individual.

Taking into account that the speech portrait of a politician is being analyzed, it is obvious that Barack Obama uses the means and mechanisms for presenting information, which are characteristic, first of all, for political communication [12]. Without dwelling on the peculiarities of political communication, we note that it is undoubtedly important for Barack Obama to pay attention both to the form of presentation of the information (i.e. the sequence of narration (utterances), actualization of meanings, argumentation, lexicosemantic and grammatical means) and the method, manner of its conveying.

The specifics of Barack Obama's speech portrait are both the features of the use of language units of various levels, and the features of speech behavior (referring to etiquette formulas, speech clichés, precedent and linguistic cultural phenomena) (Fig. 1).

First of all, the linguistic specifics of Barack Obama's speech portrait are demonstrated by frequent multi-level repetitions. At the phonetics level, they include the regular use of alliteration, that is, the repeated repetition of consonants in a close neighborhood: «It is a direct result of the American people's drive and determination, and decisions made by my administration» (Obama). In the given example, Barak Obama denotes measures that have led to the progress and prosperity of the country. The use of the repetition of the sound «d»

in the words «direct», «drive», «determination», «decisions», «made», «administration» increases the expressiveness of his statement.

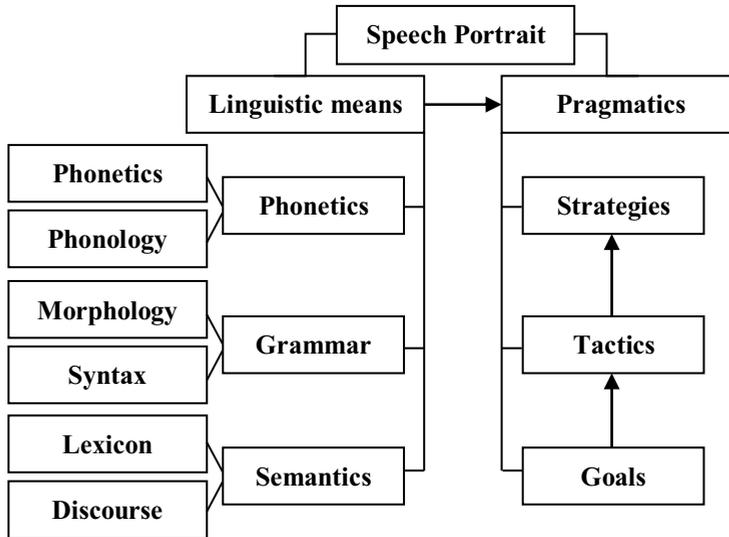


Fig. 1. Model of the Speech Portrait.

The following statement «*We've been consulting closely with Congress*» (Obama) is an example of an intentional repetition of the consonant sound «*k*» in full-valued lexical units «*consulting*», «*closely*» and «*Congress*» which reveals a significant tightness of the row necessary to create the alliteration. The statement reveals a serious atmosphere due to which the information about cooperation between US President and Congress is perceived as a business and fruitful cooperation in which Congress is ready to help and interact with the President, as it adheres to his policy.

At the morphology level, inflexible affixal morphemes are widely used by Barack Obama and make up the specifics his speech portrait: «*And we're on pace to make 2014 the strongest year of job growth since the 1990s. And one of the best would be to raise the minimum wage. We've actually begun to see some modest wage growth in recent months*» (Obama). Barack Obama's use of the «*est*» suffix repetition of adjectives is an excellent indication of the President's desire to emphasize the results that society has achieved under his leadership. The suffix repetition in the given example gives expressiveness to the statement and helps Barack Obama impact the audience in the necessary key.

In addition, President Barack Obama regularly refers to a replay of the root morpheme: «*Right now, they pose a threat to the people of Iraq, Syria, and the broader Middle East. But its leaders have threatened America and our allies*» (Obama). In the example given above, the repetition of the root morpheme «*threat*» fixes the audience's attention on significant information, gives speech expressiveness and makes up the specifics of the speech portrait of the politician.

Among the lexical features of the speech portrait of US President Barack Obama, one can single out the use of synonyms and antonyms (including incomplete, contextual), evaluative vocabulary, precedent names, idioms and phraseological units [13-15].

So, in the example: «*This is an issue that bigger and longer-lasting than my presidency*» (Obama) the usage of the contextual synonyms «*bigger*» and «*longer-lasting*» helps the President achieve graduation and gives more expressiveness to his speech,

dwelling on the problem that had haunted Americans even before Barack Obama became US President.

Barack Obama's next statement: «*It's time to stop punishing some of the hardest-working Americans. It's time to raise the minimum wage*» (Obama) inspires citizens and gives hope for a change in the situation in the country. The antonyms «*stop*» and «*raise*» are used to create the contrast and motivation of the citizens.

The appeal to antonyms enhances the linguostylistic potential of the entire statement (utterance) since the emerging antithesis allows the linguistic personality, on the one hand, to focus on what needs to be listened to, and on the other hand, makes the speech more expressive: «*You come from a great tradition that stands for education, not ignorance; innovation, not destruction; the dignity of life, not murder*» (Obama). This example of the use of antonymic units and the formation of antithesis deserves special attention since it is built on gradation.

The features of Barack Obama's speech portrait include a significant number of negatively / positively coloured evaluative linguistic units of various parts of speech, e.g. «*unthinkable power*», «*irreducible desire*», «*hard-wrought*», «*hard-fought victory*», «*chaos*», «*heartbreaking tragedies*», «*punishment*», «*to confront*», «*evil*», «*violence*», «*tragedy*», «*to enrapture*», «*courage*», «*tyranny*», «*prosperity*», «*to flourish*», «*extremism*», etc.

The above mentioned examples clearly show Barack Obama's negative attitude to the problems of terrorism and war, which is evidenced by the use of lexical units with appropriate evaluative marking («*poisonous*», «*chaos*», etc.): «*We know that ISIL – which emerged out of the chaos of Iraq and Syria – depends on perpetual war to survive. But we also know that they gain adherents because of a poisonous ideology*» (Obama).

The speech portrait of Barack Obama is characterized by explicit positively or negatively marked evaluativeness: he denounces war, extremism, tyranny, lack of democracy, terrorism. On the contrary, allies, economic progress, prosperity of the nation, scientific achievements and struggle for peace, freedom and new opportunities are positively evaluated in his speeches.

Expressing his respectful attitude towards Great Britain, Barack Obama explains that their countries have close and strong ties of friendship and mutual support not only from a historical but also cultural point of view: «*We are the allies who <...> sacrificed side by side to free a continent from the march of tyranny, and help prosperity flourish from the ruins of war*» (Obama).

US national cultural values and ideals are often metaphorically presented in Barack Obama's speech and always deserve his positive assessment of the situation or events: «*Choir anthems of freedom were heard*» (Obama). Countries with the proclaimed freedom of speech and thought, where conditions for the further development and prosperity are created, are also positively evaluated by him: «*And today, the competition for the best jobs and industries favors countries that are free-thinking and forward-looking*» (Obama).

An absolute favourite of Barack Obama is the United States, described exclusively in a positive way: «*That's the country we love – clear-eyed, big-hearted, undaunted by challenge, optimistic*» (Obama).

Precedent names are often included by Barack Obama in his political speeches, indicating historical events: «*The days are gone when Roosevelt and Churchill could sit in a room and solve the world's problems over a glass of brandy*» (Obama). In this example, Barack Obama mentions British Prime Minister, Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, and another US president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, talking about the times when these two leaders solved world problems.

The speech portrait of Barack Obama is also formed through the use of phraseological units and idioms which give expressiveness and stylistic colouring to his public speeches.

In addition, the fixed expressions used by Barack Obama are characterized by precedence and cause stable associations among native speakers. This contributes to the convergence of the addresser and addressee: «...ours got off on the wrong foot with a small scrape about tea and taxes» (Obama). Here the precedent phenomenon is associated with the Boston Tea Party, namely, the protest of American colonists in response to the actions of the British government, as a result of which all the cargo of tea belonging to the English East India Company was destroyed in Boston Harbour.

The peculiarities of Barack Obama's speech portrait at the syntax level include the use of rhetorical questions, appositions, repetitions of syntactic constructions and their elements (i.e. syntactic parallelism). For example, he resorts to the use of rhetorical questions, discussing the problems of terrorism, international relations, and the values of modern American society: «*Is this who we are? Is that something our Founders foresaw?*» (Obama).

The speech portrait of Barack Obama is also characterized by the use of appositions to clarify, explain and provide additional information. Among the thematic diversity of his speeches are those that are devoted to the values and ideals of the nation and state, the strong sides of US foreign and domestic policy, worthy representatives of the American nation. In such speeches, appositions, as a rule, positively characterize the events taking place in the country: «*A commitment to universal ideals – of freedom, of justice, of equality*» (Obama).

One of the main features of Barack Obama's speech portrait at the syntax level is the use of parallel constructions: «*The frost melts, the cold recedes, the sun reappears*» (Obama); «*We can imagine folks coming to this church, happy about the boycott being over. We can also imagine them, though, coming here concerned about their future*» (Obama). Parallel constructions contribute to the expressiveness of the entire speech; repetitions are a characteristic feature of the speech portrait of Barack Obama.

Barack Obama's speech behaviour, which makes up his speech portrait, also includes the use of etiquette formulas that correspond to both the general rules of English-language communicative behavior and the peculiarities of political communication (politicians are initially mentioned, and only then American citizens, etc.): «*Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, my fellow Americans*» (Obama).

The choice of etiquette formulas for greeting and farewell in Barack Obama's speech depends entirely on the audience. As a result the speech portrait is made up of both traditional formal expressions: «*And May God bless the United States of America*» (Obama); and less formal phrases like «*Thank you very much*» (Obama).

The analysis of the language personality and speech portrait of Barack Obama also reveals the desire of the American president to use precedent phenomena, stylistically coloured bookish vocabulary («*Taken an oath*»), epithets, metaphors and comparisons («*erase barriers to opportunity*», «*an apocalyptic cult like ISIL*»).

Barack Obama refers to the citation of philosophers and public figures who have been active human rights activists, including M. King, N. Mandela, M. Gandhi and J. Madison. By rendering their statements, Barack Obama demonstrates his attitude to the basic values of the United States. Numerous basic expressions such as «*around the globe*», «*stuck in the red*», «*within our grasp*», «*gain a foothold*», «*to bear its burden*», «*to stand on its own two feet*», «*in fits and starts*», «*have their ups and downs*», «*take for granted*», found in the speeches of Barack Obama, are an actualization of the cultural picture of the world in the politician's speech. In addition, they liven up his speeches, making those ones vivid.

## 4 Conclusion

Barack Obama's public speeches demonstrate that his policy is entirely based on such values of American society as freedom of speech and thought, democracy and unity, which have been formed over several centuries. The politician calls on the American people to follow the rules of the US Constitution, which was written long before his reign and has not lost its force to this day.

The use of bright metaphors and epithets in the speech of US President attracts the audience's attention, creates and causes vivid images in memory. Barack Obama honours the history and traditions of his country, refers to historical facts and political leaders of various times. In general, Barack Hussein Obama's speech portrait reflects a strong connection with the culture and history of the country, positioning himself as a confident leader of the state with a great mission, ready to lead his country towards a bright future.

Barack Obama implements a communicative strategy of positive self-representation and presentation of the United States, as well as its allies. In his public speeches, the politician focuses on his achievements and US role in the global politics. He reduces or eliminates the degree of other people's merits, using such methods of speech influence as intensification (amplification) and understatement (reduction).

Thus, the speech portrait of Barack Obama is formed by multi-level linguistic means, whose use is determined both by the cognitive picture of the politician's world and by the peculiarities of the language system, the cultural and historical experience of the nation, as well as the rules and norms of political communication.

## References

1. F. Mardian, *Journal of Pragmatics*, **174**, 125-127 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.01.006>
2. J. Chovanec, *Journal of Pragmatics*, **158**, 66-79 (2020) [doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2020.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.01.003)
3. R. Coleman, H. D. Wu, *Journalism*, **00**, 1-18 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884921990242>
4. K. Seaton, H. D. Wu, *International Political Science Review*, **00**, 1-14 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120982498>
5. T. Popova, Ye. Sausheva, T. Surikova, R. Yusupova, A. Dzyubenko, *XLinguae*, **2**, 147-157 (2018) [doi:10.18355/XL.2018.11.02.12](https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2018.11.02.12)
6. I. Theodoropoulou, *Journal of multicultural discourses*, **00**, 1-15 (2020) [doi:10.1080/17447143.2020.1800715](https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2020.1800715)
7. N. Volskaya, L. Borbotko, M. Zheltukhina, M. Kupriyanova, A. Ilina, *XLinguae*, **4**, 84-95 (2017) [doi:10.18355/XL.2017.10.04.08](https://doi.org/10.18355/XL.2017.10.04.08)
8. I. Aleshchanova, N. Frolova, M. Zheltukhina, *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, **331**, 5-11 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.2991/ismge-19.2019.2>
9. D. de Souza, E. Betz, M. Clinkenbeard, E. Morita, N. Shrikant, W. Tuccio, *Language & Communication*, **76**, 47-57 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2020.09.005>
10. E. Severina, S. Agapova, Ye. Milkevich, E. Agapova, *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies*, **13**, 15-28 (2018) [doi:10.18848/2327-008X/CGP/v13i01/15-28](https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-008X/CGP/v13i01/15-28)
11. Ch. Raymond, *Language & Communication*, **42**, 50-68 (2015) <https://doi.org/10.1075/slsi.31.03ray>

12. M. Zheltukhina, M. Busygina, M. Merkulova, I. Zyubina, L. Buzinova, *XLinguae*, **11**, 639-654 (2018) doi:10.18355/XL.2018.11.02.51
13. S. Tinshe, *CELTIC: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature & Linguistics*, **6**, 73-87 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.22219/celtic.v6i2.9947>
14. V. Melikyan, A. Melikyan, A. Dzyubenko, *Zeitschrift für Slawistik*, **62**, 23-47 (2017) doi:10.1515/slav-2017-0002
15. K. Marian, T. Malabarba, A. Weatherall, *Language & Communication*, **78**, 77-87 (2021) doi:10.1016/j.langcom.2021.01.004