A cognitive rhetoric approach to two political speeches
Obama and Sarkozy’s remarks at the U.N.’s Climate Change summit (2009)

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ABSTRACT


Cette étude fait suite à deux articles (Bonneille 2008, 2009) inscrits dans le cadre théorique de la linguistique cognitive et consacrés à l’analyse des outils rhétoriques les plus fréquemment déployés pour parler du changement climatique sur la scène politique. Dans la même veine, le présent article met en lumière les moyens rhétoriques mis en œuvre dans ces deux discours, afin de permettre aux deux présidents de façonner leurs réponses face à la crise environnementale.

Keywords: cognitive rhetoric, applied cognitive linguistics, Obama, Sarkozy, global warming

1. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES FROM A COGNITIVE RHETORIC STANDPOINT

Based on the cognitive linguistics theory as defined by Lakoff, Johnson et al., this paper’s main goal is to compare the speeches President Obama and President Sarkozy gave in September 2009 at the U.N.’s Climate Change summit in New York, where Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon invited more than 100 world leaders to participate in a series of talks whose main objective was to pave the ground for the Copenhagen summit negotiations.

This piece of research draws upon two of the author’s previous papers whose focus on cognitive processes, i.e. conceptual metaphor and metonymy (Ortony 1979, Lakoff & Johnson 1980), narrative structure (Propp 1970, Todorov 1971, Johnson 1993, Talmy 2000, Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton 2003, Herman 2003) and frame (Filmmore 1976, Tannen 1993, Lakoff 2004) highlighted how climate change was conceptualized by the Bush Administration in G. W. Bush’s 8 SOTUAs (Bonneille 2008) and which main cognitive stylistic features differentiated Mc Cain and Obama’s speeches on climate change over the last months of the 2009 presidential campaign (Bonneille 2009).

The current paper pursues the defined line of research, i.e. the analysis of political speeches environment-related from a cognitive rhetoric standpoint, by investigating the way environmental issues are expressed and conceptualized in Obama and Sarkozy’s speeches at the U.N. in September 2009 in order to reach out to the targeted audience’s mental screen. But it also takes the cognitive rhetoric investigation one step further in choosing to analyze, in a synchronized manner, salient features of the American and the French Presidents’ rhetorical devices which shape the response they’re both giving to the challenge posed by climate change in the field of “green talk” (Peterson 2004, Corbett 2006, Cox 2006).

Although this analysis could well fit into the cognitive stylistics framework, “stylistics” mostly focuses on literary data and its interest in interpretation slightly varies from our own:

(Cognitive stylistics is) a field at the interface between linguistics, literary studies and cognitive science. It combines the kind of explicit, rigorous detailed linguistic analysis of literary that is typical of the stylistics tradition with a systematic and theoretically informed consideration of he cognitive structures and processes that underlie the production and reception of language. (Semino & Culpeper 2002: 9).

This investigation throws light on the relationship “between linguistic choices and effects” (Ibid.: 9) from a cognitive standpoint. However, the raison d’être of the political speeches selected is different from that of literary texts in general mainly because the first ones are based on the power of persuasion and, as opposed to the latter, are neither considered as a piece of art nor as a means of entertainment. Analyzing political speeches encompasses investigation on interpretation but the strategic dimension of a such genre, in Steen’s sense (2002: 187-88), is intimately linked to rhetoric, i.e. to the power of persuasion and to power in the broad sense. Hence this investigation falls under the umbrella of “cognitive rhetoric” which refers to another expanding subfield of research in cognitive linguistics.

The main aim of these speeches is to convince the rest of the attending world leaders that environmental issues need to be tackled. Speeches are, by definition, delivered orally. And some of these oral features can still be perceived in both transcriptions: rhythm, repetition, emphasis on verbs via the use of certain tenses, etc.

4 State of the Union Address.
5 All the expressions and words extracted from the two speeches are given in italics.
Background knowledge information about the speakers also come into play regarding
the process of interpretation. Both presidents are young, they were recently elected and
are known for their communicative skills. Obama appears composed and optimistic.
He always speaks slowly with a reassuring intonation and a controlled tempo. He calls
upon figurative language often. And because his body hardly moves\textsuperscript{6}, his controlled
gesture empowers the selected words. Sarkozy tends to speak more rapidly and often
appears tense. When he gave speeches, at the beginning of his term, he made a lot of
gestures which would gradually lead to an inflationist rhetoric. Those gestures tended
to detract the impact of his words. The tempo of his voice tends to always speed up
towards the middle of a speech while his voice gets louder. He wants to appear as the
no-nonsense President who expresses himself frankly with energy and conviction.

The genre (Steen \textsc{2002}) implies that the audience expects the use of an appropriate
register, a certain choice of words and expressions, and other elements that belong to
the area of rhetoric.

Since the term “rhetoric” is becoming more and more popular across the
English-speaking mass media world, it should be specified that it is here taken in the
classical sense of the word (Aristotle \textsc{1991: 22-24}). The main function of rhetoric is
to convince the hearer or audience about the necessity to address a specific topic. The
speaker’s moral character should surface in his speech and therefore help him gain
the hearer/audience’s confidence and trust. But rhetorical devices only work if the
audience’s passions are ignited by the speech itself. The speaker therefore needs to be
aware of the emotional state the audience finds itself in so as to adapt its speech and
trigger the necessary emotions, such as sadness, joy, friendship or hatred which will
lead to persuasion.

From a cognitive semantics perspective, the most striking feature which, at
first sight, differentiates these two speeches lies in the opposition between figurative
and literal language (Lakoff \& Johnson \textsc{1980}, Lakoff \& Turner \textsc{1989}, Gibbs \textsc{1994}).
Whereas Obama resorts to metaphorical networks and metonymies, Sarkozy seems
to shy away from figurative language as if his style precisely needed to go against
Obama’s ever so praised rhetorical signature stamp. Applied cognitive linguistics
research has repeatedly shown that there is no such thing as a clear cut boundary
between figurative and literal language\textsuperscript{7} or as Gibbs (Ibid.: 16) states it: “The mind is
not inherently literal”. However, this piece of research will make use of this artificial
and convenient boundary in order to question whether the most striking figurative
effects called upon always correspond to the most powerful, rhetorically speaking,
and whether certain recurrent linguistic phenomena categorized as non figurative can
actually turn out to be as powerful as figurative language itself.

\textsuperscript{6} For the main differences opposing the two Presidents’ body language, see the comparative analysis
conducted by the semiotician Bertrand: “Barack Obama – Nicolas Sarkozy :deux discours à l’opposé”,
nouvelobs.com, 2/04/2009 (video).
\textsuperscript{7} The article comes back on this issue, section 5.

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Obama and Sarkozy’s speeches can be downloaded from official websites. The translation of Sarkozy’s speech issued by the French Embassy in Washington proved very useful for our study. It should be noted that this analysis was not combined with quantitative research methods for three reasons: (i) the study is based on two speeches which are only 1545 words long for Obama and 1147 for Sarkozy, (ii) the semantic parameters under study were more easily collected when located manually and (iii) this type of discourse analysis takes into consideration a rather wide scope of linguistic data ranging from metaphorical expression to grammatical material. The word count tool was used for specific purposes such as the analysis of the use of pronouns made by Sarkozy and Obama.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF HOW GLOBAL WARMING IS EXPRESSED

The first question which needs to be answered is: how do the Presidents refer to global warming in their speeches? More specifically, and knowing that the range of possibilities is rather limited, which words and expressions are here called upon?

2.1. Sarkozy’s speech

The first half of Sarkozy’s speech is dedicated to global warming and to its consequences. Copenhagen is repeated 7 times throughout the speech. Global warming is connected to the notion of reality, repeated twice, which implicitly contrasts with its potential fictive dimension based either on denial or on the global warming controversy (also known as ClimateGate) and which may also indirectly refer to the position adopted by the United States under G.W. Bush’s Administration, especially during his first term:

1) From the unanimous scientists, we know that global warming is a reality. No one can dispute this reality.

Political and diplomatic words are opposed to true actions. Discrepancies between these two fields are presented as the reason of this ongoing failure to tackle global warming within the realm of reality, i.e. through a tangible, extra-linguistic, somehow bodily response:

2) There’s no point in being hypocritical, no point in indulging in diplomatic or political tinkering; (...) I propose that we (...) meet to stop (...) making speeches which aren’t followed up by results, playing diplomatic games, and (to) put concrete proposals on the table.

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8 http://www.ambafrance-us.org/climate/united-nations-summit-on-climate-change-speech-by-nicolas-sarkozy/

9 See Al Gore (2006: 264-65) for a summary of the scandal disclosed by the New York Times in 2005 regarding Philip Cooney, appointed chief of the White House Environment Office by G.W. Bush in 2001 and whose unofficial mission was to edit the media and science publications on global warming.
The use of many adverbials and expressions of time emphasizes the countdown which separates this generation from disaster, i.e. from a planet whose temperature rise could exceed an average of 2 degrees centigrade:

3) we are the last generation that can take action; for the first time, we have to decide for the planet; we are today on the path to failure; today we lack will and confidence; rarely a choice has been so crucial for the future of mankind (…)

And the TIME metaphor found at the end of the speech pushes the urgency one step further:

4) (...) time isn’t on our side, time is our judge, we are already living on borrowed time

TIME is here conceptualized not as an ALLY who stands by us but as a JUDGE. The activation of this specific protagonist frames (Lakoff 2004) global warming as a situation where mankind/we, the DEFENDANT, is put ON TRIAL and where the verdict has not been delivered yet. Mankind is therefore personified. The aforementioned metaphor is also combined to that of ILLNESS as shown by the idiom live on borrowed time meaning “live on although death was expected”. By contiguity, one of the entailments (to use Lakoff’s terminology) is that the planet and its inhabitants will be sentenced to death if a protocol is not agreed on soon. The solutions to curb global warming can mainly be reached via choice, decision and action10.

Sarkozy’s position is based on a radical “either X or (else) Y” semantic formula which runs throughout the speech (see section 5.1). The lack of will and confidence the President refers to regarding firm decision-making processes is mainly and wrongly due, according to him, to two parameters perceived as impossible to combine: a fight against global warming on the one hand, and a growing economy on the other.

2. 2. Obama’s speech

As opposed to Sarkozy’s emphasis on the Copenhagen summit, the toponym Copenhagen is only repeated once in Obama’s speech. The President never uses the expression global warming and refers, instead, to climate change. The latter occurs 5 times. Whether climate change11 could be considered an understatement has more to do with scientific data than with rhetoric per se. Yet, Obama seems to willingly “take the heat out” of the debate by presenting the issue as less catastrophic and by alleviating the guilt prompted by the expression “global warming” which often implies that the causes are predominantly human induced. Addressing climate change issues is presented as a challenge, a global fight, a combat, a global commitment but

10 The word count indicates the following: choice 3 and choose 3; decision 1 and decide 6; action 3.
11 See the definition given for the two expressions by the American Environmental Protection Agency. http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/basicinfo.html
The expression “climate change” was preferred to “global warming” under the Bush Administration.
not as hanging over mankind like the Sword of Damocles. Obama does outline the danger ahead:

5) we risk consigning future generations to an irreversible catastrophe.

And the terms threat/threaten occur 5 times while the notion of safety is omnipresent:

6) an irreversible catastrophe; the security and stability of each nation and all peoples (...) are in jeopardy; endangering the planet; a world that is safer, etc.

But the President makes numerous explicit references to the progress already accomplished in the fight against climate change which he sums up as follows:

7) And I am proud to say that the United States has done more to promote clean energy and reduce carbon pollution in the last eight months than at any other time in our history.

The speech definitely marks the beginning of a new era, according to the President, but climate change has already been acknowledged and is being taken care of. Even if the countdown has started, Obama adopts a much more positive and much less radical stance towards climate change:

8) And the time we have to reverse this tide is running out. And yet, we can reverse it.

The reference made to time in Obama’s speech is different from that highlighted in Sarkozy’s as the stress is laid on the present time with the use of deictics such as today (4 times) and here (5 times) and with the use of the present continuous: we are making; we are constructing; that are creating. References to the future show that the change has been planned and that stages have been defined:

9) a standard that will save consumers’ money; we'll begin tracking how much greenhouse gas pollution ; later this week, I will work with my colleagues

However, although TIME is not here conceptualized as a JUDGE, HISTORY is presented as such:

10) Our generation’s response to this challenge will be judged by history.

The scenario of a trial where mankind needs to come clean and in which guilt should play an important part is therefore also activated by Obama, but to a much lesser degree.

3. A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO THE USE OF THE PATH SCHEMA

The PATH schema (Johnson 1987) is called upon in both speeches and is exploited as source domain data projected onto the target of the mapping process. Although the target domains the PATH is projected upon share common features in both speeches, the framing which accompanies these mappings varies greatly. Since the metaphorical expressions collected are quite numerous, they have been inserted in the annex.
3.1. Obama’s speech

Based on the metaphorical and metonymical expressions found in the corpus, the conceptual network obtained can easily be outlined. Fighting climate change is conceptualized as moving forward along a path, the latter corresponding to sustainable growth. This fight turns out to be a difficult journey. The new actions taken to combat global warming correspond to the beginning of the journey, knowing that it begins “now”, i.e. the day the speech was delivered. Obama therefore gives the speech a performative dimension even though he considers that the American people already was on a path to change. The actual speech is therefore a vehicle “we” embark on. The American people are the travelers on board and they are joined, more specifically, by the Administration, the scientists and the engineers. Sometimes, due to the scope of antecedence induced by the pronoun “we”, the people on board also include the rest of the world, i.e. the other developed nations, the developing nations and the poorest ones. However, these various countries are never named.

Decisions and choices which are made to combat climate change are steps and strides taken along the path. Doubts and difficulties correspond to impediments to motion and journey. Copenhagen is the first stop of the journey where everybody gets off to take stock on the possible solutions and to reflect on the course the journey should follow. Hence the solutions to be agreed on by the global leaders will define the orientation of the path. Making this world a better, cleaner and safer place for future generations, namely for our children, corresponds to the final destination of this journey.

3.2. Sarkozy’s speech

According to the French President, the current path treaded on was taken a long time ago by all the developed nations. It is made of the following constituents:

- a SOURCE: the denial of global warming and fear of choices that need to be made
- the actual PATH: a succession of failures
- an END POINT: a catastrophe

Copenhagen is the last chance given to shift directions and to redefine the orientation of the path for the developed nations as well as for the rest of the world. Therefore Copenhagen is a decisive crossroads which could lead “us” from the wrong path, along which “we” endanger the planet, to the right one. The new path is made of a compromise between a growing economy and a fight against global warming. Sarkozy emphasizes that the new path will either be followed by everybody or by no one. The dimension of threat, not to say blackmail, added to the message reinforces the responsibility each nation is confronted with. Because the JOURNEY metaphor is not activated in this speech, the metaphorical network of motion conveys a much drabber message where hope seems to be nowhere in sight and in which failure has so far played the central part. The telling difference between the two exploitations of the path, conceptualization wise, is that Sarkozy does not resort to the JOURNEY
metaphor as a means of framing this motion along a path as such. The narrative he centers on limits itself to going from “source” to “goal” and from “wrong path” to “right path”. Whereas Obama never pictures this motion as taking place on the wrong path whose end point equates with catastrophe, Sarkozy does and he therefore openly activates the dimension of failure that “we” are grappling with. And since the destination of a journey equates with hope and well-being, it bars Sarkozy from using the JOURNEY metaphor.

4. SARKOZY VS OBAMA: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF ONE SALIENT RHETORICAL FEATURE

Although the two speeches unveil two different types of stylistic mechanism, the present analysis shows that two main specific communication parameters clearly differentiate the two presidents’ style and the overall political stance they choose to adopt.

4.1. Sarkozy’s rhetoric of radicalism

At first sight, the most striking aspect of Sarkozy’s speech is the rarity of figurative language. So as to enable us to investigate that area safely, it should be underlined that the complex notions of “literal meaning” and “literality” are here taken in the following sense (Gibbs 2002: 75):

Within the cognitive sciences there are at least five types of literality that are mostly implicit in discussions of figurative language:

- **Conventional literality**, in which literal usage is contrasted with poetic usage, exaggeration, embellishment, indirectness, and so on.

- **Subject-matter literality**, in which certain expressions are the usual ones used to talk about a particular topic.

- **Nonmetaphorical literality**, or directly meaningful language, in which one word (concept) is never understood in terms of a second word (or concept).

- **Truth conditional literality**, or language that is capable of “fitting the world” (i.e., of referring to objectively existing objects or of being objectively true or false).

- **Context-free literality**, in which the literal meaning of an expression is its meaning apart from any communicative situation or its meaning in a null context.

Compared to Obama’s speech, Sarkozy’s could be described as “going straight to the point” by avoiding stylistic ornament. And the five non-watertight categories aforementioned turn out to all refer to the literality dealt with in the present section, although two of them indisputably stand out.

The President’s main goal is to appear as an honest, efficient and utterly dynamic decision-maker even if this leads to communicating bluntly and therefore

12 The author would like to thank Zoltán Kövecses for his useful comments (personal conversation, Lodz, January 2010) regarding this specific issue.
relying on a blend of “truth conditional literality” and “nonmetaphorical literality”. The rhetorical strategy adopted overtly shies away from tropes (Charaudeau & Maingueneau 2002: 590-91). Yet, the power of persuasion surfaces in various, even if somewhat less visible, ways which nicely dovetail with Sarkozy’s volition of making rhetoric equate with minimal art (cf. section 6).

Negation is a very important aspect of Sarkozy’s rhetoric which, on its own, would deserve an in-depth investigation. The expression of negation surfaces through various linguistic means in the speech such as negative stance, syntactic negation and lexical negation. The “scope of negation” and the way the “nonassertive territory” are exploited (Quirk & Greenbaum 1990: 223-30) are numerous. The utterances can indeed be negative in form, in meaning or in both. The utterances which are related to what we chose to call “negation stance” throw the audience into a state of doubt and fear, where little room is left for self-confidence and hope, as the following illustrates:

11) If we don’t succeed, it will be a disaster.
   We are today on the path to failure.
   Today we lack two things: will and confidence.
   Time isn’t on our side, time is our judge

The speech lays stress on the wrong choices and decisions made so far regarding environmental issues with finality. Syntactic negation reinforces the idea that the threat posed by global warming has not yet been fully considered:

12) If we don’t succeed; there’s no more disputing this; what we don’t decide; there’s no point in X; we have to decide not for W, X or Y but for Z; there’s no other choice; if we don’t do this; as for good news, there isn’t much, but; we can’t have one part of the world protecting the planet and another part (...) refusing to do so; there’s no will to do so

Most of these utterances imply that “we” are not ready to act in a responsible way and they are based on the radical semantic formula “if we don’t do positive X then negative Y is bound to happen” which encompasses a certain degree of threat.

“Semantic negation” should be here taken in a broad sense, i.e. as words which activate the negativity bias and therefore make the audience feel insecure, not to say depressed:

13) No one; fail; disaster; refuse; failure; playing diplomatic games; we are already living on borrowed time

Opposition also plays an important role in the French President’s rhetoric and is encoded via various syntactic and lexical means, such as the use of the conjunctions or, but and and:

14) Today, we have only 87 days left to succeed or fail.
   We have to choose between disaster or the solution.
   We don’t need X, but at least Y
Either we all do it (...) or we don’t all do it
But today we have to go far further.
We can’t have one part of the world protecting (...) and another (...) refusing to do so

Some oppositions are also based on the contrastive use of primary, reflexive, possessive or indefinite pronouns:

15) We know X / No one can dispute X
I want to propose X / If we don’t do X
They (the merging countries) have to join us
We are ready to this / you yourselves must do X
We, the developed countries, will have to X / you, the emerging countries will have to Y

Although this rhetorical device is clearly not used to open onto hope, it outlines a possible compromise between fighting global warming and ensuring economic growth.

Another rhetorical feature which characterizes Sarkozy’s speech is the frequent use of repetition where the occurrences are juxtaposed, with the second or the third one sometimes undergoing inflation (for instance, with the use of even):

16) We know that global warming is a reality. No one can dispute this reality. We know that we have to limit it to 2° (...) we have to decide not for our countries, not for our regions, not even for our continents, we have to decide for the planet.
We are deciding for the whole planet and what we don’t decide (...) to decide.
There’s no point in being X, no point in Y. There’s no point even in Z
What do we lack? Today we lack two things (...)

The various examples of repetition could mainly be subsumed under the rhetorical figures of epanaphora, epanalepsis and pallilologia (Suhamy 1992). Political speeches welcome repetitions because they activate anaphora and cohesion on the basis of short-term memory processes and they keep the audience’s attention. However, the repetitions analyzed here hammer the point to such an extent that the audience is close to being considered as not able to get the message if not duplicated.

So as to appear convincing, Sarkozy therefore decides not to call upon figurative language. However, negation or the activation of the “nonassertive territory”, opposition and repetition are three rhetorical devices which aim at strengthening the power of persuasion. Negation triggers the negativity bias which, by contiguity, generates fear and insecurity on the part of the audience. Opposition enables Sarkozy to establish blatant contrasts. And repetition activates short-term memory and a sense of cohesion. These three parameters allow him to emphasize his own role and responsibility as President in an authoritative manner.
4.2. Obama’s narrative rhetoric

Obama’s account of the climate crisis relies on a narrative which takes the shape of an apocalyptic tale in two distinct passages:

17) Rising sea levels threaten every coastline. More powerful storms and floods threaten every continent; More frequent drought and crop failures; On shrinking islands; The security and stability of each nation is in jeopardy

The dramatic effect obtained by such a narrative, where Mother Nature is presented as spiraling out of control, contrasts with the list of solutions presented in much longer paragraphs:

18) We are making; entrepreneurs are constructing; projects that are creating; We’re investing; we’re moving forward

Even though Obama centers the beginning of his speech on the dramatic consequences of climate change, he rapidly moves on to the rescue narrative where he first takes stock on the issues that have so far been solved, the actions that are currently being taken and those scheduled for the near future. And although Obama underlines that (he) did not come here to celebrate progress today, he clearly shows the rest of the world, thanks to this rhetorical figure known as paralipsis (emphasizing a point by deliberately seeming to pass over it), how efficient, determined and hopeful his Administration and country are.

Besides, due to the lack of commitment regarding climate change issues under the Bush Administration, Obama also makes variably explicit amends:

19) It is true that for too many years, mankind has been slow to respond (...) It is true of my own country, as well. We recognize that.

(...) these steps represent a historic recognition on behalf of the American people and their government. We understand the gravity of the climate threat.

(...) after too many years of inaction and denial (...)

The use of a narrative as a means of persuasion is known, in communication studies and journalism, as “storytelling” (Poletta 2006, Salmon 2007, Bonneville 2008, Bonneville 2009). Because it stems from the basic constituents of what a story is made of, this tool therefore informs the reader while also entertaining him. Turning facts and information into a narrative corresponds to a discourse strategy that inevitably leads to simplifying the data in order to give the audience a more synthetic view on complex issues such as global warming. The frames activated via these two narratives are danger and threat on the one hand, and rescue combined to regained safety on the other. Danger and threat therefore correspond to the required situation of imbalance, whereas rescue coincides with balance (Johnson 1993: 150-84). More specifically, these are the underlying structure common to all narratives which could be summed

13 Le point virgule indique une énumération de passages tronqués dont seuls ont été conservés les mots pertinents pour l’étude.
up as follows: the United States (and the world) was in a state of danger because of denial of climate change. But it has started taking actions and hope is on the way as they will eventually succeed in challenging the climate crisis to achieve (their) common purpose: a world that is safer, cleaner and healthier than the one we found; and a future that is worthy of our children.

Another important feature of Obama’s speech is that he presents himself as walking the timeline with his people. Be it past, present or future, he merges with them. For instance, the present time equates with rupture via temporal expressions such as:

20) Today; a new day; a new era; than at any other time in our history

The recent past, encoded by temporal expressions but also by the use of the present perfect, is emphasized as it refers to the actions taken by the Obama Administration. A more distant past is referred to via the quotation of J. F. Kennedy: “Our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man.” This utterance was pronounced by J. F. K. during a speech given in June 1963 in Washington D.C.\(^\text{14}\), some time after the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis. The quotation is originally followed by:

And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man’s reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable, and we believe they can do it again.

The main topic addressed by J. F. K. was world peace (as opposed to the Pax Americana) as seen through the prism of the United States’ attitude towards the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Even though a quotation has a life on its own, we may still wonder about this particular choice whose contextual background refers to the Cold War. We may ponder over Obama’s wish to establish a connection between (i) the threat posed by climate change as well as the challenge America is ready to face and (ii) what the United States went through during the Cold War. Therefore, could the frame of the Cold War have been voluntarily activated, at least subliminally, for the rhetorical purpose of analogy?

5. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE USE OF THE PRONOUNS I AND WE

Prior to investigating the token frequency of these deictics, our expectations were that Sarkozy’s use of the pronoun I and of the possessive determiner my would dominate over we and our and that Obama’s use of these four pronouns and determiners would disclose the opposite pattern, i.e. a more important use of we and our than of I and my. These expectations were based on the overall tone of the speeches: Sarkozy’s paternalistic and authoritative tone would call upon I and my while Obama’s more

\(^{14}\) http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1963kennedy-peacestrat.html
empathic style would rely on we and our. Yet, the following word count discloses surprising results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Obama</th>
<th>Sarkozy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As expected, the occurrences of we combined with those of our are much more numerous in Obama’s speech than in Sarkozy’s. Besides, Obama seldom uses I and my is only found once. One striking element is that the number of occurrences of we is somewhat equivalent in both speeches, given that Obama’s speech is longer than Sarkozy’s.

But, interestingly enough, the result which went against our assumptions is related to Sarkozy’s use of I and my. Although the reading of his speech makes his persona much more present on the discursive stage than Obama’s in his own speech, the French President uses I almost 4 times less than we and he never uses my. We therefore decided to investigate the antecedents referred to by these pronouns and determiners to elucidate this change in expectations.

Sarkozy uses we as a way to differentiate, in turn, France, Europe and the World from his own decisions and role. His speech contains several performative utterances thanks to which he alone turns out to be the decision-maker whose aim is to gradually build a process of heroification. This is where I precisely comes into play and dramatically contrasts with the antecedents implied by we.

Obama’s use of we indicates a fluctuation of antecedents as the pronoun can refer, more or less clearly, to his Administration, to his Administration and the American people, to the United States and to the planet. Excluded from possible antecedents are they/them, namely (i) those rapidly growing developing nations, China being one of them, which need to commit to strong measures the way the developed nations did and (ii) other (poorer) developing nations.

Therefore, while Obama stands by his people and is systematically part of we, i.e. of a group with fuzzy boundaries, Sarkozy appears to “go it alone”.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON SARCOZY AND OBAMA’S CHOICE OF RHETORICAL DEVICES

Because, as the present analysis demonstrates, the most striking rhetorical aspect which differentiates the two speeches is based on the literal/figurative artificial dichotomy, part of this investigation was to define whether the use of figurative language systematically strengthens the rhetorical dimension of a political speech. In other words, which other types of discursive strategies can be called upon to ensure
that the audience will be convinced by the fact that global warming/climate change needs to be tackled?

Obama’s use of the expression “climate change” and his emphasis on the notion of hope sharply contrast with Sarkozy’s choice for “global warming” and the fact that his speech generates feelings of fear, insecurity and threat. Taking actions against climate change is framed by the JOURNEY metaphor in Obama’s speech whereas Sarkozy calls upon the MOTION ALONG A PATH metaphor only. And if the American people is already on the way to change according to Obama, Sarkozy states that France is still walking the wrong path and needs to shift directions at the Copenhagen summit to avoid catastrophe. Time, also, is conceptualized in two different ways. Obama adopts a reassuring stance about the present and looks back with confidence at the progress already made, whereas Sarkozy states that the issue has still not been seriously considered, that the past equates with failure, which means the world is in a state of emergency.

The French President delivers a pessimistic diagnosis and the anxiety his speech prompts in the audience helps him appear, thanks to the use of pronouns, possessive determiners and performative utterances, as the efficient decision-maker who will finally lead France on the path to sustainable economy. The strength of persuasion stems from specific rhetorical tools: repetition, negation and opposition. Obama resorts to a combination of two narratives, the apocalyptic vs. the rescue tale, to first acknowledge the gravity of climate change and then offer a list of solutions in a reassuring tone. The decisions to make are framed as a common fight or a challenge which puts the American people in the position of the responsible and successful main protagonist, as illustrated by J.F.K.’s quotation and by Obama’s use of pronouns and possessive determiners. The implicit reference to the Cold War is made to display a sense of unity and cohesion and might also bring closer together “environmental issues” and “war on climate change”. This hypothesis echoes Norris, Kern and Just’s statement (2003: 14-15) according to which the “Cold War frame” gradually lost “its intellectual coherence and narrative power” in the 1990’s and was therefore replaced by the “War on Terror frame” after 9/11, which enabled politicians as well as journalists to reactivate the war narrative which includes: allies; enemies; a fight; the “us vs. them” dichotomy; security vs. fear; reassuring characters vs. threatening ones or, more simply put, a hero, some victims and a villain.

From a rhetorical standpoint, the emotions aroused by these two speeches are quite distinct: Obama infuses his remarks with compassion, understanding and hope, whereas Sarkozy puts the audience in an uncomfortable position where everybody, apart from him, is held responsible and has not yet realized how serious and real global warming is. In Lakoff’s terms (1996), Sarkozy therefore appears as the prototypical authoritative “Strict Father” of a family model whose immature children must learn “self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority” (Ibid.: 33) so as to evolve safely in the dangerous outside world. And Sarkozy chose to enforce his authority by adopting a dry and literal way of communication whose strength emanates from rhetorical figures but not from tropes. Although his speech is framed by the strict
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father model, the framing process is not based on a network of figurative expressions, which proves that working on frames and conceptualization processes cannot solely rest on the elaboration of a dry taxonomy of tropes in the first place. Obama’s speech offers an illustration of the “Nurturant Parent model” (ibid.: 33) whose government (the parents) displays empathy and protection towards its nation (the family).

The expectations shared by the audience regarding both presidents are encoded in their speeches through various means. And the field of figurative language has been investigated to such an extent in cognitive linguistics and semantics that applied cognitive rhetoric should encompass other discourse analysis parameters that unveil cognitive processes which are not encoded figuratively on the “surface language”. The sharp contrast resulting from the use of figurative language on the one hand (Obama) and literal language on the other (Sarkozy) displays two different rhetorical paths which, however, can both potentially serve the purpose of greenwashing (Greer & Kenny 1996). In classical rhetoric, three main degrees of style are defined (Patillon 1990): simple or “low”; middle; high. Whereas Obama’s style is openly “high”, Sarkozy’s could be described as “simple” but is in fact, for strategic purposes again, a high and intricate style in disguise.

Bibliography


A cognitive rhetoric approach to two political speeches


ANNEX (SECTION 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obama’s speech</th>
<th>Sarkozy’s speech</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As we head towards Copenhagen (...)</td>
<td>(...) those who follow us will no longer (...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hardest part of the journey is in front of us.</td>
<td>(...) let’s look clearly at the situation we are. We are today on the path to failure if we go on as we are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of us will face doubts and difficulties (...) as we try to reach a lasting solution (...)</td>
<td>(...) move from high carbon growth to sustainable growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(...) to make Copenhagen a significant step forward in the global fight against climate change.</td>
<td>But today we have to go much further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We cannot allow the old divisions that have characterized the climate debate (...) to block our progress.</td>
<td><em>adapted translation of an expression used in French</em> Either we all tread it or we don’t (the path to sustainable growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of (the developing nations) have already made great strides (with the development of clean energy).</td>
<td><em>adapted translation of an expression used in French</em> You (the developing and emerging countries) must be present at the planet’s meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(...) to put other developing nations (...) on a path to sustainable growth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(...) many nations have already taken the first steps on the journey towards that goal (build a better world).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>But the journey is long. The journey is hard. And we don’t have much time left to make it. It is a journey that will require each of us to persevere (...), and fight for every inch of progress (...)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So let us begin (the journey).</td>
<td></td>
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