

### Introduction: 3-5 sentences

Who is the audience of Obama's speech, and what is its purpose? Therefore, in what context does he deliver this speech? How much control does Obama have when adjusting his spoken language?

- Aimed to persuade people to vote for him.
- Initially an underdog
- Aimed to connect with audience while still remaining authoritative
- Controls figurative message through use of spoken language techniques

Barack Obama delivered this speech during his election campaign to persuade voters that a vote for him would lead to positive and lasting change. Although he was initially an underdog, he used this to connect with his audience while remaining authoritative and presidential. In this particular speech he is able to use spoken language techniques to control a variety of figurative message that centre around his anthem of 'Yes We Can.'

### Analysis: 5 paragraphs, each at least 5 sentences

You need to pick out points thematically. That is, you need not progress chronologically through the speech (although it might be useful for some.) Also, you should avoid merely analysing a different technique in each paragraph. Yes, you must analyse different techniques particular to spoken language – this is always rooted in the context of the language, though. What I mean by 'rooted in the context' is that the technique must specifically be applied to what is being said. Therefore, repetition doesn't just emphasise what is being said – the repetition of 'yes we can' creates a positive anthem that sustains the examples of how negative situations have been overcome, for example.

*1) Extract begins with how Obama takes the audience into his confidence (although this was not the beginning of the speech) – refers to personal pronoun "we know" and audience interaction.*

- Obama infers how party are underdogs
- Why use militaristic language?
- eye contact (and pause) with audience on "we know"
- Who is the 'we' in this phrase?

As the extract opens Obama infers that his party are the underdogs in the election battle. Using militaristic language he states, "the battle ahead will be long." While it is a risky strategy to seem to admit weakness, this is part of his overall strategy to suggest that the status quo (to vote for the Republicans) would be a lazy mistake. His ability to interact with the audience is indicative in his emphatic use of "we know." He sweeps his eye contact on the audience at this point to suggest he is referring to many of them. In addition he pauses after the phrase, "we know." While the "we" may, on paper, be referring to Obama and his party, the pause states that he wants the audience to consider what they might know, and therefore hopefully align themselves with his principles.

*2) Continuing Obama's appeal to be highly personal with audience, he makes a reference to slavery (perhaps to pre-empt potential negative reactions to his colour?) – refers to figurative language and paralinguistic feature of hand gesture.*

- Obama would be first black president
- hand gesture is most pronounced of speech during 'the darkest of nights'

- wants colour to be perceived as a positive thing
- how might a reference to slavery (something that embarrasses America) be normally perceived by a politician?
- What effect would it have on audience should he confidently handle a controversial issue?

Obama's principles must consider the fact that, if elected, he would be the first black president of America. When he states that his anthem of 'yes we can' was 'whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights', his hand gesture is the most pronounced of the speech. By emphasising this particular figurative language – "blazed a trail towards freedom" – he is attempting to emphasise his colour as a positive thing. While slavery would be a negative and contentious subject to raise, his hand gesture implies he wants to emphasise how he will not shy away from addressing it. Therefore, in confidently handling a contentious issue, he hopes to gain the audience's confidence and trust.

*3) Gaining the audience's trust allows him to use the term 'false hope' to pre-empt criticisms against him – refers to abstract noun and use of pause.*

- Obama tries to gain audience's trust with term 'false hope.'
- Employs fantastical imagery – will audience automatically accept this imagery?
- Obama pauses after false hope.
- Is this pause implying that his message is too ambitious? Is it significant that he is suggesting this?
- Contrast connective resolves tension of pause
- Hopes people will side with him emotionally (having faith in him) against rational criticisms

Obama's desire to gain the audience's trust is established earlier when he states that his opponents will accuse him of 'false hope'. This trust is essential because, as with "blazed a trail", Obama employs fantastical imagery throughout the speech. Such ambitious language requires the audience to actively want to accept his message if it is to be effective. Therefore, it is significant that Obama pauses emphatically at the end of the abstract noun phrase "false hope". In doing so, it is he (not his critics) who suggests that his message for change could be too ambitious. Furthermore, while the pause intends to lull the audience into uncertainty, he continues with the contrasting connective 'but in the unlikely story...' which resolves this tension. Consequently, Obama's use of pausing hopes to manipulate the audience to emotionally side with him (by appreciating and rejecting the notion of false hope) against rational critics (who rightly suggest that he is unlikely to change society).

*4) Links the bond between the audience and the workers of America to points of civil changes in America's past that were only positive with hindsight.*

- Obama gains trust by referring to points of civil change.
- Were these points of civil change always positive?
- Tone is emphatic and repetitive in giving examples
- Refers to 'workers who were organised' and ends on 'a king who took us the mountaintop(.)and pointed the way to the promised land.'
- Religious language and Martin Luther King reference
- Is Obama being deliberately abstract? How might the audience feel if they detect/infer his message?
- Is this a risky strategy?
- Audience have already applauded more tangible references earlier. Does this make them more receptive to abstract messages?

Obama further gains the audience's trust by referring to points of civil change that may have seemed negative to some people at the time. He controls his tone in an emphatic and repetitive manner when he refers to 'the workers who were organised...' amongst other examples, he ends with a reference to 'a king who took us to the mountaintop(.)and pointed the way to the promised land.' Firstly he is deliberately using religious imagery that would appeal effectively to an American audience. In addition, this is a reference to language used by Martin Luther King, who by this point is accepted as a figure for social justice and change (although he was lambasted by some sections of society in his time.) However, its effectiveness is in the abstract nature of the reference: if the audience is able to detect the connotations, then it is as if "they know" (as he stated at the opening of this extract) the secret of his positive message. While this might seem a risky strategy for a politician to adopt, Obama assumes that the audience would have already applauded the more concrete references earlier (as they do), and would therefore be able to accept religious figurative language.

5) Links this rebellion against opponents with the call to the manual workers of America evident in the final section – refers to increase in pace, continued audience interaction (to bond to one another) and implicit reference to patriotic song 'God Bless America'

- Has gained trust without attacking his critics
- Controls intonation and speeds up delivery
- Refers to how manual workers are similar
- Techniques used are: repetitive use of pronouns; figurative language with a formal dialect
- His message is both personal, yet still authoritative
- Increased pace encourages audience to applaud at end of speech

By the end of the speech Obama has gained the trust of the audience without directly attacking his critics. In particular, his controlled intonation that rouses towards a climatic end suggests the audience will oppose those who would call him too idealistic. For example, as he refers how manual workers of America are similar – the 'textile worker' and the 'dishwasher' – he increases the pace of his delivery. The techniques that he has been employing before – the repetitive use of pronouns, figurative language used with a formal dialect – help this message to remain remarkably personal, yet still appropriately authoritative for a president. Furthermore, in increasing his pace, he implicitly lets the audience know that the speech is coming to an end, and is therefore encouraging their applause (and by implication) acceptance of his message. His control is so expert that by the end the audience is incessantly applauding, and yet he is able to pause significantly between the final five words.

### **Conclusion: 3-5 sentences**

**What particularly makes this speech successful in achieving its purpose? What distinctively, in terms of spoken language, makes it effective?**

- Purpose was to draw audience into his confidence
- He persuades them to accept some radical messages
- The default choice would have been to vote against him
- Is America's past based on opposing the status quo?
- Obama's varied reactions to audience's chanting showed how he controls them.
- Being authoritative, yet personal, perhaps won him the vote.

Obama's control of his spoken language enables him to draw his audience into his confidence, and

therefore encourage them to vote for him. He manipulates them into accepting some radical messages of rejecting the status quo (i.e. voting against him) by suggesting that America was founded on such principles. In particular, his ability to pause (and smile) while the audience chants 'Yes We Can' showed that he was able to portray a personal response to the audience. However, he is also able to talk over them when repeating his ideas of how America had struggled against odds before. This suggests that he is still able to be authoritative, which is partly why he was voted president.