

OBAMA'S INAUGURAL ADDRESSES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CORPUS LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

A presidential inaugural speech marks, formally, the beginning of a president's term of office in many countries. In such a speech, the head of state establishes his/her intentions as a leader. Presidents-to-be may also include social, economic and political remarks. This paper aims at analyzing the vocabulary in Barack Obama's two inaugural speeches in order to detect the major issues at these two historical moments for the American society. A corpus of 4051 words was compiled and consists of Obama's complete inaugural speeches. AntConc software was used to quantify the words most frequently chosen as well as the number of times each word appeared. It was noticed different lexical choices in both speeches when comparing the two frequency list generated from them. The paper concludes that the content of the two speeches were influenced by different historical moments.

Key words: inaugural address, Obama, lexical choice.

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, a world historical event took place: the first black American president was elected: Barack Hussein Obama II reached the higher political position in world. He occupied this position after George W. Bush's government, which was marked by the USA increased war activity. In 2013, Obama was reelected after a period of economic shocks in his own mandate. After these two elections, Obama made the traditional inaugural speech.

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The inaugural speech is the address given by the elected president during the ceremony to mark the beginning of a term of office. In this address, the president is expected to show his intentions as a leader. These intentions are seen in the speech content, mainly through word and structure choices.

According to Biria and Mohammadi's study (2012), there is an intrinsic relation between the use of language and the effectiveness of discourse intent. In a speech, the speaker wants to convince his audience about his view. They say that, until 1960, the main purpose in an inaugural address was to show "*the power and role of the president holding office*" (p. 1291). Nowadays, discourse analysts are also concerned about the intentions and the convincing power of those addresses. Persuasion and rhetoric of such speeches were studied by other scholars (e.g. DENTON; HAHN, 1986). Above all, the presidential discourses have a function of leading and convincing the audience (CHENG, 2006).

Several researchers have analyzed Obama's speeches. GUNAWAN (2009) analyzes the use of words, such as nouns, verbs, and adverbs; the use of syntactic structures as well as the figures of speech regarding the intentions of the president in the address of 2009. This author establishes the theme of Obama's speech: the idea of unity about "*the kind of life expected by Americans*" (p. 3). The president also mentions the crisis in which the country is. Obama tries to convince people they will overcome this situation.

Gunawan (2009, p. 95) found out that Obama's discourse was structured as the following: "(1) opening, (2) acknowledging the prevailing economic crisis, (3) conviction of Americans' capability to overcome crisis, (4) soliciting cooperation from the opposing cynical politicians and forces, (5) repositioning of the U.S. global involvement, and (6) closing: the power resting on the people to resolve their common problems". He also discovered that collective nouns were employed to refer to the American people. Verbs were used to convince the audience about the overcoming of the crisis. This research points out that Obama encourages the nation to build a better country. Moreover, the study shows that the U.S. president established his desire of administration renovation.

Batluk (2011) also analyzed Obama's first speech with support of several linguistic techniques. The author showed how the discourse created a unity

between the speaker and audience. She mentions that the former government actions (war, economic crisis) created a decrease in Republicans' popularity, Obama's opposition. Thus, the appearance of a president willing not to fight brought a new air to the country.

Batluk also proved the use of rhythm in the speech in order to promote an emotional atmosphere as well as to facilitate the presentation of content. This rhythm was achieved through parallelism and metre. The use of such devices allowed the memorization of information. Moreover, she also explained the preaching characteristics in Obama's speaking. Aiming to be democratic, Obama does not talk about one single religion. He refers to the "scripture", instead of the Bible, to cover no specific religion. His speaking resembled Afro-American sermons, and presented elements of Gospel. Finally, the author made a deep analysis of the use of pronouns *we*, *our* and *us*, which created a unity between the speaker and the audience.

Following the aforementioned papers, the aim of the present research is to compare Obama's two speeches based on the lexical choices made: what they have in common, how the socio-politic-economic context influenced the choice of words, and what their mood was. This research is valid because it should allow us to see how language, politics and intentions are linked. In other words, the political speech has a very well planned composition; the text is not convincing by chance. Furthermore, this analysis should lead us to a better understanding of Obama's discourse in general.

1 METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the analysis of Obama's two inaugural speeches, in 2009 and in 2013. The corpus contains 4472 words: the first speech has 2393, and the second one has 2079 words. The speeches were taken from the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies site². This committee is responsible for the planning and execution of the swearing-in ceremonies and the

² Available at <<http://www.inaugural.senate.gov/>>

luncheon for the Inauguration of the President of the United States at the U.S. Capitol.

To do the corpus analysis, it was used the software AntConc, a freeware concordance program³. It allowed counting the number of words, and it generated a frequency list of terms. By using this program, it was easy to retrieve the context of use of the words on focus.

In order to develop the investigation on Obama's inaugural addresses, it was necessary to follow some steps. First, the socio, political, and economic background of each speech was researched. It involved the reading of magazines and newspapers in order to understand what could appear in the speeches. The research also aimed to verify if the economical, social and political backgrounds would affect the addresses. After this, the frequency list was generated to detect the ten (10) most common nouns in both speeches. This grammatical category was chosen because nouns are content words; therefore, they carry meaning. Then, the linguistic context of each word was analyzed and they were analyzed in the light of the historical background. Lastly, the occurrences in both speeches were compared.

2 RESULTS

In this section we first present the background in the U.S at the time of Obama's both inaugural addresses. Second, the results from his first address is shown. Third, the lexical choices made in his second inaugural address is brought to the readers.

2.1 BACKGROUND

Obama's inaugural addresses were given in two troubled contexts. In 2009 Obama took office as the American president after a polemic government. The former president, George W. Bush, led the country into several conflicting situations. During Bush's administration, there were social, political and economical

³ AntConc is available at <http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html>.

problems. As it was shown in the Washington Post headlines in 2006: “Some Americans Lack Food, but USDA Won't Call Them Hungry”⁴. The text by Elizabeth Williamson presents the U.S. government assertion about food insecurity. The government says “Americans will never be hungry again”, but they may face low food problems. Bush also faced political problems when he ordered the invasion of Iraq. The war brought economic problems to the USA. In 2008, the president cut 10% of the diplomatic posts, creating an atmosphere of bad relations with other countries. In such environment, Obama had to give his first speech to a destabilized nation, which feared for its future. He was expected to present solutions to this situation or, at least, to calm down the population.

In 2013, the reelected president had his own former government to lead his second address. Obama’s first mandate was marked by economic and social problems. According to the Senate Republican Conference (SRC), the organization of Republican Senators of the U.S.A., since his inauguration day until 2012, Obama’s debt did not allow the creation of new jobs and the growth of economy. The federal debt increased exorbitantly. Below, there are some data presented in the Senate Republican Conference⁵ site.

President Obama's debt has cut economic growth and slashed job creation:

- In the first half of 2012, federal debt grew twice as [fast](#) as economic [growth](#), and our total federal debt now exceeds the entire annual [economic output](#) of the United States.
- This level of debt is projected to reduce economic growth by [1 percent](#), which would result in [1 million](#) fewer jobs according to the president's former top economic adviser.

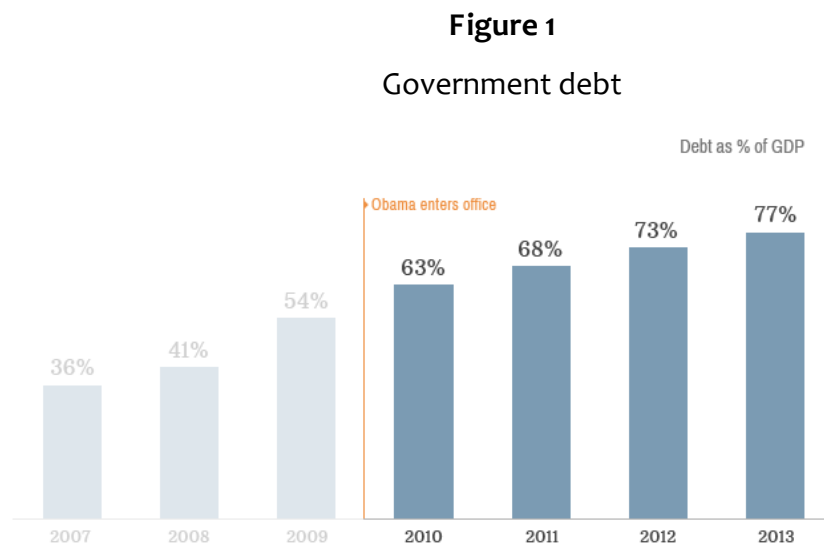
The president's broken promise to cut the deficit:

- Instead of cutting the deficit in half by the end of his first term like he [promised](#), President Obama has presided over four years of annual deficits greater than [\\$1 trillion](#).
- Before President Obama took office, the previous all-time deficit record was [\\$458 billion](#).
- The [average](#) annual deficit over the last 40 years has been \$132 billion.
- The federal debt has [climbed](#) by more than 50 percent since President Obama took office – crossing the \$16 trillion mark in September.

⁴ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/15/AR2006111501621.html>

⁵ The whole text is available at <http://www.republican.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2012/10/the-obama-economy-isn-t-working-record-debt-hurts-jobs-economy>

The Office of Management and Budget, which has the mission to forecast estimates of spending for the president's policies and programs, also presents the government debt record⁶.



Source: White House Office of Management and Budget

As the Figure 1 suggests, the government debt during Obama's first term was higher than in the previous government. In this non-favorable situation, the expectations of the American people were more intense. When Obama was elected, he was considered the leader of U.S new era, as some newspapers announced. But, after his 4-year administration, it seemed America was still facing many difficult issues. Thus, Obama, in his second address, had many critical issues to be addressed.

2.2 First SPEECH

In the first speech, Obama was in the position of the newly elected president. Then, people wanted to know what this new president, that they voted for and trusted, had to say. Furthermore, they needed an alternative to the crises

⁶ The figure was taken from CNNMoney. It is available at <http://money.cnn.com/gallery/news/economy/2014/01/28/obama-economy/17.html>

they were in. Thus, Obama's address was expected to carry content words of confidence, optimism and overcoming of problems.

The frequency noun list, presented in Table 1, was generated from Obama's first speech. The ten most frequent nouns show to which issues Obama wanted to call the attention of the audience.

Table 1

Obama's first inaugural speech frequency noun list

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	12	nation
2	10	America
3	7	people
4	7	world
5	6	time
6	5	generation
7	5	day
8	5	God
9	5	spirit
10	4	crisis

As it can be seen in the Table 1, Obama used frequently the words "nation", "America" and "people". In order to understand how the words contributed to the overall objective of the first speech, we will analyze some sentences where these frequent nouns occurred (see examples below).

1. "Our **Nation** is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred."
2. "Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the **Nation** for a new age."

3. “We remain a young **Nation**, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things.”
4. “In reaffirming the greatness of our **Nation**, we understand that greatness is never a given.”
5. “We remain the most prosperous, powerful **Nation** on Earth.”

To refer to the U.S.A., Obama chose the word “Nation”, written in capital letters. In two of the occurrences of this word, the president, openly, set that the country was facing problems regarding violence and economy (sentences 1, 2). However, as he speaks, the president creates an atmosphere of confidence, highlighting the power of the country, saying they are still a prosperous nation (sentences 3, 4, 5).

The word “nation” comes also in a context of diplomacy, integration/toleration (6, 7 below), even if, power is foregrounded (sentence 6):

6. “And so to all the other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born, know that America is a friend of each **nation** and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity and that we are ready to lead once more.”
7. “We are a **nation** of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers.”

The president shows that the United States want to have good relations with the whole world, integrating people. Probably, he is talking about immigration when he says about the people who seek peace and dignity in America. With the reference to several religions, the president shows he wants a country that respects peoples’ difference, a real united nation. By doing this, he reaffirms American sovereignty.

Following the line of thought of reaffirming the U.S. leadership, the word “America” is quite common in Obama’s speech:

8. “But know this, **America**, they (the challenges) will be met.
9. “Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking **America**.”
10. “And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that **America** must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.”

It is mentioned again that the United States has had problems. However, Obama brings the feeling of overcoming to his speech (sentences 8, 9 and 10). Therefore, he talks about a peaceful country. The country, as it is emphasized, has to make stronger the ties between the American people and the government (sentence 11).

11. “Those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day because only then can we restore the vital trust between a **people** and their government.”
12. “We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its **people** and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan.”
13. “To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict or blame their society's ills on the West, know that your **people** will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy.”

Besides establishing the intention of developing good relations, Obama also presented some solutions for the problems America was facing, regarding the

army in Iraq, the war by itself (sentences 12, 13), and the disbelief in government (sentence 11).

The use of the term “world” helps Obama refer to change. As it was expected with Obama’s victory, the president affirms he brought the era of change (sentence 14). He is an open-minded politician, in all the senses, as his mentions immigrants and people of different creed or non-believers (sentences 6, 7). The words “time” and “generation” came also to reaffirm Obama’s view of overcoming and union (sentence 15). In addition, in the context of use of “day”, the repetition of victory appears (sentence 16).

14. “For the **world** has changed, and we must change with it.”
15. “The **time** has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit, to choose our better history, to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from **generation** to **generation**, the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.”
16. “On this **day**, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.”

Towards the end of his address, Obama uses the term “God” to talk about, again, the American resistance to the crises.

17. “Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back, nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and **God's** grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.”

In a different sentence (18), taking the same purpose of encouraging the resistant to crisis, Obama’s brings an emotional tone to his speech without mentioning religion but using the word “spirit”:

18. “And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our **spirit** is stronger and cannot be broken.”

Lastly, the 10th-most frequent noun that appeared in the first inaugural address was “crisis”. It seems surprising that Obama used this word so directly. Considering his position and the background presented, admitting to the audience that the country was facing a crisis could be a risk. People could get more worried than they were. However, as it was seen throughout all the speech, Obama focused his speech on the inherent capacity of Americans resilience. He was aware of the populations’ feelings, as he would not try to pretend the situation was different. Hence, he was very direct as he talk about America’s situation (19, 20). However, as he did along the text, he made a counterpoint to the situation (21, 22):

19. “That we are in the midst of **crisis** is now well understood.”
20. “These (war, economical situation, healthy care, use of energy) are the indicators of **crisis**, subject to data and statistics.”
21. “Our workers are no less productive than when this **crisis** began.”
22. “But this **crisis** has reminded us that without a watchful eye, the market can spin out of control and that a nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous.”

Besides softening the effects of the crisis, Obama also said that there was a positive point in it. From that situation, the country could learn some lessons. Thus, Obama did not refuse the existence of the crisis, but he also did not talk about it as something despairing. He knew how to deal with the situation, leading to a balanced speech.

As the words and contexts show, in his first inaugural address, Obama wanted to calm down the population. On the other hand, he also had to face the critical situation faced by U.S.A. To achieve his purposes, he chose to give a balanced speech, focusing on the overcoming of the crises.

2.3 Second SPEECH

In 2013, Obama had already experienced the duties of a president. The American population decided to trust him one more time. In spite of his troubled first mandate, Obama seemed to be the best choice to lead the U.S.A. again.

Compared to the first speech, the president probably was more confident: he already had lived that experience and he was not a new face to the crowd. Then, the address was expected to have a different mood. On the other hand, Obama was again in an unfavorable situation. As Figure 1 showed, in his first 4 years, Obama faced an economic crisis and it was hard to recover from it. What was unexpected happened: the American superpower was destabilized.

To try to gather the population and calm them down, Obama used words that carried the meaning of unity, such as “people”, “nation” and “citizens”. While “Nation” is the fifth most frequent word, “people” is the most frequent one.

Table 3

Obama’s second inaugural speech frequency noun list

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	11	People
2	10	Time
3	8	America
4	7	country
5	7	Nation
6	6	Citizens
7	6	freedom
8	6	generation
9	6	Journey
10	5	Creed

The sentences below show how the address aimed to show government’s attention to its people:

1. “Together, we resolve that a great nation must care for the vulnerable and protect its **people** from life's worst hazards and misfortunes.”
2. “Now, more than ever, we must do these things (prepare children, build roads and labs) together as one Nation and one **people**.”
3. “For we, the **People**, understand that our country cannot succeed when a shrinking few do very well and a growing many barely make it.”
4. “We, the **people**, still believe that every citizen deserves a basic measure of security and dignity.”
5. “We, the **people**, still believe our obligations as Americans are not just to ourselves but to all posterity.”
6. “We will defend our **people** and uphold our values through strength of arms and rule of law.”

Including himself as a member of the Nation (sentences 3-6), Obama showed he is not in a difference position from the population. He also wanted to make stronger the relationship between people and government. He calls the Nation to work together, saying they must stay side by side in moments of “misfortunes”. In other words, the country only would thrive if there was a common effort.

It is worth comparing the use of “we, the people” in Obama’s speech with the occurrences of “I” and “we” by former president Bush. Biria & Mohammadi (2012) found that Bush used, frequently, pronouns referring to himself, such as “I” and “me”. Furthermore, the pronoun “we” and related words were used regarding American-Christian people. On the other hand, as it was presented in the first speech analysis, Obama used “we” to refer to every people in America: Muslims, Jews, non-believers, non-American. This use is also seen in his second speech. Thus, Obama intended to build the feeling of unity and integration. As in the following extract, Obama talks about equality (sentence 7):

7. “We, the **people**, declare today that the most evident of truths, that all of us are created equal, is the star that guides us still, just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall, just as it guided

all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great Mall to hear a preacher say we cannot walk alone, to hear a "King" proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth."

With the words "time" and "citizens", Obama brings to his speech the ideals of change and solidarity/unity (sentences 9-10):

8. "We understand outworn programs are inadequate to the needs of our **time**."
9. "We must be a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice, not out of mere charity but because peace in our **time** requires the constant advance of those principles that our common creed describes: tolerance and opportunity, human dignity and justice.
10. Progress does not compel us to settle centuries-long debates about the role of government for all **time**, but it does require us to act in our **time**."

Obama keeps his point-of-view towards peace, equality and change. He also keeps his discourse of prosperity and America's capacity seen in the first speech:

11. "**America's** possibilities are limitless, for we possess all the qualities this world without boundaries demands: youth and drive, diversity and openness, an endless capacity for risk, and a gift for reinvention."
12. "We believe **America's** prosperity must rest upon the broad shoulders of a rising middle class."
13. "We know **America** thrives when every person can find independence and pride in their work, when the wages of honest labor liberate families from the brink of hardship."
14. "But we reject the belief that America must choose between caring for the generation that built this country and investing in the generation that will build its future."

15. “**America** will remain the anchor of strong alliances in every corner of the globe, and we will renew those institutions that extend our capacity to manage crisis abroad, for no one has a greater stake in a peaceful world than its most powerful Nation.”

By using the term “America”, Obama talks directly to the workers due to the high unemployment rate. He probably tries to comfort them, showing that the country is still a leader (sentence 16). He brings relevant issues together: energy sources, immigration (sentences 16 and 17).

16. “The path toward sustainable energy sources will be long and sometimes difficult, but **America** cannot resist this transition; we must lead it.”
17. “Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see **America** as a land of opportunity; until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country.”

Based on these passages, it is possible to say Obama tried to cover as many subjects as possible in his address. He also approaches social and medical issues.

18. “The commitments we make to each other, through Medicare and Medicaid and Social Security, these things do not sap our **Nation**; they strengthen us.”

Improvement in govern administration, schools, and workers’ capacity were also mentioned by Obama, regarding the term “citizens” (sentence 19). There are also occurrences of the term “freedom”, as a reference to democratic changes (sentence 20).

19. “We must harness new ideas in technology to remake our government, revamp our Tax Code, reform our schools, and empower our **citizens** with the skills they need to work harder, learn more, and reach higher.”
20. “We will support democracy from Asia to Africa, from the Americas to the Middle East, because our interests and our conscience compel us to act on behalf of those who long for **freedom**.”

Another common term in his second speech is “journey”. Obama refers metaphorically to issues, such as gender equality and homosexual questions (sentences 21 and 22), political rights and (sentence 23) and childcare.

21. “It is now our generation's task to carry on what those pioneers began, for our **journey** is not complete until our wives, our mothers, and daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts.”
22. “Our **journey** is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law, for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well.”
23. “Our **journey** is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote.”
24. “Our **journey** is not complete until all our children, from the streets of Detroit to the hills of Appalachia, to the quiet lanes of Newtown, know they are cared for and cherished and always safe from harm.”

This “journey” Obama talks about is, for sure, the process of becoming a better nation. It is a country where equality should be a reality and this is clearly seen as he uses the word “creed”:

25. “We are true to our **creed** when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else because she

is an American, she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own.”

The preaching characteristics in Obama speech, analyzed by Batluk's (2011) work, are clearly presented through the mention of God. Yet, Obama does not talk about a Christian God and prefers to address a generic one.

If compared to the first speech, Obama's second inaugural address presents more topics. He tries to cover all the problems his first term of office faced. He also had to rebuild the faith Americans had in him.

3 DISCUSSION

Although the two speeches were given in different moments and under different circumstances, the analysis of these talks present several common points. In both texts, the president tried to create a strong link between the population and the government. Having this purpose in mind, he frequently used words related to the audience: “nation”, “America” and “people”. Considering the two contexts of the addresses, this use is justified. In 2009 and 2013, Obama's image had to be improved, either because he was a new promise to the country, or because he needed to recover the population's trust.

Another common topic was the supremacy of the U.S.A. The country was facing, in those two moments, a war and, after that, an economic crisis. Thus, the population wanted to know the future of the nation. Obama talked effusively about the capacity America had to overcome problems. However, this capacity was more highlighted in the first speech. This was due to the transition from an old government to a new one: this moment represented a time of uncertainty and anxiety. Hence, Obama had to affirm strongly that the U.S.A. could go through this change.

As the new president, in the first speech, he did not explicitly mention the problems created by previous government. On the other hand, in the second speech, Obama could point directly his faults. That is why his second speak sounded more objective than the first one. Obama referred to social and economic issues

openly, such as unemployment, infrastructure and the medical programs. The second address does not mention a crisis, but names all the factors involved in the crisis faced by the Nation.

Equality was also a common point in both texts. Obama, in 2009, had to talk about equality in general, regarding all the Americans. It is necessary to consider that the previous president was a defender of Christian's values. It seems that Bush did not consider the non-Christians as part of America. Obama referred openly to equality issues in 2013 since this had been a subject largely discussed in his government. Therefore, he could mention gender equality and homosexual issues.

Immigration also appeared in the two texts. In 2009, Obama touched it superficially. He only said America was a friend of the ones who looked for a new opportunity. On the other hand, in 2013, Obama proposed a discussion about the immigrants and how America receives them. This discussion was completely opposed to what Bush did in his term of office: he did not favor the entrance of immigrants in the country.

The second speech had brought up energy source issues. This topic has been highly discussed in America since the start of the environmental care boom. As one of the leading economies, the U.S. consumes a great deal of nonrenewable energy. It has been in the centre of the debate about pollution rate. In his address, Obama showed to be open to the discussion.

The main difference between the speeches was how explicitly the content was approached in each address. In both moments, Obama had problems to deal with. His belief in equality, overcoming and people was constant in his addresses.

CONCLUSION

The analyses of Barack Obama's addresses suggested that his speeches were highly influenced by the American backgrounds. The main purpose of an inaugural address is to show the president's intentions to the country. Furthermore, as it was noticed, Obama's intention also had to follow people's necessities. Throughout the speeches, Obama tried to cover the most important problems

faced by America. Nevertheless, as he talked about those issues, Obama could not show fear, uncertainty or weakness. Hence, he needed to give a balanced speech.

The words used showed what the president did to achieve his purposes in his speeches. He built an atmosphere of confidence, set the real situation, and tried to improve the population's mood. He knew how to choose his words and how to talk to his audience. This study tried to show the lexical choices that led Obama to his final objective. It was found that when a politician gives a speech, the historical background is considered and it is crucial to shape the text.

RESUMO

O discurso de posse de um presidente marca, formalmente, o início de seu mandato em muitos países. Nesse discurso, o chefe de estado estabelece suas intenções como líder. O futuro presidente pode também incluir questões sociais, econômicas e políticas. Este artigo visa analisar o vocabulário dos discursos de posse de Barack Obama a fim de detectar os assuntos principais nestes dois momentos históricos para a sociedade americana. Um *corpus* de 4051 palavras foi compilado e consiste dos discursos completos de Obama. O programa AntConc foi usado para quantificar as palavras utilizadas com mais frequência e o número de vezes que elas ocorreram. Notou-se que as escolhas lexicais foram diferentes ao se comparar as duas listas de frequência geradas do corpus. O trabalho conclui que o conteúdo dos discursos foi influenciado pelos diferentes momentos históricos.

Palavras-chave: discurso de posse, Obama, escolha lexical.

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