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Text Analysis of Kerry's speech at Democratic
National Convention, Boston, 2004

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On Thursday, July 29th, 2004 at 9 Pm Eastern Time, John Kerry took a stand during Democratic National Convention in Boston and accepted Democratic Party nomination for a president of the United States.

In this paper text analysis of his speech is presented. Co má být cílem textové analýzy? Na jaké výzkumné otázky má přinést odpovědi? Jaké je širší výzkumné téma, v němž se tento text stává zdrojem evidence?

Let me start with Democratic Party description and its National Convention procedure, followed by briefing on Kerry's life before presidential race 2004, his position on important issues reflected in his acceptance speech.

Democratic Party targets working middle class personnel. From late 19th hundreds donkey has been its party symbol Thomas Nast invented it in 1870 (a political cartoonist) and it is considered to be a symbol of down-to-earth appeal, humble, homely, smart, courageous, and loveable character of Democrats. Republicans took the symbol of the elephant. They consider it to an image of the intelligence and impressive strength (Nickels, 2000).

For last decade it has focused on three main topics, as follows prosperity, progress and peace. They want strong federal government; increase taxes to finance federal social programs (Democratic Party Platform, 2000).

In its 2004 National Platform it talks about four main themes that has to be in the centre of its attention for next four years.

A strong, growing economy is among them. They want to stop outsourcing, export of jobs abroad. Instead they want to support middle class by keeping American business at home, so as fight huge corporation and corporal crime.

In addition party stands for strong American community with strong, healthy families. They want to reform health care system by granting health care insurance for all. They seek educational reform by giving more funds to schools and decreasing the number of students in class. Further, they support environmental protection efforts hand in hand with energy independence.

Reflecting events of September 11th, 2001 Democrats also emphasizes idea of strong, respected America. Accepting 911 Commission recommendations they want to improve homeland so as international security by improving military so as law enforcement so as intelligence collecting agencies. They want to promote democracy, peace and security by defeating terrorists and their supporters.

Every four years Democrats hold the National Convention (DNC) where representatives of all states chose a party nominee for the presidential race.

In 2004 Fleet Center, Boston, Massachusetts hosted DNC. More than 35, 000 people attended, out of which 4,353 were delegates (accompanied by 611 alternates), 15,000 members of the media and 15,000 guests including elected officials and foreign dignitaries. California had the largest delegation, Guam the smallest. 24 Delegates represented Democrats from 12 different foreign countries (The Democratic Convention, 2004).

Every day of fourth daylong convention had own theme. Speakers such as Clinton, Al Gore, and Carter introduced Kerry-Edwards Plan for America's Future on Monday, July

26th. On Tuesday July 27th Teresa Heinz Kerry and Ted Kennedy were among those who spoke about a Lifetime of Strength & Service. On Wednesday, July 28th Edwards promoted A Stronger More Secure America, candidate for vice president. Last day, Thursday, July 29th had a theme of Stronger at Home, Respected in the World. Kerry, his daughters and Albright had been among presenters (The Democratic Convention, 2004).

That night Kerry, 60-year-old a decorated Vietnam War veteran and Senator from Massachusetts (first elected to the Senate in 1984) accepted the party nomination. At first he, the second Democrat to enter the race (on December 1, 2002), was not considered a front-runner. However after winning Iowa caucuses he did not lose any of further primaries and became party number one (The Democratic Convention, 2004).

His position on various issues reflects his two key value backgrounds. He is a Roman Catholic and Democrat.

He believes that woman has right for abortion if raped, in life danger. He supports officially gay marriage federal amendment, however many times he has spoken about the right of each state to resolve this issue. He is favor of death penalty, gun control and further tax cuts (CNN, 2004).

He backs increasing military and homeland security spending, missile program and Patriots Act. He wants to improve current health care, reduce medication cost for seniors and low income. He is also in favor of restriction of mal practice lawsuits (CNN, 2004).

On an international front he voted “yea” for Iraq and Afghanistan war. He was one of the architects of “Road map “ to peace.

His speech from July 30th 2004 reflects these above-mentioned opinions. It was a clear example of American political culture- carefully scripted and directed in the movie-style

(body language, smiles, flags, clothes, colors, spontaneously and positively looking crowd reactions, music by U2).

He went on at 9pm Eastern Time considered the prime time on television when the majority of Americans watch the TV on either cost. He tried to present himself as an ordinary guy (talking about his family background and growing up), not an intellectual nor a snob, who happens to be a war hero and human rights advocate. He presented his moral profile built on the Vietnam involvement and as such he positioned himself as a better alternative of Bush.

It was 45 minutes and 41 seconds long (not to bother with long tiring speech) and consisted of six parts, as follows introduction, military, values, economy, health care and closing. His sentences and language were simple, easy to understand. Slogans were simple too, easy to remember and repeated multiple times to help them to be remembered.

Before I continue on to detail description of each part let me talk briefly about four crucial moments in his speech.

First he started by “I am reporting to duty” statement placing himself in the position of returning war hero, demonstrating his readiness to lead the country in difficult times of war, to serve the country as he has done since the times of Vietnam.

Second, his promise that “America Can Do Better” and that “Help Is On the Way!” was carefully put in the middle of his speech, was repeated five times with spontaneous help from crowd. It followed examples demonstrating values he stands for. There were 3 real life story examples, one statistic and 1 general description.

Third crucial moment can be summed up by question: "Where the American Consciousness is?" And he answers in small towns, in urban areas and in suburban areas, therefore it is everywhere, meaning politicians of last four years got it wrong but Americans are still conscious and reasonable.

Closing was the last highlight of that night. "It is time to reach for the next dream. It is time to look to the next horizon. For America, the hope is there. The sun is rising. Our best days are still to come. Goodnight, God bless you, and God bless America." In couple sentences he hit multiple American symbols, such as American dream of better bright future and faith.

He spent most of his time (28 per cent) on economy, followed by introduction (25 per cent), and the least on health care (6 per cent), followed by values and closing (both 6 per cent).

There were several topics that Kerry developed further, such as war in Iraq, foreign policy, military policy, national security, economic plan, tax policies, education, health care and energy policy.

As a president he wants to "make America stronger and respected in the world" and to "restore trust and credibility to the White House." Indeed, he wants to renew international cooperation and incorporate allies to currently fought wars, mainly the Iraq war, to stop international terrorism. Furthermore he wants to add 40, 000 active duty troops, double Special Forces to conduct anti-terrorist operations and immediately implement 9/11 commission recommendations. Improvement of homeland security, mainly port inspections and protection of nuclear and chemical plants are on his agenda too.

Having in mind environmental protection standards his economic plan of "revitalization of manufacturing" counts on new technologies and innovation to stop "shipping our jobs overseas". It is key to "create and keep good-paying jobs" at home and support American business position in global economy.

His tax policies target middle class. He promises not to "privatize Social Security" and not to "cut benefits." He wants to target corporal crime, take away tax cut for the wealthiest and give tax cuts to middle class and small businesses.

He wants to increase accountability of those involved in educational, so as health care systems, so as improve systems themselves. He sees health care as "a right for all Americans". He wants the system to be more effective, offering lower drug prices for poor and seniors. He wants to reduce say of insurance companies in the process of treatment.

He wants to carry positive campaign to unite America and to "make this election a contest of big ideas, not small-minded attacks."

Co je v tomto kontextu významné pro sledované téma, otázku? Jak je tento context významný ve vztahu k vlastní textové analýze, k jádru práce?

Methodology

The third part of Kerry's DNC acceptance speech called Values was the unit of the text analysis. It represents 11 per cent of the total speech volume. It consists of three main parts, as follows introduction (10 per cent), main part (73 per cent) and closing (17 per cent).

After reading selected text, it has been divided into several main categories that have represented main themes mentioned. Those were America, Values, Health, Senior,

Family, Security, Faith, Work and Town. Then text analysis begins with word coding. Each word with meaning that falls into each category received code. Groups of words with similar meaning were created. Each group was analyzed, words counted and analyzed in the face of American political culture.

Analysis

In introduction Kerry addresses his fellow citizens and talks about last four years of Bush's presidency. Main part highlights values he emphasizes, followed by their examples. Closing is spent on the issue of finding consciousness and job related issues.

Now let me go through each section in detail.

At the beginning of the speech he devoted only one paragraph to president Bush and his last four years in White House. He did not make any direct attack on Bush; instead he spoke in general terms such as "President must be..." And never quoted the name Bush. He concluded that last 4 years were spent on talking values, not fighting for them, nor respecting them.

The main part identified Key Values. He argues: "choices we make must be guided by principles". First and foremost "we value" family with regards to faith, education, safety, health care, seniors, strong economy, environmental protection, so as care, responsibility, opportunity, accountability and dignity.

Let me first introduce the group of the most frequent references among which belongs references to values (57 words), followed by references to America (45) and family (23).

There were brief (once) references to values such as honor, equality, opportunity, quality, protection, responsibility and truth. References to God and faith (3 times), so as

believe (4 times) and improvement (do better, 5 times) were more frequent. The greatest emphasis was put on care and help (7 times) and values as such (20 times).

American theme can be described by words with sentimental meaning for Americans. There are words of personal national identification such as our & we & us (quoted 21 times), America (11 times), citizen, country, people (all mentioned twice). In addition, in reference to fall 2004, there are election and president references (both highlighted twice).

Second group of frequent references consists of these themes: work and job (15times), Health (10 times), town (7times), neighborhood safety (6times), military safety (6times) and poverty references (5times).

Work and job references are equally split between words: hard work, job and worker (4, 4, 3 times). In addition to his frequent references to workers he has been mentioned 3 times class theme, out of which middle class was mentioned twice in positive connotation and upper class referred only once and with negative intention. That clearly shows his position in the fight of employers versus employees.

Health insurance and drug coverage for seniors, low income and seniors (both 2 references) are the most frequent references in health theme.

Lastly, there is a third group of the least frequently mentioned references, encountering references of taxes and finances (3 times), policies (3 times) and seniors (3 times).

Pension (Social Security, two times) and drug coverage (2 times) are the key words for seniors' theme, tax break or cut (twice) for taxes and finances theme.

Conclusion

Kerry's speech is full of words with deep symbolic meaning well communicated to American citizens who understand them and respond to them. These words form themes that were identified as key for this election, themes that reflect the state of the USA so as the world. Key issues such as economy, through health care, to military are addressed from Democratic Party perspective. Kerry's speech tries to present complete picture of the past, present and future.

Analyzed part is built on family as a key value, as a key symbol. Series of short single paragraphs formed by simple design sentences step by step present each attribute of this symbol.

To sum it up, Kerry wants to be clear, understood, friendly, sensitive but on target, knowledgeable with next-door look.

Further Research Recommendation

Further analysis of Kerry's speech should focus on use of symbols. It is important to see which words are used frequently, where they are positioned in the speech and what words they are connected with. Further, it would be important to analyze each topic, its meaning and reasoning behind its selection reflected by time spent on this topic, words and power of symbols used. Meanwhile it is necessary to accompany this effort by the study of on stage and behind the stage events that are carefully scripted to follow the speech. If analyzed use of American flag and the style of its use, so as music (played before, during and after the speech), so as response of the crowds and other events during the speech have to be studied. They itself carry a deep message and reflect an American political culture.

Sources

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Zajímavý zdroj analýzy, chybí však pokus o zobecnění ve vztahu k tématu (otázce). Problém je ale už v tom, že žádnou explicitní otázku, ke které můžete vztáhnout výsledek analýzy (byť dílčí) neformulujete. Formulace otázky pak pomůže vyjasnit metodologickou část – např. Proč se zaměřuji na pozorování užití (četností) určitých slov, slovních kategorií etc. A tak zůstává nakonec nezodpovězeno: co znamená Vaše zjištění o struktuře a četnosti užívaných slovních kategorií v analyzované části textu, jakou informaci tato analýza poskytuje? Jak ji použít? Jak popis (čeho?), jako argument (pro co?), vysvětlení?

Práci chybí být minimální zakotvení v literárním (teoretickém) kontextu. Užíváte-li pojem “politická kultura”, v jakém smyslu, v jakém pojetí...? Tady jste mohla a měla odkázat na některé relevantní texty z četby v kurzu. Oceňuji výběr zajímavého tématu.

Práci hodnotím jako D “dobře +”

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