

Linguistic Peculiarities of G. Bush's and B. Obama's Speeches on the Armenian Genocide

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Abstract

The present article aims to reveal the peculiarities of the language units chosen and strung together in the speeches on the Armenian Genocide made by George Bush and Barak Obama before and after their presidency. An attempt is made to reveal the functional and linguostylistic peculiarities that condition the ideological aspect of George Bush's and Barack Obama's speeches. Words, word combinations, syntagms that are part of the whole linguistic system are studied as means of realization of a certain ideological function.

Key words: George Bush, Barak Obama, transformation of ideology, the Armenian American community mislead, policy of Realpolitik vs. morality.

Introduction

The Armenian Question, particularly the question of the Armenian Genocide remains the key and intricate problem of the Armenian Society and Diaspora. A great deal of political, scientific, psychological and social analyses have been carried out, diverse and multilingual vast literature has been created with the aim of drawing the Armenian and foreign researchers' constant attention to the issue.¹ The observations of both Armenian and foreign politicians, ambassadors and consuls of 1915 became the vital area of interdisciplinary research for many scientists. Of all the numerous publications on the Armenian Genocide the linguistic study of the discursive material stands out as absolutely vital and original. The linguistic analysis of publications on the Armenian Genocide is of paramount importance, as it reveals different communicative purposes underlying several controversial facts of the issue.²

The present article, devoted to the study of the linguistic aspect of George Bush's and Barak Obama's speeches before and after their presidency, aims to reveal the peculiarities of the language units chosen and strung together in the speeches of both presidents.

Transformations of Ideology Expressed through Language and Style

To start with, we think it rational to consider Fairclough's (1995) claim according to which specially chosen linguistic forms and specific contents are conditioned by a certain ideology.³ On the other hand, this ideology cannot be easily revealed without interpretation carried out on the basis of a thorough study of the linguostylistic features of the given discourse.

Thus, an attempt is made to reveal the functional and linguostylistic peculiarities that condition the ideological aspect of George Bush's and Barack Obama's speeches on the Armenian Genocide before and after presidency. Words, word combinations, syntagms of certain choice and arrangement, that are part of the whole linguistic system and characterized by a typical ideological function, as well as the peculiar means of realization of the given function, will be studied.

As a first step to be taken in our investigation we turn to President Bush's letter sent to his two Armenian friends at the Business School of Harvard on February 19, 2000, i.e. before his presidency:

Dear Edgar and Vasken,

Thank you for your inquiry to my campaign regarding issues of concern to Armenian Americans.

*The twentieth century was marred by wars of **unimaginable brutality**, mass murder and **genocide**. History records that the Armenians were the first people of the last century to have endured these cruelties. The Armenians were subjected to a **genocidal campaign** that defies comprehension and commands all decent people to remember and acknowledge the facts and lessons of an **awful crime** in a century of bloody crimes against humanity. If elected President, I would ensure that **our nation properly recognizes the tragic suffering of the Armenian people**.*

*The Armenian diaspora and the emergence of an independent Republic of Armenia stand as a testament to the resiliency of the Armenian people. In this new century, the United States must **actively support the independence** of all the nations of the Caucasus by promising the peaceful settlement of regional disputes and the economic development of the region. American assistance to Armenia to encourage the development of democracy, the rule of law and a tolerant open society is vital. It has my **full support**. I am **encouraged** by recent discussions between the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The United States should work actively to promote **peace** in the region and should be willing to serve as a mediator. But ultimately **peace must be negotiated and sustained by the parties involved**. Lasting peace can come only from agreements they judge to be in their best interests.*

*I appreciate the **tremendous contribution of the Armenian community** to the United States. The Armenian community has been and will continue to be a model of **dedication to values of faith and family**.*

*Sincerely,
George W. Bush.*

The statistical view of the letter shows that it consists of 285 words. Lines from 1 to 10 are full of linguistic units that have to do with war and the tragic past of not only the Armenians but also the whole world. The units that refer to tragedy (35 in number) are respectively charged with negative connotations and include the word *genocide* which is mentioned twice: *marred by wars*, *unimaginable brutality*, *mass murder and genocide*, *Armenians endured these cruelties*, *Armenians were subjected to a genocidal campaign*, *an awful crime*, *bloody crimes against humanity*; *recognizes the tragic suffering of the Armenian people* and so on.

However the general speechological effect of the mentioned units, inherently negatively charged and dealing with the notion of war, changes into positive in the concrete speech situation, for the choice of those units inspires the members of the Armenian American community to anticipate the recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide on behalf of US

authorities, including G. Bush. Interestingly, lines from 11 to 23 presenting a number of positively charged word sequences come to support the hopeful expectations of the Armenian community. It is the powerful wording of the letter, the willingness of the Candidate to recognize the Armenian Genocide, his readiness to call on the American people to join him in remembering the unimaginable brutality the Armenian people were subjected to in the beginning of the 20th century that gave the Armenians ground to believe every single word he wrote in his letter.

Among the “encouraging” units the word *peace* makes a stronger impact not only due to its semantic content of freedom in general and freedom from civil disorder, friendship and harmony, restoration of good relations,⁴ etc. but also the frequency of its usage – it is repeated for 4 times. The units that make a general positive impact are 35 in number, among them: *United States must actively support, promising the peaceful, full support, I am encouraged, promote peace, peace must be negotiated, lasting peace, I appreciate, Armenian community is a model of dedication, values of faith and family*, etc. The choice and arrangement of these linguistic units in the text of the letter by Mr. George Bush – Governor of Texas, are, in fact, the embodiment of his promises concerning the long expected positive solution to the question which is of vital importance for Armenians.

However, the Armenian American community had all the reasons for disappointment after G. Bush was elected President of the USA, for the speech of the latter after his presidency displayed his retreat from the high ideology of justice and morality advocated by him in the process of his election campaign.

The close study of President G. Bush’s post-presidency speech reveals only a few lines concerning the Armenian Question, and his denialist position can be understood without any effort:

“We all deeply regret the tragic suffering of the Armenian people that began in 1915, but this resolution is not the right response to these tragic sufferings. Its passage would do great harm to our relations with a key ally in NATO and in the global war on terror.”

George Bush
October 10, 2007.

The inherently connotative attributive syntagm *tragic suffering* is used twice here, while there is not even one mention of the word *genocide*. The ideology of denial is attempted to be concealed through different linguistic units, such as: *deeply regret, tragic suffering, not the right response, tragic suffering, great harm, global war, terror*, but with no success, for the given arrangement of these linguistic units in the passage shows quite openly that G. Bush, already in the position of the president of the USA, does not care at all for the transformation his image underwent in the perception of the Armenian Americans and the honest part of the international community at large. It reveals not only the falsity of his pre-presidency words but also the artificiality of the situationally-bound pathos of his speech.

More or less the same picture can be observed in Mr. Barak Obama’s speeches before and after his presidency:

"I am proud of my strong record on issues of concern to the one and a half million Americans of Armenian heritage in the United States. I warmly welcome the support of this vibrant and politically active community as we change how our government works here at home, and restore American leadership abroad. I am a strong supporter of a U.S.

- Armenian relationship that advances our common security and strengthens Armenian democracy. As President, I will maintain our assistance to Armenia, which has been a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism and extremism. I will promote Armenian security by seeking an end to the Turkish and Azerbaijani blockades, and by working for a lasting and durable settlement of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict that is agreeable to all parties, and based upon America's founding commitment to the principles of democracy and self-determination. And my Administration will help foster Armenia's growth and development through expanded trade and targeted aid, and by strengthening the commercial, political, military, developmental, and cultural relationships between the U.S. and Armenian governments.

I also share with Armenian Americans – so many of whom are descended from genocide survivors - a principled commitment to commemorating and ending genocide. That starts with acknowledging the tragic instances of genocide in world history. As a U.S. Senator, I have stood with the Armenian American community in calling for Turkey's acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide. Two years ago, I criticized the Secretary of State for the firing of U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, John Evans, after he properly used the term "genocide" to describe Turkey's slaughter of thousands of Armenians starting in 1915. I shared with Secretary Rice my firmly held conviction that the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable. An official policy that calls on diplomats to distort the historical facts is an untenable policy. As a senator, I strongly support passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution (H.Res.106 and S.Res.106), and as President I will recognize the Armenian Genocide.

Genocide, sadly, persists to this day, and threatens our common security and common humanity. Tragically, we are witnessing in Sudan many of the same brutal tactics - displacement, starvation, and mass slaughter - that were used by the Ottoman authorities against defenseless Armenians back in 1915. I have visited Darfurian refugee camps, pushed for the deployment of a robust multinational force for Darfur, and urged divestment from companies doing business in Sudan. America deserves a leader who speaks truthfully about the Armenian Genocide and responds forcefully to all genocides. I intend to be that President.

I look forward, as president, to continuing my active engagement with Armenian American leaders on the full range of issues of concern to the

Armenian American community. Together, we will build, in new and exciting ways, upon the enduring ties and shared values that have bound together the American and Armenian peoples for more than a century."

White House Press Releases
Barack Obama | Change We Can Believe In |
January 19, 2008.

His speech as Illinois Senator before presidency can be divided into three parts. The first part (which includes sentences from 1 to 18) is a self-compliment directed by the author to himself, presenting his opinion and viewpoint on the Armenian Genocide. It is here that the Senator's firm belief in the necessity and importance of recognizing the reality of the Armenian Genocide is rather openly and distinctly expressed. In this speech the president uses the word *genocide* 8 times along with a pledge of acceptance of the Armenian Genocide after he becomes president. This ideology is supported by two stylistically impressive utterances (*I strongly support passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution and as president I will recognize the Armenian Genocide*). As a result the author's conviction of the possibility of Genocide recognition by the USA is transferred to the Armenian American community. Other units that impact the addressee are: *the negative words that have to do with denial, stood with the Armenian American community, acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide* (twice), *Turkey's slaughter, Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a historical evidence, facts are undeniable, I strongly support passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution, I will recognize the Armenian Genocide, Genocide, sadly, persists to this day, mass slaughter used by the Ottoman authorities, against defenseless Armenians, etc.*

It is evident that the repetition of the key word *Genocide* makes a magical impression on the audience. Acting as a psychological device, the word *Genocide*, on the other hand, is meant to make a logical emphasis – an emphasis, necessary to fix the attention of the addressee on the key ideology of the speaker. The primary function of this inherently connotative word is the intensification of the whole utterance. The immediate emotional charge, in its turn, leads to the realization of the persuasive function; the conviction of the Armenian American community that Obama will initiate the Genocide recognition process, obviously increases, and the reasons for that are in the speaker's text (*I also share with Armenian Americans – so many of whom are descended from genocide survivors – a principled commitment to commemorating and ending genocide; the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation; America deserves a leader who speaks truthfully about the Armenian Genocide; etc.*).

Sentences from 18 to 20 in the second part of the speech, reveal Obama's self-estimation and his consideration of himself as somebody who is the most suitable candidate for the highest and most responsible position of the president. This time, through the manipulation of the word *Genocide*, self-praise is achieved. In this part *Genocide* is a stylistic tool enabling the speaker to present himself as a leader and future president (*who speaks truthfully, responds forcefully to all genocides*) stepping on the most difficult path of recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Self-praise is expressed in the following stylistically charged units: *a leader who speaks truthfully about the Armenian Genocide, responds forcefully to all genocides, I intend to be that president, etc.*

The rhetorical power of speech remains strong in the third part of Illinois Senator Obama's address to the Armenian American community. Lines from 20 to 25 express "solidarity" or "collectivity" between the Americans (in the face of Obama) and Armenians (in the face of the Armenian American community). The speaker expresses his wish to build a better future for the Armenian Americans. The promise is expressed through the following linguistic and stylistic units: *together; we will build in new and exciting ways; upon the enduring ties and shared values that have bound together the American and Armenian peoples.*

However, when we look into Mr. Obama's interview given to Ms. Christi Parsons, the Chicago Tribune reporter, on April 7, 2009 after his Presidency, abrupt changes in his speech can easily be observed:

The president 'not interested' in tilting Armenia-Turkey negotiations in one way or another

President Barack Obama met with his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul at the Cankaya Palace in Ankara.

Following the meeting, and after making a statement to the press, Obama called on Christi Parsons from the Chicago Tribune's Washington Bureau to ask a question. Parsons said, "As a U.S. Senator, you stood with the Armenian American community in calling for Turkey's acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide. And you also supported the passage of the Armenian Genocide Resolution. You said, as president, you would recognize the genocide. My question to you is: Have you changed your view? And did you ask President Gul to recognize the genocide by name?"

"My views are on the record and I have not changed views," Obama answered. "What I have been very encouraged by is news that under President Gul's leadership, we are seeing a series of negotiations, a process in place between Armenia and Turkey to resolve a whole host of long-standing issues, including this one," he added.

Talking about his role in this process, he said, "I want to be as encouraging as possible around those negotiations, which are moving forward and could bear fruit very quickly, very soon. And as a consequence, what I want to do is not focus on my views, but focus on the views of the Turkish and the Armenian people, if they can move forward and deal with a difficult and tragic history, then I think the entire world should encourage them. So what I told the president was I want to be as constructive as possible in moving these issues forward quickly. And my sense is that they are moving quickly. I don't want to, as the president of the United States, to preempt any possible arrangements or announcements that might be made in the near future. I just want to say that we are going to be a partner in working through this issue in such a way that the most important parties, the Turks and the Armenians, are finally coming to terms in the most constructive way."

Parsons followed up by asking, "So if I understand you correctly, your

view hasn't changed, but you'll put in advance the issue of whether to use that word in the future?" Obama answered, "What I'd like to do is encourage President Gul to move forward with what have been some very fruitful negotiations. I'm not interested in the United States in any way tilting these negotiations in one way or another, while they [Armenia and Turkey] are having useful discussions."

Barak Obama
ANKARA, Turkey (A.W.)
Mon., April 6.

Our study of the text of the interview reveals Mr. Obama's maneuvering policy in speech formation. He not only omits the word **genocide** from his speech, but also tries to distract the attention of the Chicago Tribune reporter from the idea of paramount importance of recognizing and condemning the Armenian Genocide. He tries to transfer the logical stress of his answers on to the necessity and actuality of the negotiation process between Armenia and Turkey that seemed to have started, a process which he seems to be encouraged by (at least Mr. Obama very emphatically declares so). The triple use of the verb **encourage** in his answers to the reporter displays his strategy of enhancing his personal role in the negotiation process which, in fact, was only an attempt on behalf of Armenia to start negotiations with Turkey without any preconditions. One wonders why Mr. Obama thought that the honest and moral position the USA and he himself as president of the country were expected to take would mean interfering or, moreover, **tilting** the negotiations.

In the text of the interview the reader's attention is caught by the use of such word sequences as: *you stood with the Armenian-American community, calling for Turkey's acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide, supported the passage of the Armenian genocide resolution, you said, as president you would recognize the genocide, have you changed your view? did you ask President Gull to recognize the genocide by name?* Mr. Obama builds his answers to the reporter proceeding from the following three basic themes: **denial** of the change in his views (*my views are on the record, have not changed views, very encouraged, under President Gull's leadership, resolve a whole host of long-standing issues*); **encouragement** of negotiations between Armenia and Turkey (*a series of negotiations, as encouraging as possible, negotiations which are moving forward, could bear fruit very quickly, very soon*); **insistence** that negotiations continue successfully and he be as influential in that process as he could (*not focus on my views right now, focus on the views of the Turkish and the Armenian people, if they can move forward, I think the entire world should encourage them, I want to be as constructive as possible, I don't want to pre-empt any possible arrangements, we are going to be a partner in working through, Turks and the Armenians, are finally coming to terms*).

Mr. Obama states that it is the job of the Turks and the Armenians to come to terms. The president will, like the entire world, view, observe and clap hands when mutual understanding is achieved. However, he is sure he will not interfere.

Conclusion

When Mr. Obama's answers to the reporter are confronted with his pre-presidency speech against the background of Fairclough's theoretical judgment about ideologies residing in texts (Fairclough 1995) it becomes quite obvious that the president has changed his ideology: (*encourage President Gull, very fruitful negotiations, I'm not interested in tilting these negotiations*), the actual reason for that being his already achieved goal – the post of the U.S. President actively supported by the votes of the Armenian American community. His sole mission now is to keep close to his policy of Realpolitik, neglecting the all-important principle of morality. No, Mr. Obama is unfortunately unable to overcome his manipulative approach to life even when great moral principles are involved, even if it is a question of exterminating a whole race. Thus, quite justified is the viewpoint of Yair Auron who believes that in modern days politics and political manipulative considerations have utterly no relation with morality though ancient philosophers never separated these notions.⁵

Notes:

1. *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective* (important essays by scholars) (1986) / Ed. R. Hovhannisian. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books; Dadrian, V. (1994) *A Review of the Main Features of the Genocide*. // *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*. Vol. 22, N 1; Dadrian, V. (1995) *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*. Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books; Nersisyan, M.G. (1998) *Patmutyan keghtsararnery*. Hodvatsner yev haghordumner. Yerevan, RA NAS; etc.
2. Gasparyan, S.K. (2013) *Guenter Lewy's "Truth about the Armenian Genocide."* // *Banber Yerevani Hamalsarani (Armenian Studies)*, N 139. 1, Yerevan: YSU Press; Gasparyan, S.K. (2014) *The Armenian Genocide: A Linguocognitive Perspective*. Yerevan: YSU Press; etc.
3. According to N. Fairclough "...the forms and content of texts do bear the imprint of (or traces of) ideological processes and structures..." Cf. Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman, p. 25.
4. Hornby, A.S. (1980) *Oxford Advanced Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: OUP, p. 616.
5. Cf. Auron, Y. *Israel's Attitude toward the Armenian Genocide: Denial and Recognition*. // *Noravank Foundation*. Available at: <http://www.noravank.am/eng/journals/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=4813> [Accessed March 2014].

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2. Dadrian, V. (1994) *A Review of the Main Features off the Genocide*. // Journal of Political and Military Sociology. Vol. 22, N 1.
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6. Gasparyan, S.K. (2014) *The Armenian Genocide: A Linguocognitive Perspective*. Yerevan: YSU Press.
7. Hornby, A.S. (1980) *Oxford Advanced Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: OUP.
8. Hovhannisian, R. (ed) (1986) *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books.
9. Nersisyan, M.G. (1998) *Patmutyan keghtsararnery. Hodvatsner yev haghordumner*. Yerevan: RA NAS.

Ջ. Բուշի և Բ. Օբամայի՝ Հայոց եղեռնին վերաբերող ելույթների լեզվական առանձնահատկությունները

Հոդվածում արծարծվում են ամերիկյան երկու նախագահների՝ Հայոց եղեռնին նվիրված նախընտրական և ետընտրական ելույթների լեզուն և ոճը պայմանավորող լեզվական միավորների հատուկ ընտրության, զուգակցման, հաղորդակցական նպատակի իրացման հետ կապված խնդիրներ: Փորձ է արվում բացահայտել այն լեզվաոճական և գործառական առանձնահատկությունները, որոնք պայմանավորում են Ջ. Բուշի և Բ. Օբամայի ելույթների գաղափարախոսական հենքը: Լեզվական որոշակի համակարգի մաս կազմող բառերը, բառակապակցություններն ու շարույթները դիտարկվում են որպես որոշակի գաղափարախոսական գործառույթի իրացման միջոցներ:

Языковые особенности выступлений Дж. Буша и Б. Обамы о Геноциде армяни

В настоящей статье предпринимается попытка выявить функциональные и лингвостилистические особенности языковых единиц в выступлениях Джорджа Буша и Барака Обамы о Геноциде армян до и после президентских выборов. Данное исследование позволяет раскрыть идеологическую подоснову речи двух американских президентов и выявить манипулятивные стратегии их речетворчества, способствующие достижению коммуникативной цели. Проведенное исследование показывает, что выбор и организация автором слов, словосочетаний и синтагм являются средствами реализации определенной прагматической функции.