



The phenomenon of ObamaMania and its influence on language and society

Liliana Religa (Warsaw University)

The article looks into the phenomenon of Barack Obama and his influence on politics, culture and most surprisingly - language. Never before has any political or religious leader aroused such intense emotions and hope or brought about far-reaching changes in people's attitude all over the world. The explanations for this only partly lie in his political programme, and mainly in his idiolect and the way he constructs his speeches.

The aim of this article is to analyze and characterize the so-called Obamaspeak, a distinctive way of expressing thoughts, as well as typical concepts, metaphors and rhetorical devices. Based on content analysis, critical discourse analysis and Gricean pragmatics, the study will investigate to what extent Obama's history-making speeches reflect the Grice's maxims, Austin's speech acts and Chilton's strategic functions. The second part of the work is devoted to interpretation and explanation of symbols and intertextual references. Additionally, it involves a comparison of Obama's speeches in public performances in search for potential digressions and non-verbal modes of behaviour. The phenomenon of Obama cannot be perceived only in terms of his popularity and global support – it is also necessary to account for his direct impact on language. Obama's words and phrases take first places in the majority of The Global Language Monitor rankings summing up the year 2008. What is more, Barack Obama has inspired and activated word-building mechanisms. The Urban dictionary has registered 292 words that start with the prefix "Obama*" or "Barack*", and all of them have been coined by ordinary people.

ObamaMania cannot be ignored as a mass-scale phenomenon generally resulting not from the substantive content of Obama's speeches, but mainly from their symbolism, rhetoric devices and characteristic style.

References:

- Chilton Paul, (2004), "Analysing political discourse: theory and Practice", London, New York: Routledge
- Schiffrin Deborah, (1997), "Approaches to discourse", Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell
- Titscher Stefan, Meyer Michael, Wodak Ruth, Vetter Eva, (2000), "Methods of text and discourse analysis", London: Sage Publications
- Wilson John, "Political Discourse", van Dijk Teun, "Critical Discourse Analysis". In Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi Hamilton, (eds), (2001), "The Handbook of Discourse Analysis", Malden, Oxford: Blackwell