De-constructing Race and Identity in US Presidential Discourse: Barack Obama's Speech on Race

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Barack Obama's 'A More Perfect Union' speech, given amidst public outcry over statements made by his pastor, Reverend Jeremy Wright, brought the questions of race and racism to the forefront of his 2008 campaign. While the speech can be seen as Obama's candid vision of race in America, it can also be interpreted as an elaborate scheme to de-construct the issues of race, racism, and identity in the United States. The paper analyzes the issues of race, racism and identity as reflected in this speech from a CDA perspective, on the assumption that all speech acts are embedded in the society and culture within which they are produced. It focuses on both contextual and linguistic aspects, highlighting the ways Obama delegitimizes and, hence, de-constructs, racist practices still prevalent in American society. The analysis focuses mainly on the use of recontextualization, and argues for a broader interpretation than the one traditionally proposed in the literature.

Keywords: race; Obama; recontextualization; CDA; political discourse; pronominal use

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La deconstrucción de raza e identidad en el discurso presidencial de Barack Obama

El discurso de Barack Obama 'A More Perfect Union', pronunciado en medio del clamor popular producido a raíz de las declaraciones de su Pastor, el Reverendo Jeremy Wright, hizo que diversas cuestiones relacionadas con las etnias y el racismo cobraran gran relevancia durante la campaña de 2008. Aunque el discurso se puede tomar como una sincera visión del asunto de las etnias en los Estados Unidos por parte de Obama, también se puede interpretar como un elaborado plan para de-construir los problemas de las etnias, el racismo y la identidad en ese país. En este artículo se analizan, desde la perspectiva del Análisis Crítico del Discurso, los mencionados asuntos tal como se ven reflejados en el aludido discurso de Obama, asumiendo que cualquier acto del discurso forma parte de la sociedad y la cultura dentro de las cuales se manifiesta. El artículo se centra en aspectos contextuales y lingüísticos, y resalta los medios utilizados por Obama para deslegitimizar y, por tanto, de-construir los hábitos racistas que perduran en la sociedad estadounidense de nuestros días. El análisis presta especial atención al uso de la recontextualización y aboga por una interpretación más amplia de la que se suele encontrar en la literatura.

Palabras clave: etnia (raza), Obama, recontextualización, Análisis Crítico del Discurso, discurso político, usos de los pronombres

1. Introduction

Barack Obama's election as President in November 2008 represents a historic moment for both the United States and the world.[1] While the question of race in the campaign should not be underestimated, Obama certainly did and still does not fit "the conventions of a statesman of his era" (Wills 2008) in many ways: his upbringing and background appeared both foreign and untraditional, and he was accused of having connections with unpatriotic and potentially violent radicals. Seen in this light, his victory could be interpreted as even more unexpected, demonstrating, at least ostensibly, how much the United States has changed in terms of accepting otherness. However, it would be naive to construe Obama's victory as a complete victory over race and identity, for race divisions are still deeply ingrained in American society, and racism, although often disguised, is still widespread.

Barack Obama's discourse has been described as deracialized or post-racial (Frank and McPhail 2006; Younge 2008). Rather than focus solely on his African American identity, which in itself may be seen as a "construction" (Suleiman and O'Connell 2008: 376), Obama's electoral campaign message highlighted his mixed background:

> I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather … and a white grandmother …. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners – an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible. (www.barackobama.com)[2]

In spite of such references, Obama seldom focused directly on the issues of race and racism, as he most likely knew that his statements "could transform him in a campaign ad from the affable, rational and racially ambiguous candidate into the archetypical angry black man who scares off the white vote" (Staples 2008). These were the risks he faced when the inflammatory, anti-patriotic statements of his former pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, started circulating on the Internet and in the media in March 2008. Obama directly addressed the issue of race in his 'A More Perfect Union' speech.

This speech is a clear example of the type of balancing act that Obama adopted in his campaign to both legitimize himself and delegitimize his opponents. In it he offers a new vision of race and race relations based on his own version of the American Dream, embracing the core themes of change, hope and unity. Furthermore, he deconstructs and recontextualizes the traditional concepts of race and identity as originally set forth

[2] All examples from the speech are from the published, online version available at this website.

by the US Constitution which, according to the speech, were "stained by this nation's original sin of slavery".

2. Aims and scope of the paper

The paper analyzes the issues of race, racism and identity from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, which considers the historical, cultural and social contexts crucial to an understanding of a discourse. In CDA, discourse practices are viewed as dependent on the power and dominance relations in society and institutions. My main hypothesis is that this historically significant speech is representative of an important type of current discourse practice in the United States, and, as such, it both influences and is influenced by social practice. Furthermore, since Obama represents both a historically excluded black minority and dominant political and social group(s), this speech necessarily reflects these different and often shifting social positions. Yet, at the same time, due to his privileged position – as a lawyer, professor, senator and presidential candidate – the speech has an even greater influence on social practice. From a theoretical point of view, I propose a broader interpretation of recontextualization than that most often found in the literature. Thus, I view recontextualization as taking place on different levels: both text-externally or intertextually *and* text-internally, in the lexis and grammar. The broader historical and socio-political contexts also play an important role in creating external recontextualization. On the text level, I focus on what I consider to be the most salient examples of recontextualization in the speech: the strategic use of personal pronouns and grammatical and lexical recontextualization. The analysis of this specific text should shed light on and help to "unmask" (Wodak *et al.* 2009) Obama's overall discourse practices, demonstrating how they both reflect and are a reflection of social practice in contemporary US politics and society.

The work is divided into three main sections: in section three the speech and its speaker are framed in terms of their historical and social contexts. This section also addresses the crucial aspect of mediatization of politics and politicians. In part four, the most salient theoretical issues addressed in the work are presented, while in the fifth part, specific examples from the speech are discussed and analyzed in light of the theoretical considerations.

3. Context

'A More Perfect Union' was given at one of the most decisive points of the 2008 Democratic Campaign. First of all, Obama was involved in a very close race with Hillary Clinton. Secondly, he was engulfed by criticism in the press, from within the Democratic Party, and among his electorate over statements made by former vice-presidential candidate and Hillary Clinton supporter, Geraldine Ferraro, and Obama's former pastor, Reverend Jeremy Wright. Ferraro had declared, "If Obama was a white man, he would not be in this position" (Seelye and Bosman 2008) drawing immediate criticisms of racism from within the Democratic Party. More importantly, Reverend

Wright had made statements accusing the US government of blatant racism and directly blaming US policies for the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 (Suleiman and O'Connell 2008: 376). The mass media continuously replayed Wright's angry comments, which were affecting Obama's popularity (Suleiman and O'Connell 2008). In such a climate the expectations for the speech were extremely high, especially since, for the first and only time in his campaign, Obama was directly addressing the issue of race. It was evident that this speech would frame the rest of his campaign and possibly decide the winner of the Democratic Primaries.

Obama's skilful use of speeches as a political tool has been widely noted, and on more than one occasion he confronted "serious political or policy problems with the Big Formal Speech" (Fallows 2008; see also Heffernan 2009 and '"The Speech": An Experts' Guide' 2009). Obama's rhetoric, however, is clearly different from the model of traditional black leaders, such as Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King. Instead, his discourse practices can be likened to a new generation of black leader, which tends to exhibit more confidence and "sobriety than their white counterparts" (Bourdieu 1991, in Suleiman and O'Connell 2008: 387). Moreover, his message captured the imagination of a broad, varied group of the American public (Mendell 2007: 9). It is a mixture of his personal style and charisma, his verbal eloquence, and an all-encompassing message of unity, I would argue, that makes his rhetoric more persuasive. On this particular occasion, however, Obama's tone was more serious than usual, most likely because "[t]his was a speech in which the words—not the delivery—counted" (Corn 2008).

'A More Perfect Union' was generally well received in the liberal press, a view exemplified by *The New York Times*: "It's hard to imagine how he could have handled it better" ('Mr. Obama's Profile in Courage' 2008; see also Corn 2008; Garry 2008). The non-partisan *Pew Research* think tank labelled the speech as "arguably the biggest event of the campaign" estimating that some 85% of Americans had heard "at least something" about the speech ('Obama Speech on Race Arguably Biggest Event of Campaign' 2008).

Such positive media descriptions are important for political success, since, now more than ever, political events (and actors) are mediated by the mass media, and their meanings are transferred between social practices, texts and genres (Fairclough 2003: 30). This relationship is so strong as to be almost "symbiotic" (Wodak 2009a: 3). Moreover, the politicians themselves are transformed into media personalities due to the importance of the media in reporting the events, and politics is becoming more and more staged (Fairclough 2000; Wodak 2008, 2009a).[3] The Obama campaign immediately grasped the importance of exploiting new media to distribute campaign materials to a more varied voting public. As with other speeches, 'A More Perfect Union' was immediately made available on line in a cleaner version than on television (Heffernan 2009). The influence of this medium is confirmed by the 10% of Americans who viewed the speech online ('Obama Speech on Race…' 2008) and by the fact that

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[3] For a more detailed discussion of the notion of staging in politics see Fetzer and Weizman 2006; Wodak 2009a, 2009b; Wodak *et al.* 2008.

the video has been played more than 6 million times on YouTube alone (see also Heffernan 2009).[4]

Another important part of the context of this speech is the strategic choice of venue: the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. Both the city of Philadelphia and the Constitution Center are extremely important landmarks of American history. Moreover, as the home of the American Revolution and the US Constitution, upon which much of the speech is based, the location provided both a visual and a metaphorical link with the principles and ideals of US history, along with its original 13 colonies, its independence, its legal institutions and its founding fathers.

4. Theoretical background

4.1. *Critical Discourse Analysis and political discourse*

For CDA, language use is not only a product of society but also an important force in (re)shaping social practices, both positively and negatively (Bloor and Bloor 2007: 12). Closely tied to this notion is how discursive practices "conceptualize" the power and dominance relations present in society and how they are related to "unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed in particular sociocultural contexts" (Fairclough 1995: 1). In other words, discourse is determined according to the roles of speakers and hearers in society and institutions (Chilton and Schäffner 2002: 31), which, in turn, provide a set of frames for people's action in certain situations (Fairclough 1995: 38). It follows, then, that contextual features are crucial to understanding discourse practices (Chilton and Schäffner 2002: 16). Consequently, texts cannot be analyzed without considering institutional and discourse practices (Fairclough 1995: 9) because of this "dialectical relationship" between discourse acts and social practices (Wodak *et al.* 2009: 8). More specifically, CDA describes not only the social, cultural and historical processes and structures within which a text is embedded, but also the new and recontextualized meanings that are created through text production and interaction with other texts (Wodak 2001a: 3; Wodak *et al.* 2009: 7-8).

With its interest in power, dominance, social and institutional practice, CDA naturally lends itself to the analysis of political discourse (see Chilton 2004; Chilton and Schäffner 1997, 2002; Fairclough 1995, 2000; Schäffner 1996; Wodak 2009; Wodak et *al.* 2009; Wodak and De Cillia 2007; Wodak and Reisigl 2001). The relationship between politics and language is summed up by Fairclough: "Political differences have been constituted as differences in language, [and] political struggles have always been partly struggles over the dominant language" (2000: 3).

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[4] The number of views is as of July 2009.

4.2. Identity, ideology and race

The notion of identity implies two possible parameters of comparison in interpersonal relations: *similarity* and *difference* (Wodak 2009a: 13). In other words, people identify themselves in terms of their similarities and differences to others. Such notions, however, are strongly tied to the predominant ideology, which "can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between … social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people" (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258). The way people talk about themselves and others, both positively and negatively, reflect deeply ingrained power relations, and the texts they produce can serve to sustain or change ideologies (Fairclough 2003: 9). As noted above, race also plays an important role in expressing power and dominance differences inherent in identity. In his description of social cognition Van Dijk speaks of "schemas" underlying the organization of representations and attitudes within society, such as those schemas that whites have about blacks or that men have about women (1993: 258). We can presume, then, that there is also a schema that blacks have about whites. Moreover, these schemas, like all discourse practices, are constantly changing to reflect new realities, as well as changing relations and power structures (Mazid 2007: 353).

   In any analysis of political discourse, the issues of identity and ideology are crucial to understanding the political actors, as their performance is defined and perceived according to social identity (Fairclough 2000: 95) and ideological group membership (Van Dijk 1998). However, this relationship is further complicated by the fact that a group ideology can also define a group identity (Van Dijk 1998: 118). Thus, a politician's identity is influenced by the tension between the (often constructed) public office and the private (Fairclough 2000: 97), or tension between dominant and subordinate power positions. Furthermore, individual identity is dependent on both personal and social factors and "[p]art of our self-representation is inferred from the ways others … see, define and treat us" (Van Dijk 1998: 118). In the case of African American politicians, I would argue, other factors come into play, to varying degrees, such as background, upbringing, education, racial identification, etc, which further complicate the situation and create more tension.

4.3. Recontextualization

In its most general sense, recontextualization means "the appropriation of elements of one social practice within another" (Fairclough 2003: 32) and has been considered one of the most important processes in text production (Wodak and De Cillia 2007: 323).[5] Recontextualization is mostly seen as belonging to intertextuality or text-external referencing, when an argument is taken from one context and restated in a new one; in this way the object is first decontextualized and then recontextualized in its new context

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[5] The term comes from Bernstein (1981, 1986), who applied the notion of recontextualization to educational practices (in Van Leeuwen 2008: 3-22).

(Wodak 2008: 3). In her discourse-historical approach Wodak proposes a four-level "triangulatory approach" to context: (1) the text internal co-text; (2) the intertextual; (3) the extralinguistic; (4) and the broader sociopolitical and historical contexts (2001b: 67). Fairclough speaks of "recontextualizing principles" spanning different fields, social practices and genres according to which "social events are selectively 'filtered'" through exclusion, inclusion and selective prominence (Fairclough 2003: 139; see also Van Leeuwen 2008). Moreover, he distinguishes between external and internal (inter)textual relations, with recontextualization occurring mainly in the former (2003: 139). A similar distinction of textual relations is also made by Van Dijk (2001), but without specifically mentioning recontextualization; in fact, he speaks of "local" (vs. "global") discourse forms, which determine linguistic realizations and can be seen in the lexical choice, syntactic structures, agency, metaphors, etc. (2001: 103). In my analysis I propose a much broader approach to recontextualization, claiming one that occurs on both of these levels, i.e. both text-externally *and* text-internally.

On a global level, we can observe recontextualization from one discourse, text or genre to another, in which a dominant text imports elements of another text for some strategic purpose (Chilton and Schäffner 2002: 17). On a local or surface level, recontextualization most often occurs lexically or syntactically, through rhetorical figures, semantic structures, etc. (Van Dijk 1993: 261). Lexically, recontextualization is achieved through substitution or repetition and resemanticization (see Wodak and De Cillia 2007; Van Dijk 1993) and can also be used for metaphor and metonymy. More specifically, semantic relations can be highlighted or obscured in texts through substitution, exclusion, synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy, etc. (Fairclough 2003).

Recontextualization also commonly occurs in pronominal use, which is closely tied to the notions of identity and ideology. Thus, pronouns can indicate (or obscure) collectivity and individuality (Fairclough 2003: 162), or they can be used for 'self' or 'other' referencing or as a way to polarize representations of ingroups and outgroups (Van Dijk 2001: 103; see also Suleiman and O'Connell 2008). Pronominal use and interpretation are mediated by a number of different social and personal factors "producing a range of possible uses and interpretations" (Wilson 1990: 45). With so many external factors, which according to Wilson (1990: 46) include formality, informality, status, solidarity, power, class and sex, it is not surprising that pronoun shifting is so common among politicians and can lead to what Partington calls "conflicting pressures" (2003: 72). Clearly absent from this list of factors is race, which is also crucial in determining and understanding pronominal use, especially within the current discussion.

In politics the most salient pronominal distinctions are *I* vs. *we*, inclusive vs. exclusive-*we*, and *us* vs. *them*. Moreover, third-person pronouns can be used in different ways to create (or obfuscate) agency. First, the use of *I/we* is clearly marked depending on how much responsibility the speaker wants to claim: *I* is used "to gain the people's allegiance", while *we* is often used to evade complete responsibility (Wilson 1990: 50). Secondly, *we* has different meanings depending on whether it includes or excludes the addressee(s) and if inclusion is partial or total (see Wilson 1990, Chapter 3; Wodak *et al.* 2009: 45-47). Finally, third-person pronouns can be used for distance, a relation of contrast and other referencing from the so-called 'deictic centre', of which *I*

and its variants can be considered the centre, in a sort of "pronominal scaling" (Wilson 1990: 58-61; see also Chilton 2004: 57-59).

4.4. *Text, genre, discourse and political speeches*

The notions of *text*, *discourse* and *genre* have been the subject of much discussion in the literature (see Wodak and Meyer 2009). In line with Fairclough I consider text as "any actual instance of language use" (2003: 3), while discourse is a more general way of representing the world (2003: 215). Genre is "a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity" (Fairclough 1995: 14). The present analysis is based on one text, which is representative of both a general discourse (i.e. Obama's political discourse) and a specific genre, the political (campaign) speech. Myers has classified the political speech as an "ideal" genre due to its mostly rhetorical and stable nature (2008: 140).

The speech is an important genre in political discourse, which has been studied since ancient times. Indeed, classical rhetoric distinguished three classes of oratory: *judicial*, *deliberative*, and *epideictic*. Judicial rhetoric is generally focused on the past and on the themes of justice and injustice, while functionally it is aimed as accusing or defending; deliberative rhetoric is linked to the future and focuses on expediency or harmfulness, while exhorting or dissuading; epideictic rhetoric is tied to the present and the themes of honour and disgrace with the function of attributing praise or blame (Wodak *et al.* 2009: 70). However, it should be noted that the three forms do not occur in pure form and there is generally a mixing of all three forms in the same speech (Wodak and De Cillia 2007: 324).

Another important aspect in the analysis of political discourse is the strategic functions that are employed to realize inclusionary or exclusionary rhetoric (Wodak *et al.* 2009). One of the most important of these functions, especially in political speeches, is legitimization (and its counterpart, delegitimization), which is used for "positive self-presentation" (Chilton and Schäffner 1997: 213).[6] Similarly, Wodak *et al.* (2009) posit a number of different macro-strategies, including construction, perpetuation or justification, transformation and demontage, and tie them to argumentation schemes and means of linguistic realisation. Of note for the current discussion are the constructive strategies, which promote "unification, identification, solidarity and differentiation" (2009: 33), and their subcategory of justification. These can be used to shift blame and responsibility, cast doubt, downplay, minimize, etc. and are tied to various *topoi* such as comparison/difference, illustrative examples, history as teacher, fallacy of external threat, etc. (2009: 36).

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[6] This analysis is limited to the use of legitimization and delegitimization, which would appear to be the most widely used strategic function in this sub-genre of primary campaign speeches (See Boyd 2008). A full account of strategic functions can be found in Chilton and Schäffner 1997, 2002; Chilton 2004.

5. Discussion

5.1. 'Explaining' Reverend Wright

Above it was noted that political speeches generally adopt different forms of rhetoric within the same speech. 'A More Perfect Union' is no exception to this, and it reveals a combined use of all three of the classical oratorical forms. Thus, it focuses on the injustices of racial division (*judicial oratory*) and the expediency to change (*deliberative*), and, more importantly, it serves to honour the heroes of the civil rights movement, as well as ordinary Americans, and to assign both praise and blame to various moments of the past and present of race relations in the US (*epideictic*). Moreover, the speech makes use of a number of justificatory (or legitimization) strategies to explain Obama's relations with Reverend Wright and the comments made by Geraldine Ferraro. As far as the former is concerned, Obama was faced with the very difficult task of legitimizing his relations with the extremely controversial figure of Reverend Wright, without delegitimizing his (black) followers. If he ignored the criticism, he most certainly risked being perceived by a still largely undecided voting block as unpatriotic; yet, if he overtly criticized his former preacher he risked isolating many of his back supporters, while at the same time delegitimizing his own relationship with his former pastor, his involvement with the church and his integrity. Not surprisingly, then, Obama 'explained' rather than excused his relations with Reverend Wright (Corn 2008). The rhetorical strategies he adopted serve both to defend Wright and his followers and Geraldine Ferraro and her supporters and, on the other, to differentiate himself not from the people themselves but from their comments.

In the speech, at first, Obama responds indirectly to Ferraro's statements as we can see in (1):

> (1)   the *implication* that *my* candidacy is somehow an exercise in affirmative action; that it's based solely on the desire of wide-eyed liberals to purchase reconciliation on the cheap;

Here, *implication* is used metonymically to remove agency from the statements, thereby mitigating any personal criticism that might be inferred from the use of 1st Person Sg possessive determiner *my*. Later in the speech, however, Ferraro is mentioned by name and likened to Reverend Wright:

> (2)   We can dismiss *Reverend Wright* as a crank or a demagogue, just as some have dismissed *Geraldine Ferraro*, in the aftermath of her recent statements, as harboring some deep-seated racial bias. But *race* is an issue that I believe this nation cannot afford to ignore right now.

Yet, here as well, no direct blame is attributed to either Wright or Ferraro. Rather, the inclusive-*we* combined with the modal *can* create a sense of what Wodak *et al.* call "co-responsibility" (2009: 36) for *racial bias*, which is extended to all people, including himself. In addition, criticism of their statements comes from the outside, which is highlighted by the use of the indefinite pronoun *some*, rather than directly from Obama. Moreover, the parallelism between the two figures serves to justify their

behaviour as well as to legitimize Obama's relations with the more controversial Wright. In the second sentence of (2), *deep-seated racial bias* is promoted to the generic *race* in thematic position as a way to advance his message of unity and racial change. In these two examples Obama uses justificatory strategies to shift blame from both Wright and Ferraro to society as a whole, which is achieved by recontextualizing their statements.

5.2. Recontextualizing the Constitution

One of the most important uses of recontextualization in the speech occurs in reference to the hyper-theme of the US Constitution. The speech opens with a well-known quotation from the preamble to the 1787 US Constitution:

(3)   We the people, in order to form a more perfect union.

Not only does this set a specific cultural and historical frame, which underlines the document's import and enhances the very location in which the speech was given, but it also allows for the original meaning to be deconstructed within the speech and the wider context of Obama's message and discourse. The individual lexical items of the quotation are then repeated, recontextualized and resemanticized in a larger discourse about race, identity and race relations by relating – both directly and indirectly – the phrase and the document to the local co-text and context of the speech and Obama's global narrative and message.

As a lawyer, former editor of the *Harvard Law Review* at Harvard University, and former professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Chicago, Obama was perfectly aware of the judicial import these words carried. The words, as the rest of the Constitution itself, are still open to reinterpretation by the legal system, courts and legislature, since constitutions are "metastable" and "guaranteed by their capacity to change" (Bayley 2005). Consequently, the founding fathers purposefully left much of the Constitution unspecified so that it could be "negotiated" among the three branches of the government "through processes infused with rhetoric" (Campbell and Jamieson 2008: 1). In Obama's rhetoric, the *Constitution* is personified, appears to have a life of its own and, as such, naturally adapts itself to the changing times:

(4)   Of course, the answer to the slavery question was already embedded within *our Constitution* – a *Constitution* that had at is very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a *Constitution* that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.

The use of the inclusive *our* in (4) further highlights Obama's membership in this process of transformation. However, Obama also notes that in its original form the Constitution was somehow incomplete thereby making "the Constitution a means for its own transcendence" (Wills 2008: 4):

(5)   The document they produced was eventually signed but ultimately *unfinished.*

For obvious reasons he refrains from criticizing the original racist bias of the document (and, consequently, of the founding fathers), just as he refrains from overtly

criticizing the widespread racism among much of the US population, as in (2) above. This is because of his overall message that transcends disparities and racism and his

(6) unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people

Nonetheless, as underlined in the speech, legal (re-)interpretation and amendment have not always been enough to complete or 'to perfect' the Constitution or, for that matter, to change prevailing attitudes about race and identity:

(7) And yet *words on a parchment* would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. *What would be needed* were *Americans* in successive generations who were willing to do their part

In the first part, the personified synecdoche *words on a parchment* highlights both the complexity of the Constitution and consequently the difficulty for them to cause change. In the second part, the thematic position of the depersonalized semi-cleft emphasizes the agentivity of *Americans*, who thus become the agents of change. This message of change through action is also directed toward contemporaries, supporters and detractors alike, when he urges them

(8) to continue the long march of those who came before *us*.

The message is further strengthened by the use of the inclusive-*us*, which also implies that Obama as well as the rest of the American people are an active part of both history and this transformation. Thus, the Constitution, which was originally 'stained' by 'imperfection', has been changed over time. Within the speech and within Obama's larger message of change, hope and unity, such transcendence is extended to the US population in its entirety.

5.3. Pronominal use

Obama continuously shifts pronouns to reflect his membership in both the dominant ingroup and a minority outgroup, highlighting both similarities and differences. While this is achieved, for the most part, through the strategic use of the 1st person pronouns, the 3rd Person pronouns are also used to both accept and evade responsibility. It has been suggested that Obama's use of the 1st person pronouns is closely linked to his own identity and story. The writer Zadie Smith, for example, notes Obama's "wariness" of using the 1st person Sg *I*, favouring instead the Pl *we* (2009). A similar shifting strategy was noted in Obama's interview on the Larry King Show after the speech (Suleiman and O'Connell 2008: 383).[7] In the speech, similar patterns of pronominal usage emerge, but, as we shall see, the situation is more complex, and it will be demonstrated that Obama's use of *we* is strategic, and it is extended metonymically to represent all Americans.

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[7] While the analysis in Suleiman and O'Connell (2008) is based on a different genre, the political interview, which is less rhetorical than the political speech (see section 4.4), there are certainly many similarities, as we shall see below.

If we return to the opening lines of the speech, the 1st person plural pronoun *we* designates a historically dominant group – both exophorically and cataphorically – that excluded Blacks and other minorities and was limited to a dominant group:

> (9) *We* the people, in order to form a more perfect union. Two hundred and twenty one years ago, in a hall that still stands across the street, *a group of men* gathered and, with these simple words, launched America's improbable experiment in democracy. *Farmers* and *scholars*; *statesmen* and *patriots* who had traveled across an ocean to escape tyranny and persecution finally made real their declaration of independence at a Philadelphia convention that lasted through the spring of 1787.

Ingroup membership here, then, was limited to a specific *group of men* – the Founding Fathers – *farmers*, *scholars*, *statesmen* and *patriots*. The cataphoric and exophoric use of the historical *we* highlights the limitations of the ingroup and creates a contrast with its subsequent use in the speech. Through extensive recontextualization, the meaning is broadened to include both Obama – a representative of the dominant political class, the law and a minority – and subordinate others, including himself, his family, his supporters, and all Americans, who have been excluded both historically and continue to be marginalized in contemporary society.

In the speech, however, his usage oscillates between an all-inclusive *we* referring to the entire American population and a more limited, partially inclusive *we* which refers to him and his supporters. The all-inclusive *we* is illustrated in (10), while the "partially addressee-inclusive" *we* (Wodak *et al.* 2009: 46) can be seen in examples (11) and (12):

> (10) This is where *we* are right now. It's a racial stalemate *we*'ve been stuck in for years

> (11) What *we* know is that America can change

> (12) This was one of the tasks *we* set forth at the beginning of this campaign – to continue the long march of those who came before *us*.

In (12), Obama applies prominent word stress to *we*, thus shifting the focus and, consequently, creating a new meaning of the 1st-P PL pronoun, which now reflects historical, societal and personal change. Within the speech and his message of unity *we* takes on new meaning, thereby embracing all segments of the population:

> (13) *we* may have different stories, but *we* hold common hopes.

However, Obama must also legitimize his personal relations with an unconventional figure and take personal responsibility, which he does through the use of first person singular pronoun. First, he underlines his own story, which is used metaphorically as part of his message of unity

> (14) *I* have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents

The 1st person Sg possessive determiner is also used to highlight his own beliefs, background and politics, as we can see in (15) and (16) below

> (15) *my* unyielding faith in the decency and generosity of the American people

(16) Given *my* background, *my* politics, and *my* professed values and ideals, there will no doubt be those for whom *my* statements of condemnation are not enough.

I is also used for self-effacement and to demonstrate his own limitations:

(17) *I* have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle or with a single candidate

Furthermore, Obama must legitimize his own candidacy and his faith in his political message, but he also needs to extend this message to everyone:

(18) *I* chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because *I* believe deeply that *we* cannot solve the challenges of our time unless *we* solve them together unless *we* perfect our union by understanding that *we* may have different stories.

Such shifts between *I* and *we* not only allow for a shift in perspective, but also blur the distinction between the two pronouns making him a more human part of his all-encompassing and uniting *we*. Moreover, his message is strengthened by recontextualizing the important ideals embedded in the Constitution: *we/our, perfect, union*. In the speech he continuously underlines his own story, which serves, metaphorically and metonymically, as a template for all people's stories and gives new meaning to his opening line, in (9). While in (19) *this nation* is compared to the synecdoche *the sum of its parts*, in (20) the order is reversed and *we* becomes both a metaphor and metonym:

(19) *this nation* is more than *the sum of its parts*

(20) out of many, *we* are truly one

As we might expect, a word count, provided in Figure 1, reveals that 1st person Pl pronoun and its derivatives appears more often than the Sg forms in the speech:

Word	Freq	%
I	39	0.80
my/me/myself	31, 12, 2	0.92
Total 1st person Sg	84	1.72
we	66	1.35
our/us/ourselves	41, 14, 1	1.15
Total 1st person Pl	122	2.50

Figure 1 Distribution of 1st Person Pronouns

The 1st person Sg pronoun forms are used a total of 84 times in the speech (or 1.72% of the word count), while the Pl pronoun forms are used 122 times (2.5%). These data appear to confirm the observations made by both Smith (2009) and Suleiman and O'Connell (2008). However, as we have seen in the discussion above, the 1st person Pl pronoun is recontextualized through both metonymy and metaphor and thereby extended to include all people, whether they belong to an ingroup or an outgroup.

Recontextualization is also widely used with the 3rd person pronominals. Thus, the 3rd person SG pronominals help to create a distance from his former pastor and

(21) *his* most offensive words.

Yet, as already mentioned, Obama cannot completely detach himself from the Church, the Black community and his own religious beliefs, nor can he reject Wright's underlying message, that blacks should become more responsible and self-possessed (Wills 2008: 4). A word count reveals that the 3rd person Sg pronoun and its derivatives are used 23 times in the speech to refer to Wright, while he is directly named 14 times, as we can see in Figure 2:

Word	Freq	%
he	10	0.20
his	6	0.12
him	7	0.14
Wright('s)	14	0.29
Total	37	0.75

Figure 2 Reference to Reverend Wright

Upon closer inspection, however, *he* is used only three times in topic position. In other cases, when referring to Wright's statements, agency is shifted, thereby creating focus on the object of the criticism (*his comments*) rather than on the person, which can be seen below in example (22) with the use of the possessive and in (23) as the object of a prepositional phrase:

(22) *Reverend Wright's* comments were not only wrong but divisive, divisive at a time when we need unity

(23) if all that I knew *of Reverend Wright* were the snippets of those sermons that have run in an endless loop on the television and You Tube

In example (24), semantic substitution is used metonymically:

(24) the *caricatures* being peddled by some commentators

Such linguistic substitution creates a focus on the object of criticism (*comments*, *all I knew*, *caricatures*) rather than on agency. It also disassociates Wright from personal responsibility, thereby mitigating criticism. At the same time, however, it allows for a shift of negative focus (delegitimization) to the mass media, as demonstrated in examples (23) and (24). Wright is also depicted positively through the extended listing of his positive qualities:

(25) *a man* who helped introduce *me* to *my* Christian faith, *a man* who spoke to *me* about *our* obligations to love one another; ... He is *a man* who served his country as a U.S. Marine; who has studied and lectured at some of the finest universities and seminaries in the country, and who for over thirty years led a church that serves the community …

In (25), the repetition of *a man*, rather than the more distance-creating *he*, creates positive imagery. Moreover, in the first part the use of the 1st person Sg pronominal forms *me* and *my* together with the inclusive-*our* strengthens co-responsibility. A positive portrayal can also be seen in two of the three uses of *he* as a topic:

(26) *He* strengthened my faith

(27) *He* is a man who served his country.

Wright's negative qualities are further mitigated by extending criticism to others, including Obama's own family and political party. His (white) grandmother's ingrained racist prejudices are illustrated in (28) and Geraldine Ferraro's presumed racial bias in (29):

(28) a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street

(29) as harboring some deep-seated racial bias

In this way, Wright comes to be representative of an entire class of people with their inherent disparities:

(30) the contradictions – the good and the bad – of the community that he has served diligently

These people and what they represent are, both metonymically and metaphorically, "part of" Obama and "part of America". Through his use of pronouns and recontextualization Obama manages to save his reputation and legitimize his associations with Wright; such associations are justified by including potentially negative elements as representative of

(31) the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through – a part of our union that we have yet to perfect

5.4. Lexical substitution and resemanticization

The last part of the quotation in (31), *a part of our union that we have yet to perfect*, is another example of recontextualization through lexical substitution. Here, *perfect* [ADJ] from the opening line of the speech (see example [3], above) has been recategorized as a verb (*per'fect*), while *union* has become *our union* reflecting Obama's all-inclusive *we*. *Perfect* is found throughout the speech in various recontextualized forms, as we can see in Figure 3:

	Example	Use
(32)	This union may not be *perfect*	Positive Adjective
(33)	particularly a candidacy as *imperfect* as my own	Negative Adjective
(34)	As *imperfect* as he may be	Negative Adjective
(35)	but generation after generation has shown that it can always *be perfected*	Passive Verb
(36)	unless we *perfect* our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes	Active Verb
(37)	And as so many generations have come to realize over the course of the two-hundred and twenty one years since a band of patriots signed that document in Philadelphia, that is where *the perfection* begins.	Noun

Figure 3 Recontextualization of *perfect*

In (32) the negative modal *may*, combined with the predicative Adjective, mitigates the apparent self-criticism. In (33) and (34) the ostensibly negative prefix *im-*, combined with the equative form, allows Obama both to accept responsibility for his own limitations as well as to attribute limitations to Wright. Moreover, since the same form is recontextualized to refer both to Obama's candidacy and Wright's character, the similarities of the two men are highlighted and their limitations are likened (through personification) to those in the Constitution. Examples (35) and (36) illustrate verbal relexicalization: the former in the passive and the latter in the active, with a finite form combined with the 1st person Pl pronoun, which is used once again metonymically, so that everyone becomes an active participant in Obama's message of change. Such participation is further strengthened through nominalization, which can be found in the last example (37) with *the* for definiteness as well as for referential purposes, while the reification provides a sense of concreteness. Thus, the recontextualization of the original, rather vague meaning of *more perfect* is completed.

Finally, the lexeme *union*, which can be found a total of 8 times in the speech (0.16%), is also recontextualized. When compared to other non-functional lexemes with a strong referential meaning in the text, the frequency is significant. Moreover, in all but one case *union* is recast in concomitance with other elements of the original quotation to consolidate the recontextualization (and resemanticization). We can see the various recontextualizations in Figure 4:

	Example	Co-text
(38)	a *union* that could be and should be *perfected* over time	a union + perfected [V-Passive]
(39)	unless we *perfect* our *union* by understanding that we may have different stories	perfect [V-Finite] + our union
(40)	a part of our *union* that we have yet to *perfect*	our union + to perfect [V-Inf]
(41)	In the white community, the path to *a more perfect union* means acknowledging that what ails the African-American community does not just exist in the minds of black people	a more perfect [Adj] + union
(42)	This *union* may never be *perfect*, but generation after generation has shown that *it* can always be *perfected*	this union + perfect [Adj] *it* + perfect [V-Passive]
(43)	we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of *a more perfect union*	a more perfect [Adj] + union

Figure 4 Recontextualization of *union*

Interestingly, in last example (43), which is the penultimate appearance of the *perfect + union* combination, the immediate grammatical co-text (Indefinite article + comparative + noun) recalls the original phrase, but by this point the original meaning has been completely recast. The co-text not only provides a new interpretation of the original, more limited meaning of *union*, but also ties in with Obama's overriding message of unity. By the end of the speech this message is clear, so reference to the original is no longer necessary:

(44) But it is where we start. It is where our union grows stronger.

In this way, *our union* comes to represent Obama's message of unity and change for all of America.

6. Conclusions

In his speech on race, Barack Obama addresses the issues of race, identity and racism while countering the specific face-threatening accusations which had been levelled against him regarding his relations with Rev. Wright. Obama employs a wide variety of strategies in the speech to arrive at a collective identity representing all Americans. This study has demonstrated that recontextualization plays an important part in realizing this identity. I have argued for a wider understanding of recontextualization than the one that has been traditionally proposed in CDA. Thus, I see recontextualization as both a text-external and text-internal process. The text discussed here offers ample evidence to support such a broad view of recontextualization. Future research should be aimed at uncovering further examples of such recontextualization processes in similar and different texts, discourses and genres.

The specific types of recontextualization discussed in the work are of various types. First, the US Constitution is cited intertextually, but immediately recontextualized through various rhetorical and linguistic realizations. Second, pronouns are used to realize mostly inclusionary rhetoric and, most significantly, the 1st person Pl pronoun is most often used in an all-inclusive meaning, which is in clear contrast to the historical exclusive-*we* found at the beginning of the speech (and the US Constitution). Similar recontextualization occurs with the 1st person Sg and 3rd person Sg pronouns, which serve both to highlight Obama's responsibility and identity and to create the necessary distance from Reverend Wright's incendiary statements, without removing himself too much from the person and what he represents. Pronominal recontextualization, then, helps Obama to (re-)construct his own identity. Finally, the lexical items *perfect* and *union* are recontextualized, both metonymically and metaphorically throughout the speech, thus providing further support for Obama's message of change, hope and unity in his new vision of America. Thus, Obama uses recontextualization combined with inclusionary and, to a lesser extent, exclusionary rhetoric to legitimize himself and delegitimize his detractors. In the process he himself is (re-)constructed metonymically to represent all Americans.

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