

The role of fortitive processes in the construction of the most influential speeches of the 20th and the 21st centuries (on the example of speeches given by Barack Obama, J. F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King)

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The immense success of Barack Obama's speeches can be partially explained by the ideas he promotes and his magnetic and inspiring personality. It also cannot go unnoticed that the 44. US President draws on the richness of American rhetoric and often models himself on other charismatic orators, in particular J. F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. The purpose of this study is to compare and analyze speeches given by those prominent politicians on a phonological level. The results will allow to establish the nature and distribution of fortitive processes and their role in constructing the most influential talks of the 20th and the 21st centuries.

Despite the natural link between phonological work in sociolinguistics and political and social facts, there have been relatively few studies of the potential of phonology in the direct construction of political discourse. Recent research, however, indicate that selected phonological variables can carry political loading and it is even claimed that politicians often alter their pronunciation for persuasive purposes (Wilson 2006). Also Cutler (1989) observes that public speakers cater to listeners' needs "even on the level of details e.g. precisely how the chosen words are to be uttered". Finally, Turk (1996) states that politicians do need to pronounce words more carefully than they do in everyday speech to please the audience.

From the viewpoint of Natural Phonology processes which contribute to making speech more listener-friendly are called fortitions. Their aim is to maximize the perceptual characteristics of speech by emphasizing some phonetic features of a sound and make it more salient (Dressler 1985). Fortitive processes (e.g. diphthongization, lengthening or aspiration) most often affect segments in "strong" positions e.g. stressed vowels, syllable initial consonants and segments in the position of prosodic prominence (Donegan – Stampe 1979). Fortitions are maximized in slow, formal or hyperarticulate speech and apply when high intelligibility is required and when the attention of the speaker increases (Dziubalska-Kołączyk 2002).

In the experiment selected parts of six speeches given by Barack Obama, J. F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were analyzed. The author concentrated mainly on the beginnings and the endings of the performances as "they are the best remembered and the most influential parts of the talk" (Turk 1996). The outcomes of the research allowed to establish the nature of fortitions in political discourse, in particular their frequency and distribution. It was also shown that listener-friendly processes contributed to making political speeches more persuasive and attractive for the audience. Finally, it appeared that the most influential talks of the 20th and the 21st centuries showed similarities even on the phonological level.