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APPEALING TO THE NATION: HOW WOODROW WILSON MOTIVATES THE PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WAR EFFORT

Abstract: This paper analyses Woodrow Wilson's national address regarding the First World War using critical discourse analysis. Its aim is to give a brief overview of Wilson's argument and focuses on the techniques used in his speech to balance the delicate scales of power. Rhetoric takes precedence over logic in building a persuasive argument by appealing to the people's ideals and sense of duty and collectiveness, at times resorting to praise and flattery to evoke the positive feelings that would ensure his plea for the contribution of every single American to the war effort does not fall on deaf ears.

Key words: critical discourse analysis (CDA), presidential speech, power, persuasive techniques, politeness, motivation

What is the object of oratory? Its object is persuasion and conviction – the control of other minds by a strange personal influence and power.
–Woodrow Wilson, 1877

Introduction

Indeed, future President Woodrow Wilson was on the right track when he wrote these words in an editorial in *The Princetonian* during his second year at Princeton. He was well known for his oratory skills

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throughout his life, giving numerous influential speeches. As a politician, he will always be remembered for his unique perspective on foreign policy, often dubbed "wilsonianism", with some of its key tenets being opposition to isolationism and the favouring of interventionism. In line with this, on April 17 1917, 11 days after the US officially entered World War I, President Wilson addressed the nation in a speech that had the purpose of motivating the people to contribute to the war effort[2]. This speech could be classified as external inner-state political (Schäffner 1996: 202), a sub-genre that is often the subject of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). When approaching the task of providing a critical analysis of this text, one should bear in mind that "studies in CDA are multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds and orientated toward very different data and methodologies" (Weiss and Wodak 2003: 12). However, Fruttaldo and Cambria (2017: 286-7) explain that these different approaches are most often qualitative in nature, and the conclusions drawn quite subjective, only at times supported by "hard facts" such as those that may be arrived at through a quantitative approach (e.g. in a multidisciplinary approach which involves corpus linguistics). Bearing in mind these limitations, I have opted to make the most out of these evaluations. In this paper I will provide an analysis of Wilson's speech which will hopefully make the most of both a deductive perspective such as that championed by Isabela and Norman Fairclough, and a more intuitive approach to the text as a case study, albeit at times supported by quantitative analysis. In addition, I will strive to put Wilson's speech in a historical context, particularly when analysing his argumentation, but also in an attempt to explain some of his stylistic choices. These can be evaluated through the prism of the theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) as well. The aim of this paper is to explain how Woodrow Wilson made a convincing statement appealing to each individual citizen and stressing the importance of everyone's contribution by using mechanisms such as preparing the field for presenting his argument by levelling it and/or humbling himself, appealing to sense of duty, using praise and flattery, and referring to ideals.

In their work *Political Discourse Analysis,* Isabela and Norman Fairclough explain the different approaches one might take when evaluating an argument (2012: 51-59). Seeing as Wilson's speech is, in fact, supposed to offer a solution to a problem, it may be treated as

2 The whole transcript of the speech can be found at the following web address: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-17-1917-message-regarding-world-war-i

argumentative and regarded in the terms suggested in the work. Firstly, the strength of Wilson's argument can be measured by the acceptability of its logic. A framework for the structure of practical arguments is offered by the authors (45), according to which Wilson's speech is broken down below:

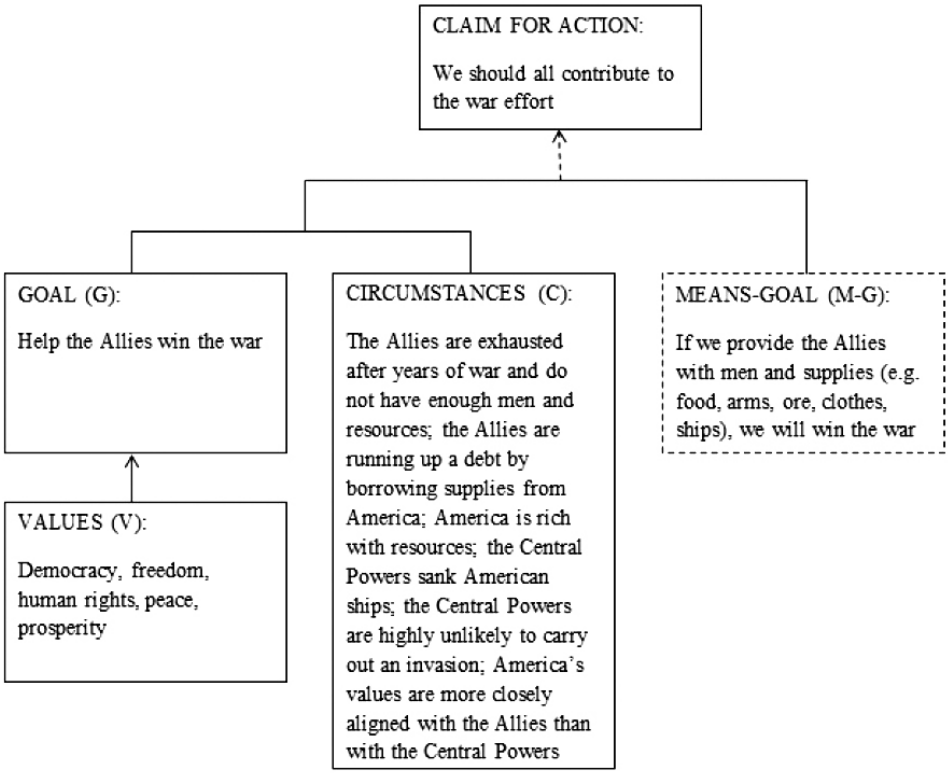

Figure 1: Wilson's argument for contributing to the war effort

As is explained by the authors, whether the means-goal premise is fulfilled in future or not does not have a bearing on the validity of the argument's logic. Therefore, we have all the necessary data to evaluate Wilson's speech from the perspective of logicalness, and may freely conclude that it meets this requirement. Nonetheless, this speech comprises many supporting arguments, which may not all prove to be logical. A question which this paper will endeavour to answer is whether even such arguments can overall be seen as persuasive and how this is achieved.

This is where the in-depth analysis of the text begins. The second approach for the evaluation of arguments is a rhetorical one, and the authors themselves suggest that this aspect of a text can turn a logical argument into an ineffective one, as well as make an illogical statement into a persuasive one. It is for this reason that, after briefly confirming the strength of the logic behind Wilson's speech, this paper will primarily focus on the linguistic means by which he strove to achieve his goal of motivating the nation to contribute to the war effort.

Power and Authority

When analysing the text of Woodrow Wilson's speech, it is important to bear in mind that he is the President, addressing his nation. This puts him in a position of power in respect to the people hearing/reading his speech, and throughout this analysis, I shall endeavour to prove that he was well aware of this position. While a speech, by its nature, is a monologue which ideally continues uninterrupted, this is not to say that it is composed without regard to the audience's response. This being said, there are instances in Wilson's speech where he addresses the audience directly, but when doing so, in most cases does not openly assert the authority he possesses as President, regardless of the fact that he has the right to do so being the democratically elected leader of the nation. Rather, Wilson opts to give power to the audience by seeking permission to speak to them and give them counsel in instances such as: "I hope you will permit me to address you", "[t]his let me say", and "[l]et me suggest". In this way, Wilson humbles himself before the listener/reader, especially, when using the performative "I beg that all editors and publishers everywhere […]". Sometimes, he uses hedges, e.g. "so far as I can see". A further example shows hedging and the use of a conditional structure in combination with an adverb of probability and a further distal modal in the if-clause: "I venture to suggest, also, to all advertising agencies that they would perhaps render a very substantial and timely service to the country if they would give it widespread repetition." By using such expressions, Wilson displays a high level of tentativeness and tact which is usually reserved for interlocutors whom we respect (due to age or social status). The implementation of these strategies, which fall under the domain of politeness, empowers the audience and goes some way toward ensuring that the requests put forth in the speech do not fall on deaf ears.

However, President Wilson balances this approach with the use of deontic modals – most notably *must* – in order to stress the necessity of the actions he suggests. When put in context, there is much to be said about the nature of these directives. Firstly, there is the *have to* v. *must* distinction to consider. Seeing as this speech is a formal address to the nation, it seems likely that the president would opt for *must* as it is more formal of the pair. As for the internal v. external obligation distinction, it would be ill-advised to classify these instances of the use of *must* as orders, despite the fact that it is possible to use *must* when presenting a rule (e.g. you must drive on the left in Great Britain). Though some may argue that the president's has the authority to order the people, especially in times of crisis such as during a war, and it may seem natural to assign these instances the status of orders, they in fact have the nature of internal compulsion. Evidence for this claim includes the fact that in the speech, *must* is most often coupled with the inclusive first person pronoun *we*, as well as the nature of the acts Wilson says they must do – "[w]e must realize to the full how great the task is", "we must devote ourselves", and perhaps the most telling example, which is the concluding statement of the speech: "We must all speak, act, and serve together!" Consequently, other examples which may have appeared more difficult to disambiguate, such as "[w]e must supply abundant food", may be treated in the same vein as internal compulsion – Wilson feels this is what needs to be done in order to achieve their goal, rather than "Wilson is ordering the nation to supply abundant food". Such reasoning again lessens the power and authority he exudes, but on the other hand makes the appeal more personal, and to some, more convincing. As the saying goes – you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, so Wilson was right to avoid giving orders, and instead try to advise, urge, suggest, prompt…

Sense of Duty

Wilson often supports his directives lexically by using words and phrases such as "duty", "dictate", "needs of the nation", "expect", "count upon", and "rely upon", all of which appeal to the nation's sense of duty. The audience would therefore feel compelled to accept the call. Furthermore, if they do consider it their duty to contribute in any way that they can to the war effort, then doing their duty would evoke strong positive feelings

(especially patriotism, which will be discussed later in greater detail). On the other hand, the thought of shirking one's responsibilities towards their country would certainly give rise to feelings of guilt in any person with strong morals who would call himself or herself a patriot. Consequently, it may be a fair assumption that Wilson also counted on the strength of emotions such as pride and, on the other end of the spectrum, shame and guilt. It is important to note that these inferences from this particular argument within the overall framework of Wilson's speech (see: Figure 1), which presents itself as logical, actually point to an appeal to emotion, which is a logical fallacy. An indicator that this is the case is the strong presence of persuasive language. This conclusion also goes to show that rhetoric takes precedence over logic, as Wilson's argument presents itself as effective.

Collectiveness

A further step towards proving that Wilson does not shy away from emotional manipulation with a view to "guilting" the audience is the analysis of his use of pronouns. This is where methods from corpus linguistics may indeed be used to CDA's advantage. Wilson used the first person plural pronoun "we" 17 times, as opposed to the singular "I", which he used 12 times. It is worth noting here as well that the first person is in most cases used in combination with hedges, distal modals and other phrases expressing tentativeness or implying uncertainty, such as using the phrase "I hope", or with the performative "I beg" which, according to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), threatens the hearer's negative face (the desire not to be disturbed and retain freedom). The same is true of orders – there are three instances where "I" is used authoritatively, making it a face-threatening act (FTA), either directly, on-record, with little redressive action, or with none (bald on-record). This is manifest in the following: "I call upon young men and old alike", "I shall confidently expect you to […]", and "I particularly appeal to the farmers of the South". One may argue that the only redressive action in these examples is the hedge that the verb "appeal" provides, as it may be viewed as a polite request, rather than a direct order. In any case, according to politeness theory, what Wilson does by addressing the people in such a way is that he puts pressure on the audience, which is in line with my

previous claim about rousing a sense a duty and, conversely, guilt in the hearer. Some may even applaud his honesty, as he does not embellish his words and makes his intentions plain. This in turn means that he leaves no room for misunderstanding. Finally, an interesting phrase that Wilson uses in his speech is "I take the liberty", which is hard to classify in terms of politeness and power and authority, as it presents itself as a hedge, but is in fact quite a bold statement – namely, Wilson recognises that he, perhaps, has no business telling farmers what they should do with their own crops, but allows himself to do so anyway. These different strategies Wilson implements when speaking to the nation in the first person singular demonstrate how carefully he composed his speech in order to keep the delicate balance of power between himself and the audience and use it to the maximal effect.

When it comes to using "we", besides using this form 17 times, there are also 19 instances of "our" and three of "ourselves". In total, this would make the first person plural three times more frequent than the singular. Indeed, when analysing presidential speeches over the past two centuries, Wilson used "we" more than any of his predecessors (Savoy 2017: 58). There is a striking difference in statistics between his immediate predecessor, William Howard Taft, who is the president who used "we" the fewest times in the history of America. This might have been a conscious effort on behalf of Wilson to differentiate himself from Taft, the Republican nominee looking to be re-elected, and to some degree perhaps Theodore Roosevelt, too, who ran as a third candidate after losing the Republican nomination to Taft and forming the Progressive party. Savoy argues that Wilson's unique style is the result of his wish to modernise the presidency (67). Some of the most obvious associations that come to mind upon hearing "we" are: group, community, togetherness, team, cooperation, unity, sharing… At worst, they might be classified as neutral (group), while most of them carry positive connotations. By using this pronoun, Wilson levels the field, giving the impression that he is in the same position as the people. What is more, this is exactly the way in which he addresses them – "My Fellow-Countrymen". They share the same problem, and they shall work together to solve it. This is underpinned by Wilson's final statement – the exclamation "We must all speak, act, and serve together!" Naturally, it is possible to find fault in his reasoning in some instances when he uses "we", seeing that, at times, Wilson would not in fact be able to include himself in all fairness in the undertakings

he suggests. For example, when he addresses the farmers and claims that "[w]e must supply abundant food", it is rather unlikely that he will be among the toiling farmers. Some might therefore take offense, especially if they belonged to those who would be affected by the war, be it directly, if they or their loved ones are sent to fight, or indirectly, if, for example, a percentage of the goods they produce is taken away from them to help the war effort. After all, they might argue, it is not the president himself who will fight in the trenches, or go down a mine shaft to get the precious ore which is to keep the factories going. This could be the reason why Wilson uses strategies such as hedging throughout his address – he is aware of the audience's possible negative reaction.

Be that as it may, the use of the first person plural is overall effective as it serves its purpose. In this speech in particular, Wilson's aim is to stress the importance of everyone's contribution, and by sparking positive associations such as those listed above, he can achieve his goal more easily. A further technique that he uses which could be viewed as tangential to this one is singling out certain groups. On the one hand, this may undermine the collectiveness angle, but on the other, the groups referred to feel privileged and more important and valuable. Consequently, those left out would harbour contrary feelings. Why should farmers, housewives, publishers and clergymen be given the honour of being mentioned and their role be elevated and not that of the doctor? This may indeed be the reason why Wilson refers to "men and women alike" and "young men and old alike" – if the listener/reader cannot identify with e.g. railwaymen or merchants or other professions mentioned in the text, then they will fall under one of the umbrella categories. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Wilson could have easily used the yet more general "people", and that his choice to refer to both men and women could be an attempt to fight against the notion that it is only young males who can contribute to the war effort. It was, after all, only after World War I that first wave feminism started moving forward with greater speed, and since the argument presented in this speech is economic, there is every reason to appeal to the widest possible audience and not just those groups traditionally associated with war, i.e. the army.

Another way in which Wilson emphasises the importance of everyone's contribution is by choosing to omit any mention of God in his speech. As Fairclough explains, it is not only what is present in the text that gives it meaning, but also that which is absent (1995: 5). One

popular rhetorical device used in political speeches is the invocation of God, and it may seem surprising that Wilson does not resort to it. A possible explanation for this could be his desire to stress the necessity of each individual's hard work, and perhaps he wants to put forth the idea that it is the people who will bring America victory, which additionally encourages them – in this speech, Wilson puts his faith in his fellow man, rather than God.

Finally, the sense of collectiveness that he stirs up could be used to rule with fear – fear of banishment. Wilson devotes a whole segment of his speech to middlemen. He warns that "[t]he eyes of the country will be especially upon [them]". What is more, he outlines the expectations of the country, and those are that they "forego unusual profits". The onus is, therefore, on them, and it would not only be Wilson who they would betray if they did otherwise, but in fact their fellow countrymen. Wilson positions himself as having no personal expectations of the middlemen except that "[he] shall confidently expect [them] to deserve and gain the confidence of people of every sort and station". By declaring this, he shifts the role of judge, jury and executioner to the people. Thus, even though he is the one doing the indirect speech act, which could be regarded as a warning, or even a threat due to its passive-aggressiveness (especially underpinned by the adverb "confidently"), Wilson involves others in its execution, rather than committing himself to the role of the punisher. The motivation behind this could be to yet again give more power to the people instead of asserting his own authority, as well as instilling fear of being excommunicated, or even worse, lynched. Indeed, they must all "assume the duty of careful, provident use and expenditure as a public duty, as a dictate of patriotism which no one can now expect ever to be excused or forgiven for ignoring." As discussed above, this manoeuvre could provoke a feeling of guilt among wrongdoers (and pride in the opposite situation), making this warning an appeal to emotion, a logical fallacy, though no less of a persuasive argument for it. What is more, the mention of patriotism reminds the audience of the values they are trying to protect.

Ideals

As shown in the schema of Wilson's argument, his goal and consequent claim for action stem from a system of ingrained values he

is trying to protect in the long run. As Heatherington sees it, in political speeches, "there are three basic tactics: arouse good feelings, arouse bad feelings, or blur the issues altogether" (1980: 171). Referring to ideals would definitely fall under the first category, and Wilson uses this tactic throughout his speech. The text includes a number of notions which all evoke the same supreme sentiment, and that is patriotism. From the very opening address of the speech, when Wilson calls upon "[his] [f]ellow-[c]ountrymen", as well as the opening statement that "[their] own beloved country" has entered World War I, to the penultimate sentence declaring that "[t]he supreme test of the nation has come", Wilson uses the words "nation" or "national" and "country" two dozen times. Needless to say, these words inspire unity and a sense of belonging, consequently giving the people something to fight for, and those are the ideals they believe in and the values they uphold. They are trying to protect "the future peace and security of the world", as well as "democracy and human rights". Furthermore, Wilson gives a very strong supporting argument for why they should answer his claim for action in order to achieve the goal of helping the Allies win the war – they should help "the peoples everywhere who are fighting for their liberties and for our own". This implies that the foundation for the alliance between the Allies and America is a shared set of values, especially since the association one derives from the notion of liberty might be *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, and America and France do historically have these ideals in common. America is fighting for democracy, and nothing could stir up more positive feelings than that thought.

Praise and Flattery

In line with the mechanics of inspiring patriotic feelings is arousing pride in one's capabilities through praise. Firstly, the position America finds itself in is a coveted one – they are to help Europe out of the crisis it is in. Perhaps unintentionally, the speech that Wilson gives leaves the audience feeling like they are in a position of power over the Allies, whom they will be bailing out, so to speak. As he puts it, "a large proportion of the people of Europe must rely upon the harvests in America." The hearer cannot help but sense that it is him/her that has somehow earned this elevated position, seeing as Wilson has throughout his speech stressed

the value of each American. This heightens the audience's sense of self-worth, making them feel that they are capable of fulfilling the goal Wilson has in mind.

In addition to sparking positive associations, he also praises the people directly – he calls the industry "a notable and honored host" and "efficient friends and saviors of free men everywhere". Moreover, tough he uses a hedge ("so far as I can see"), Wilson still states that "[t]here is not a single selfish element […] in the cause [they] are fighting for." Logically speaking, this would mean that the nation is generous to help the Allies, and that their endeavours are noble. After all, to achieve this, they will have to exercise self-sacrifice and frugality, and all of these values are those cherished by a good Christian. Perhaps that is why Wilson hopes that "clergymen will not think the theme of [the nation's solemn duties] an unworthy or inappropriate subject of comment and homily from their pulpits." All of this high praise, perhaps even bordering on flattery, all but promises glory for every man who contributes to the Allies' victory, but more importantly, the victory of democracy, freedom, and security. Doing so is "a great thing", which is in itself an interesting word choice. Wilson opts for the completely neutral and rather meaningless word "thing", in a place where he could have, for example, said "feat", "undertaking", or "endeavour", all of which carry the connotation of difficulty and tackling problems which call for perseverance and bravery. Wilson leaves the impression that he is at a loss for words before the magnitude of the task that his nation is taking up. And, naturally, only the most worthy can fulfil it.

Finally, Wilson uses another, rather manipulative, manoeuvre to flatter the audience. He says that "[i]t is evident to every thinking man that [their] industries […] must be made more prolific and more efficient than ever and that they must be more economically managed and better adapted". The moment Wilson explains the situation, it becomes evident. Calling a person a "thinking man", of course, means that the person is intelligent, and the whole audience hearing the situation being explained to them must therefore be thinking, intelligent people. This, of course, cannot be the case, which means that Wilson is covertly flattering the audience.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed Wilson's speech through the prism of CDA, which allows for a multidisciplinary approach. I have therefore put his speech in a historical context and endeavoured to analyse it using argumentation theory which has its roots in logic, but also to explain the rhetoric and give possible motives for the choices Wilson made when composing his speech through a qualitative approach which does not shy away from quantitative methods to support its claims. The analysis of this speech has shown that Wilson uses many different techniques to persuade his audience that his argument is valid, firstly by ensuring its logicalness, but also by giving numerous supporting arguments where he uses rhetoric to his advantage to create a persuasive argument where logic fails him. Namely, he shows a keen awareness of the delicate balance of power between himself and the audience he is addressing, so he strives not to present himself as a stern authority figure, but rather, one of the people, unless it is to warn against wrongdoing. In this way, he inspires a sense of collectiveness, which is further bolstered by the patriotism he evokes by referring to ideals such as democracy and freedom, as well as appealing to the audience's sense of duty. Last but not least, to ensure his appeal gets a warm reception, Wilson is generous with praise and sometimes flattery. The overall effect the listeners/readers are left with is positive, and due to the logicalness of the argument presented and the careful choice of language, they would easily be persuaded by Wilson's speech to contribute to the war effort.

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APELOVANJE NA NACIJU – KAKO VUDRO VILSON MOTIVIŠE LJUDE DA DOPRINESU POBEDI U RATU

Rezime: U svom obraćanju naciji po stupanju SAD u Prvi svetski rat, predsednik Vudro Vilson koristi različite tehnike ubeđivanja kako bi motivisao ljude da daju svoj doprinos. Rad analizira Vilsonov govor uz pomoć kritičke analize diskursa, dok vrednuje logiku njegovih argumenata i retoričke kvalitete njegovog izbora reči, ukazujući da snaga Vilsonovog govora ipak leži u govorničkoj veštini. On pravi ravnotežu između korišćenja deontičkih modala kako bi urgirao i različitih vidova epistemičke modalnosti sa ciljem da ublaži razliku u pozicijama moći i autoriteta sebe, kao predsednika države, i svojih slušaoca. Na taj način on apeluje na narod da ispuni svoju dužnost, usput budeći sentimente patriotizma i drugih ideala, najpre koristeći leksiku sa emotivnim nabojem. Kvantitativnom analizom je utvrđeno da u ovom obraćanju Vilson koristi prvo lice množine tri puta češće nego prvo lice jednine, čime evocira osećaj pripadništva zajednici, dok su iskazi u jednini većinski propraćeni strategijama negativne učtivosti, tj. ograđivanjem, sem kada im je cilj stavljanje pritiska na javnost, ili konkretnu grupu, da daju svoj maksimum, čineći ih naročito efektnim. Konačno, kroz upotrebu hvale i laskanje publici, Vilson obezbeđuje topao prijem i garantuje ubedljivost svog apela.

Ključne reči: kritička analiza diskursa, predsednički govor, moć, tehnike ubeđivanja, učtivost, motivacija