

Barack Obama and Modern American Caricature. Anatoly Chudinov, Svetlana Makeeva. Ekaterinburg: UGPU, 2014. ISBN 978-5-7186-0622-5

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The book under review comprises ten chapters, nine of which span six years of Obama's political activity as reflected in American caricatures. Chapter 8 is meant to provide an extensive overview of stereotypical, racially-biased images and prototypes associated with the African-American population from the pre-Civil War period to the present day. This work is conceived as both an introduction to and tool-kit for students and scholars doing research in the area of political linguistics. It also aims to promote the analysis of pictorial elements of discourse to a more prominent place in cognitive linguistics. Nine of the ten chapters deal exclusively with American political figures (Obama and his political opponents), whereas Chapter 10 presents Obama and Putin in a comparative study which accords an unprecedented degree of respect and admiration to the latter than is traditionally reserved for an American "enemy-head" personality.

Addressing the culturally-engrained devices (caricatures, stereotypes, anecdotes, etc.) exploited in modeling, remodeling, promoting, and (for the most part) abusing America's leading political figurehead, Barack Obama, in graphic art, E. Shustrova's research implicitly intertwines with a number of key linguistic issues. The first, emotive-evaluative nomination of persona, developed by T. Markelova (1993), recognizes that the category of evaluative nomination in modern language use tends to get weaker, with the observable weakening not compensated by any other linguistic

features. Shustrova's research tends to provide evidence of this category, still actively developing on meta-textual level. The second linguistic issue raised by Shustrova's study is that of evaluation versus social role/ social status conflict. The racial ethnicity of Obama is identified as the permanent characteristic that defines his status, whereas his position in the Oval Office is an acquired role characteristic. The study provides ample evidence to the fact that permanent status characteristics still hold priority for the composite WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) evaluator. Thirdly, the problem of values versus assessment semantics is raised: Obama, first viewed as a compelling personification of liberty and equal opportunities, later caused a severe values rift in American society as ever-present contradictions regarding popular myths, cultural icons and norm-referenced values between the black and white populations in the US backfired with a vengeance on the person meant to be the Moses of racial consolidation.

Turning now to an examination of the book's ten chapters, Barack Obama's political rhetoric is explored in Chapter 1 through an analysis of imagery and tropes. Shustrova manages this section adequately by tracing similarities and differences in Obama's political rhetoric with that of his predecessors. Highlighting Obama's individual use of Christian rhetoric deserves less emphasis: the casting of significant figures in US history (particularly Presidents) as prophets and

martyrs for the nation – Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King – is a given. Admittedly, Presidents are also high priests of the American civil religion. Observation of African-American Baptist practices is of greater consequence: for example, “call and response” patterns, stringing and blending imagery, pronounced community values, ‘testifying’ and ‘signifying’. The absence of allusions to a chivalry code in Obama’s rhetoric is, again, a statement of the obvious: a moral code popularized throughout Western Europe by the Norman aristocracy could hardly be accepted and addressed by African Americans, an oppressed community in the US. This first chapter, nevertheless, admirably brings together many and varied aspects of Obama’s rare speaking talents and offers some contextual foregrounding for his ‘policy of great aspirations’.

Chapter 2 addresses how the image of Russia is modeled in Barack Obama’s speech, yet does not offer new data analysis and relies, instead, on updating and reprinting earlier publications. It examines several passages from Obama’s speeches for embedded evaluation, i.e. evaluations that are presented as givens through the use of factive predicates, attributive rather than predicative adjectives, and so on. This chapter is a useful reminder of the extent to which the speaker/writer’s viewpoint is at the mercy of political conformity and political fashion.

In Chapter 3, Shustrova addresses the representation of Barack Obama in political caricatures, offering an evaluation of the affective (good-bad) type of characterization he receives in graphic imagery. She examines the meta-textual, metaphoric modeling of nine key images – including ‘sportsman’, ‘circus performer’, ‘doctor’, etc., – to identify their ‘evaluation polarity’ with Obama’s practice of modeling related concepts, and concludes that negative evaluative polarities seem prevalent. The linking of images with multi-layered meanings to concrete political precedents in her analysis is commendable. It is somewhat surprising, though, not to find quantitative data supporting the imagery discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 addresses puns in components of verbal and visual caricature. The chapter proceeds in a clear and well-organized manner, describing different types of metaphors conveyed via textual and graphic semiotic means. Attitudinal (including value judgment and counter-expectation marking) and stylistic (speech-act comment) cases prevail. Interesting illustrations are provided of phraseological units employed as stance-defining means. Students interested in pragmatics should definitely be referred to the excellent sample of stance studies.

Chapter 5 examines basic, archetypal images in the representation of Barack Obama, drawing on Jungian

psychology (Jung, 2013) and the archetypal images of mother, child, wise old man, god, self, anima, trickster, and shadow. This foundation makes the treatment of material somewhat impressionistic: in his writings, Jung fails to give archetypal images a dry, precise, intellectually-formulated meaning. However, to give Shustrova her due, some archetypal images (e.g. the trickster) are sufficiently well-contextualized in African-American folklore and speech practices to be relevant here. It would be interesting to see some quantitative data and, most importantly, to see this chapter linked to research on the type of addressee. Unlike the more obvious cases addressed in previous chapters, samples presented in the fifth chapter are definitely aimed at an intellectual reader and present a decoding challenge: what does it signify?

Occupying a ‘stand-alone’ position with a focus on precedent phenomena in caricature, Chapter 6 should definitely be granted the ‘top’ rating for the book as a whole. It presents a clear, helpful procedure of contrastive intertextual analysis of a person’s discourse practices and of the graphic imagery connected with this person in political discourse. Barack Obama is a most rewarding choice for this type of research, notorious as he is for ‘borrowing’ snippets of political rhetoric from his predecessors. The chapter inadvertently proves that: a) the Bible remains a popular source of reference for the American reading public; b) mass culture visual semiotics (Hollywood production images) prevail over *belles lettres* sources as popular currency.

Chapter 7 offers a brief examination of linguocultural types of Obama in caricature. Drawing on V. Karasik’s (2012) theory of linguocultural images, Shustrova presents a somewhat sketchy overview of the Superman concept deployed for Obama’s characterization in graphic images, suggesting that Obama falls short of the image expected of an American figurehead. The regressive modification of the Superman concept – once a cultural idol, now subject to ironic caricatures – could prove a fruitful topic of research. Another issue which Shustrova points out is the juxtaposition of linguocultural type deployment in cartoons, produced by representatives of various linguocultural groups. Some sources (e.g., Rhinehart, Conan, Goblin) are introduced but require further development.

Chapter 8 offers an overview of stereotypical images of African-Americans in American graphics, providing a valuable, flexible tool for both cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research into the expression of attitudes towards African-Americans in the Deep South and more generally. It reviews certain positive mythologized types (Uncle Tom, Aunt Jemima) and reveals them to be limited to a WASP mentality. Predictably, it devotes more attention

to negative imagery, presenting the well-known stereotypical representations of blacks as ‘dumb, lazy, over-sexed, watermelon-eating, chicken-stealing’, etc. This section might cause aggressive trigger reactions from Southern conservatives. As related to the rest of the book, the function of the chapter is to provide a key to anti-Obama media campaigns. This key might have been more helpful in the initial chapters, though the present organization does give the research a touch of intrigue. Stylistically, this chapter bears on a popular scientific genre of writing, making the potential readership virtually limitless. The subject treatment is suggestive, thoughtful and (as throughout the whole book) well-illustrated.

Chapter 9 examines Barack Obama and the 2012 elections as represented in American graphics, while the final chapter, Chapter 10, looks at Barack Obama in 2014. These chapters will be reviewed in unison since they share the same objective: tracing the transformation of Obama’s image from guardedly neutral, to grudgingly positive, to scathingly negative due to the downward glide caused by recent events in the Ukraine. The author keeps reminding us of one important detail: modern IT makes it possible for virtually the entire populace of the US to try their hand at caricature production through simple, widely-available software programs, which they seem to do with gusto. To return to my initial comment, Shustrova’s preference for Putin over Obama is entirely unprecedented: presidents, to repeat, are high priests who model American values. Obama, seemingly, has acquired the hazardous position of a false prophet.

Overall, *Barack Obama and Modern American Caricature* is a timely reminder of the extent to which evaluative expressions pervade discourse and the use of graphic input in the study is very welcome. An axiological study of names in terms of value formation has been, for most part, neglected by linguists; it is far more common to operate with cases in which the evaluative component is firmly established (e.g., Martin Luther King — action, optimism, future orientation, non-violence, self-help). The problem of deciding where and how to draw a line between representational/descriptive meaning and attitudinal/evaluative meaning receives further, if somewhat unconventional, development in Shustrova’s study.

The study of Barack Obama in graphic art is a perfect choice if one wishes to research the way constructed environments respond to and, in turn, shape the world. Graphic art lends itself to more immediate demonstrations of the way the world is, the way the world ought to be, what proper behavior is, as well as social esteem and social sanction. Most notably, it allows for a glimpse into constructing an affiliation based on a highly personalized use of affect in counterpropaganda (or, for that matter, counterculture) with all those readers who share the speaker’s enthusiasm (or lack thereof).

There is a multitude of differing approaches and overlapping categories, as well as discourse analysis models to be found in this book, which manages many sources in a clear and progressive way. Shaped by the abiding principle ‘Do what you like and like what you do’, the book might be useful for those planning research in the field of mass-media discourse, sociolinguistics, political linguistics, creolized texts and US cultural studies.

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