

# CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN MICHELLE OBAMA'S 2012 RE-ELECTION SPEECHES

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## *Abstract*

On November 7<sup>th</sup> 2012, after being re-elected as the President of the United States, Barack Obama devoted some words in his acceptance speech to the First Lady as his first supporter. The world's media generally acknowledged this statement as something more than a mere formality, due to the active role played by Michelle Obama, which was considered decisive for the final result of this disputed electoral race.

This paper seeks to study the various strategies employed throughout the 2012 US Presidential Campaign by analyzing her official speeches and comparing them to those of her husband and other direct influences. The analysis of persuasive figurative language in a corpus consisting of the speeches delivered in the last four months of the campaign is based on approaches by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Charteris-Black (2004) and may allow us to identify her tools of political persuasion.

*Keywords:* Political discourse analysis, Michelle Obama, 2012 US Presidential Campaign, conceptual metaphor, social cognition, political language.

## *Resumen*

En su discurso de aceptación tras su reelección como Presidente de los Estados Unidos de 7 de noviembre de 2012, Barack Obama agradecía a la Primera Dama su apoyo incondicional. La prensa internacional se hacía eco de hasta qué punto la afirmación traspasaba el plano de lo personal y la mera fórmula protocolaria, dada la gran implicación activa de Michelle Obama, considerada como un factor decisivo dentro de un complicado marco electoral.

Nuestro propósito es el estudio de las claves de su diversificada estrategia en los discursos para la campaña de las elecciones presidenciales de Estados Unidos de 2012, que se comparan con los de su marido y otras influencias directas. El análisis del lenguaje figurado persuasivo del corpus compuesto por los discursos pronunciados en los cuatro últimos meses de la campaña, bajo las premisas de los enfoques de Lakoff y Johnson (1980) y Charteris-Black (2004), pretende desentrañar sus herramientas de persuasión.

*Palabras clave:* Análisis del discurso político, Michelle Obama, elecciones presidenciales norteamericanas de 2012, metáfora conceptual, cognición social, lenguaje político.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As stated by Okulska and Cap (2010:4), the Analysis of Political Discourse accommodates socially oriented studies of *polity* and/or *policies*, located at the intersection of political/public discourse and political/social institutions, and studies conducted within the Critical Discourse Analysis paradigm with an emphasis on *politics*. Political speeches have a special capacity to fix particular values and models of reference among citizens, as well as to reproduce dominant ideologies and social conceptions; thus, their value within politics is beyond doubt.

It is the aim of this paper to explore Michelle Obama's strategies to influence voters through the study of the use of language in her speeches. There is a substantial body of research on Barack Obama's classical rhetoric and usage of metaphors (Charteris-Black 2011), his Presidential Campaign speeches (Post 2009), his performances at Democratic National Conventions (Frank and McPhail 2005), persuasive strategies and covert ideology of his political discourse (Hórvath 2009), critical discourse analyses of his early Presidential speeches (Wang 2010) or those aimed to a specific audience, such as Latinos (López Cirugeda and Sánchez Ruiz 2013), power in his political discourse (Shayegh and Nabifar 2012) or comparisons of his speech with those by other notable orators such as Martin Luther King (Shayegh 2012). Apart from this, there has been a growing interest in Michelle Obama since her performance in the 2008 Presidential Campaign (Thomas 2009; White 2011), and her increasing importance within the Democratic Party as well as her decisive role in the last elections reported by the mainstream press.

This paper studies the First Lady's role in the 2012 campaign with a special focus on the analysis of figurative language of her political speeches as a persuasive strategy at different campaign events including the Democratic National Convention, within a corpus of investigation<sup>1</sup> and a timeframe comprising four months (August 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 – November 5<sup>th</sup> 2012, when the campaign ended. Table 1 shows the distribution of the corpus in detail).

	August	September	October	November
Number of speeches	15	18	23	8
	<b>Total</b>			<b>64</b>

Table 1. Distribution of the corpus.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from the official website of The White House <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-and-remarks>, where the speeches are gathered under the headline "Remarks by the First Lady".

However, we have paid special attention to the September-4<sup>th</sup> speech, since the role of the First Lady within the campaign changed from that date and “marked another step on her path from reluctant campaigner to political heavy hitter” (Obama, M. 09/05/2012). The media coverage of the event made especially significant (Alandete 2012, Caldarelli 2012, *Le Monde* 2012, MacAskill 2012, Rutemberg 2012) this speech, similar in structure and contents to the others in the corpus.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout the campaign, Michelle Obama repeated the same speech introducing slight variations depending on the audience, location or breaking-news events. We have analyzed and interpreted the most representative and persuasive conceptual metaphors of the corpus by employing Charteris-Black’s (2004) *Corpus Approach to Critical Metaphor Analysis* (CMA), and also Lakoff’s (1993) and Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* (CMT). The former aims to understand the underlying ideology of the speech by identifying, interpreting and explaining its metaphors (Charteris-Black 2005:26,47), while the latter propounds that the importance of metaphors go beyond mere comparison as humans organize their thoughts through metaphorical associations based on personal experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3).

Thus, we have followed the empirical method of CMA: first, we identified the metaphorical expressions and the words used metaphorically; then, we classified them according to their linguistic content or *source domain* and what they describe or *target domain*. Table 2 shows the number of metaphors analyzed and their classification according to their source domain.

Source domain	Target Domain	No of examples	Source domain	Target Domain	No of examples
Asset	Health	2	Garden	Volunteering	3
	Time	1	Journey	Economy recovery	1
Body	Helping	1		Elections	1
	Ignoring	1		Life	1
	Improving	1	Orientation	Economy	2
Building	American values	2		Help	2
	Country	1		Presidency	1
	Decisions	1		Priorities	1
	Dreams	2	Problems	2	

	Economy	1	<b>War</b>	Success	5
	Life	5		Surrendering	1
	Opportunities	1		Worsening	1
	Success	2		Civil rights	3
<b>Garden</b>	Commitment	1		Elections	3
	Kids	2		Health	1
	The campaign	1		Obama	7

Table 2. Number and classification of metaphors.

Finally, Social Cognition and Cognitive Semantics were applied to explain the relationship between the linguistic choices and metaphorical meanings within their social context. By way of illustration of the employed methodology take the following example: “Barack Obama has been fighting for us. He has been struggling with us”, where the source domain (war) and the target domain (elections) offer an alternative way of comprehending reality by virtue of the conceptualization elections are war. More precisely, it presents different sets of ontological correspondences as a result of using the knowledge we have about war to talk about elections and political campaigns; for instance, the opponent is the enemy, campaigns are weapons and battlefields, etc.

We have also considered other theoretical frameworks in this paper. First, Wilson’s *Political Discourse Analysis* (2001), which specifically focuses on public political manifestations and interventions as interesting phenomena and analyzes the strategic use of linguistic devices to influence the receiver in different ways. Since politics and power merge in this kind of text, we have also followed *Critical Discourse Analysis*<sup>2</sup> (Wodak and Meyer 2009), which is not interested in investigating a linguistic unit *per se* but in studying social phenomena because language is a social practice. This means that discourse is socially constitutive, as it helps to sustain and reproduce the social *status quo* and contributes to transforming it, and that it is conditioned since it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities and relationships between people and groups of people. Thus, discourse and power are related insofar as discursive practices have major ideological effects; that is, they can “produce and reproduce unequal power relations [...] through the ways in which they represent things and position people” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997:258). Moreover, “CDA understands discourse as relatively stable uses of language serving the organization and structuring of social life” (Wodak and Meyer 2009:6). As discourses take place within society and can only be understood in the interplay of social situation, action, actor and societal structures, we also consider van Dijk’s *Sociocognitive Approach* (2008b), whose

<sup>2</sup> Some scholars prefer the term Critical Discourse Studies (van Dijk 2008a).

theory constitutes a framework to systematize phenomena of social reality, where social actors involved in discourse use both their individual experiences and strategies and collective frames of perceptions (*social representations*); thus, these socially shared perceptions link the social system to the individual cognitive system. The three forms of social representations (knowledge, attitudes and ideologies) help us understand Michelle Obama's discourse.

### 3. THE 2012 US PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

On November 7<sup>th</sup> 2012, after being re-elected as the President of the United States, Barack Obama devoted some warm words in his acceptance speech to his wife as his most committed supporter: "Let me say this publicly: Michelle [...] I have never been prouder to watch the rest of America fall in love with you, too, as our nation's First Lady" (Obama, B. 11/07/2012). The world's media generally acknowledged this statement beyond a mere formality, due to the active role played by Michelle Obama, which was considered decisive for the final result of this disputed electoral race.

Four years before, Barack Obama's advisory team marked a milestone in the launch of electoral campaigns with a model based on the dissemination of a positive portrait of the leader via social networks and new technologies, pop culture and design and even the use of his own physical image –which has been adapted in other countries with due cultural modifications– together with the use of classical rhetoric strongly linked to the quintessential American discourse of American heritage and its exceptionalism, a traditional resource for previous Presidents (Kennedy 01/20/1961, Johnson 03/15/1965, Nixon 01/20/1969, Ford 07/04/1976, Reagan 01/21/1985, Carter 07/15/1979, Bush, G. H. 01/20/1989, Clinton 01/21/1993, Bush, G. W. 09/20/2001), which is directly linked in this specific case to the conquest of civil rights, portrayed as an epic battle (Obama, B. 11/17/2008).

Four years later, the polls for the 2012 campaign would be much more conditioned by the impact of the economic crisis. After the flourishing of the *Tea Party* and the 2010 Republican victory in the Senate Elections, the Republican Party was officially asking disenchanted or indecisive democrats for their vote through initiatives like the "No, we can't" video made by former Barack Obama supporters. It was therefore predictable that the Democrat strategy needed to reinforce the perception of the accomplishments of the still on-going term of service, which, according to the polls, remained unnoticed by most citizens, and to fight

abstentionism, traditionally considered as more common among pro-Democrats (Allison 2012).

In this context, Michelle Obama's performance was regarded as a crucial agent to restore the voters' undermined trust in the President. Her commitment to fund raising and networking was constant and remarkably diversified so as to respond to the needs of a very heterogeneous electorate, including those accustomed to the continuous posting of online news. Apart from frequent updates of her Facebook and Twitter profiles, her search for visibility made her present in many other more neutral grounds, such as Spotify or, especially, Pinterest. The mainly *female* contents –fashion and decoration, recipes, or inspirational quotes, among others– of this last social network reinforced the First Lady's position as a “mom-in-chief”, to use her own expression. This can be considered as a strategy to attract female voters, as the Republican Party had been revitalized by mothers through the *Tea Party* Movement (Streich, 2008). Despite Pinterest's so-called apolitical vocation, pro-Republican and anti-Presidential messages from the users were not uncommon during the campaign period on this platform.

#### 4. MICHELLE OBAMA

Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama is the wife of the 44th and current President of the United States, Barack Obama, and the first African-American First Lady of this country. She graduated from Princeton, where she enrolled in an academic and cultural group, thereby becoming aware of minorities' problems, which led her to write a thesis entitled *Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community* (Robinson 1985). In 1988, she earned her Juris Doctor degree from Harvard Law School.

She met her husband when they were among the few African Americans at the law firm Sidley Austin. They married in October 1992 and had two daughters, Malia Ann (1998) and Natasha (2001). Despite campaigning on her husband's behalf since early in his political career, Michelle Obama did not relish the activity at first, since she was afraid of the possible negative effect on their daughters (Obama, M. 09/05/2012).

Her first exposure to the national political scene took place in the 2008 Presidential Election Campaign, when she discussed race and education by using motherhood as a framework. On August 25th 2012, she delivered a speech at the Democratic National Convention, which was largely well received, with mostly positive reviews (Rasmussen Reports 2008). In it, she sought to portray her family

as the embodiment of the American Dream<sup>3</sup> by telling anecdotes and emphasizing her love for her country, as a response to criticism for her apparent lack of patriotism (Obama, M. 08/25/2008).<sup>4</sup> The media reported that her presence on the campaign trail had mellowed regarding the start of the race, focusing on soliciting concerns and empathizing with the audience instead of challenging them. However, she was also depicted under the pejorative stereotype of the *angry black woman* (Powell and Kantor 2008, Mann 2008).

Women aspiring to high public office are usually found under deep gender scrutiny and perceived as naïve if regarded as feminine or harsh if not (McGingley 2009). That could explain the constant exposure of Michelle Obama's housewife skills during her first term as First Lady. Some examples of this are not only her commitment to motherhood with the promotion of campaigns like "Let's Move", in order to prevent obesity in the younger generations; but also the use of her own appearance as a style icon and the online posting of economic resources for housewives, as an attempt to state her preference of family life over politics, and to distance herself from the Hillary Clinton stereotype, often perceived as *too masculine*.

In the 2012 Presidential Election Campaign, Michelle Obama continued to touch on the above mentioned issues, such as the importance of quality education and the culture of effort (American Dream) and patriotism, but also introduced current ones, like health reform and the economic crisis. Her presence in the campaign exponentially increased after her headline speech at the Democratic National Convention, on September 4th 2012, in Charlotte (North Carolina), where she defended her husband's character and qualities as the perfect President beyond politics and the party from her viewpoint both as a wife and a mother.

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<sup>3</sup> The *American Dream* is a national ethos in the United States, a set of ideals in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success, wherein upward social mobility may be achieved through hard work regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. Rooted in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that "all men are created equal", the concept has been defined by many, such as Adams (1931:214-215) or Brands (2003:442), among others and is popularly used in literature.

<sup>4</sup> This accusation arises from a comment Michelle Obama had supposedly made about the increasing support of the Democrat Party: "For the first time in my adult life, I am proud of my country" (Hornick 2008). As will be explained, patriotism was paramount in her analyzed speeches.

## 5. ANALYSIS RESULTS

### 5.1. TOPICS

Michelle Obama's speeches for the 2012 US Presidential Campaign are built over the same 4000-word structure: acknowledgement of the volunteers work, praise of American values, embodiment of the American Dream in her own and her husband's family's vital experience, reminders of the President's main achievements for the country and her personal panegyric of him, the launch of the "It Takes One" initiative, and a final call of duty.

Her words run parallel with those employed by Barack Obama in the use of a kind of white rhetoric as described by Waddell and McKenna (2009:274) appealing for supporters to direct action ("roll up your sleeves", "talk to your neighbors about the President's concerns", "send them to gottaregister.com", "send them to gottavote.com"), and avoidance of criticism of their opponents. The most remarkable difference is her lack of references to political issues. On the topic of foreign affairs, she only mentioned her support for the US soldiers serving overseas; on the economy, she gave only a few examples of Barack Obama's measures to help small business and the creation of new jobs. She also attempted to connect health care with American values.

This scarcity of words contrasts with her emphasis on the matter of the President's personal interest in female progress. In order to make this point, she reminds us of Barack Obama's background as the son of a single mother and his condition of devoted father of two girls. Furthermore, she mentions examples of equality policies: the signature of the Lilly Fedbetter Fair Pay Act or the appointment of associate justices Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court. Apart from that, she brings to attention the launch of the DREAM Act<sup>5</sup>, meant to enable access to higher studies, long forgotten and revived due to the Obamas' shared concern for education.

It is also observed that she follows the same trend described by White (2011) for the previous campaign about sharing personal experiences with mixed-raced audiences and references to the modern civil rights movement and Barack Obama's activism in that field to mostly black audiences (such as in the Congressional Black Caucus Gala, held in Washington DC on September 23rd 2012)<sup>6</sup>. She constantly

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<sup>5</sup> The DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) is a legislative proposal to provide permanent residency and other benefits to those immigrants who came to the US as minors.

<sup>6</sup> Before the Presidency, both Barack and Michelle Obama used to preferentially tackle racial issues, as in Barack Obama's two books (1995, 2006) and Michelle Obama's dissertation



integrates emotions, a set of values which lead to commitment, objective data and figures that have appeared on the news and direct strategies for action. Thus, she might well be considered a follower of Bill Clinton in his use of Kahler's theories (1974), which skilfully combine all these elements in an attempt to individually reach every possible member of the audience.

## 5.2. CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

As adduced in the introduction, we have analyzed conceptual metaphors as a persuasive strategy in Michelle Obama's political speeches. This choice is not random because they are "a device with the capacity to structure our conceptual system, providing, at the same time, a particular understanding of the world and a way to make a sense of our experience" (Crespo Fernández and López Campillo 2011:59). Therefore, metaphors constitute a persuasive force which is able to activate both conscious and unconscious responses to influence people's rational, moral and emotional response (Charteris-Black 2011:50). A metaphor is a representation that results from the shift in the use of a word or phrase from the context or domain in which it is expected to occur to another context or domain where it is not expected to occur, thereby causing semantic tension. It potentially has linguistic, pragmatic and cognitive characteristics (Charteris-Black 2004:21).

In our analysis the presence of *orientational metaphors* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:61) is significant in number. These metaphors do not structure reality in terms of another concept but organize a whole system of concepts with respect to one another and mainly have to do with spatial orientation.

Sometimes, in our analysis, metaphors merged with metonymies since the boundaries between both figures of speech are fuzzy. In fact, Goossens (1990:323) coined the word *metaphonymy* to refer to those cases where the limits between one and the other device are not completely clear. *Metonymy* occurs "when a word, or phrase, is used to refer to something within the same semantic field" (Charteris-Black 2005:27), but sometimes both devices create a single one: *metonymic metaphors*, which are grounded in bodily and social experiences to recur structures coming from people's own perceptions and bodily functioning (Johnson 1987, Lakoff 1987:271-278).

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thesis (1985). Barack Obama is said neither to have avoided nor searched for opportunities to fight racism as means to be felt as the President of every American, and not just the African-Americans, with the exception of events for mostly black audiences (Shapiro 2013). The analysis of the corpus of Michelle Obama's speeches tend to confirm this same tendency as in this Congressional Black Caucus Gala, she based her speech on slavery.

After providing the definitions of metaphors and metonymic metaphors, we proceed to show the results. A great number of Michelle Obama's metaphors have a *path* as their source domain, which implies a descriptive conception of elections and life in general, since they both have a clear beginning and an ending, where people are travelers and things happen in between. By virtue of the source-path-goal Schema (Lakoff, 1987: 275), politics and electoral campaigns can be understood as a process with a starting and an end point as well as a time span, which even merge with more conceptual metaphors:

- (1) This journey is going to be hard
- (2) While we still have a long way to go to rebuild our economy
- (3) There are going to be so many bumps that you hit in your life, so many people that will try to block your path
- (4) We have come so far

Example (1) refers to elections, elections are a journey. With it, the First Lady indirectly calls the attention of supporters and their help not just for the day when they attend the event, but for the whole campaign. This becomes even more meaningful if we recall that in the 2008 Campaign she referred to Barack Obama's first entry into the White House as "this improbable journey"<sup>7</sup>.

In example (2), two different metaphors merge: on the one hand, economic recovery is a path; on the other hand, economy is a building. The former explicitly states that the economic recovery is a long process, so it suggests citizens must be patient until the problem is completely solved. The latter unconsciously associates economy with one of the basic human rights, having a house to live in, as the process of building, which is also relatively long, and needs the cooperation of several people working towards the same goal. Although it has not been mentioned as an example –since it does not derive from the concept of *path*–, there is a sentence related to the economic crisis which depicts it physically too. That is: "we've been pulling ourselves out of that hole that we started in", via the economic crisis is a hole. This vision of the critical financial situation clearly expresses the feeling of being sunk or even buried underground, which, at the same time, evokes death and relates to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980:27-28) orientational metaphors down is worse and death is down. Example (3), life is a journey or a path, is a recurrent metaphor because it is an easy way to physically represent time, with a starting point (birth) and an ending (death).

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<sup>7</sup> Headline speech of the Democratic National Convention, held in Denver, CO, on August 25<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Moreover, in the same example, Michelle Obama emphasizes its conceptual meaning by saying that there would be difficulties to overcome, symbolized by bumps on a road or by interfering with people. However, Michelle Obama closes her speech with a positive attitude towards the future and so do we with example (4): coming far is success. Despite recognizing there is still much to do so as to overcome the difficulties and get over the economic crisis, there is a message of hope for citizens not to surrender and to remember all the efforts they have made and all the goals they have achieved.

In the same vein, the September-4<sup>th</sup> speech includes an explanatory sentence which stresses the importance of helping others to succeed when somebody has already done it. This is (5): “when you’ve worked hard [...] and finally walked through that doorway of opportunity, you don’t slam it shut behind you. No, you reach back and you give other folks the same chances that helped you succeed”. The conceptual metaphor success is a path clearly identifies a goal with visible or tangible effects which someone wants to reach. This sentence also enhances the Democratic conception of traditional American values (helping others) and patriotic views (remaining together and helping each other) –commented later– as opposed to Republican views, in which the obligation to take care of yourself and the freedom to choose your own ways are prevailing as proposed by Lakoff (1996). The source domain of the path, one of the most common in political speeches, has also been extensively used by Barack Obama (Lesz 2011:55-77) and previously by Martin Luther King (Guitart Escudero 2011:48).

There are other orientational metaphors conceptualizing reality:

- (6) That could be the one that puts us over the top
- (7) Some folks were willing to let the auto industry go under

Example (6) indicates the importance of every single vote, even your neighbor’s ballot –in Michelle Obama’s words– for Barack Obama to be the President, which makes the audience responsible for their future as they become integrated in her speech with an active role and an action to perform. But it also implies a direct allusion to moral standards, to do the right thing, which means voting and persuading others to do likewise. Moreover, the conceptual metaphor presidency is the top represents both the importance of that position and their ultimate objective of the campaign and, indeed, it might allude to Martin Luther King’s 1968 speech “I’ve been to the mountaintop” (1994). Example (7) serves two purposes: first, to remark that some members from the opposition party were in favor of doing nothing to save the automotive industry<sup>8</sup>. This negatively represents

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<sup>8</sup> The automotive industry played a key role during World War II. Advanced engineering methods were made, which is considered to have been crucial in the victory of the allies. With his mass-production of the Model T, Ford changed postwar Americans’ life from rural poverty to

the outgroup according to the concept of *polarization* (van Dijk 1999:95) through questioning their values and even patriotism. The second purpose is to enhance the efforts of the President to save Americans' jobs and one of the symbols of the country and, so, indirectly and positively self-representing the ingroup.

Other orientational metaphors also refer to physical locations. The following examples illustrate this point:

- (8) We believe in keeping our priorities straight
- (9) We have a community of people lifting us up
- (10) Are we going to turn around and go back to the same policies that got us into that hole in the first place?
- (11) Or are we going to keep this country moving forward?
- (12) We are one vote closer to re-electing my husband and moving this country forward for four more years
- (13) And when one of us stumbles, (...) when one of us falls on hard times, we don't turn our backs (...) we extend a helping hand until they can get back on their feet

Example (8), priorities are straight, as noted by Kövecses (1986), is a conventional metaphor where moral character is represented as a movement with a degree of straightness. Such a degree of straightness represents a level of moral goodness rooted in religion and opposite to evil or what is socially rejected. This enhances the conviction and firmness with which the Democrats –and especially the President as their most outstanding example– commit to their values of sharing and helping. As stated by Lakoff (1996:108-142), liberals have a different conceptual model of morality opposed to conservatives. Whereas the latter have a *Strict Father morality*, based on self-discipline and hard work, the former have a *Nurturant Parent morality* in which better people help other people to be good and everyone is taken care of by helping each other. In example (9), lifting up is helping, two different underlying messages are conveyed: on the one hand, the idea that union is force, that is, if Americans remain together, they will be able to deal with any problem which arises. In addition, it is a message of hope, since, traditionally, moving upwards is related to positive feelings and linked to gaining top positions hierarchically and, thus, becoming important or improving. The same perceptions are attributed to moving forward, contrary to going backwards, as happens in

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urban riches. America went from a farming-based society to an industrialized giant where the new cultural hero was the big city capitalist. American cars –represented by the Big Three: Chrysler, Ford and General Motors– symbolized freedom, sexual liberation and American patriotism. The example alludes at the recovery of General Motors from its 2009 bankruptcy, as a meaningful proof President Barack Obama had successfully overcome economic crisis in his first term.

examples (10) and (11), where four different phrasal verbs are used to conceptualize the following via conduit metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:10-12): a) turning around is surrendering, which indirectly urges citizens to keep on fighting to overcome current difficulties; b) going back is worsening and also living in past mistakes; c) getting into a hole means financial problems, which associates economic difficulties with a downward movement equivalent to feeling devastated and eventually to being dead and buried underground, as explained in examples (2) and (3). Finally and as stated in example (12), moving forward is improving, which is what Americans need to get over the economic crisis and go back to glorious times. It is therefore implied that progress will be achieved by voting to the Democrats, because re-electing Obama is moving forward.

The last example, (13), also employs movement to conceptualize difficulties and enhancement with five different orientational metaphors: having problems is stumbling, since it physically represents not being stable; having problems is falling, as the previous example, literally portrays the action of standing, which is associated to stability and prosperity, until declining to be at the same level of the ground, thus, the bottom and worst position; ignoring somebody is turning one's back, which highlights this Democratic concept that sticking together is the key to success and even wealth; helping is extending a hand, which is what good Americans do (direct allusion to moral and emotional response, what López Eire and de Santiago Guervós [2000:71] call *pathos*); finally, improving is getting back on one's feet. Here a movement metaphor and a corporeal conceptual one merge. The second one represents the action of standing or moving upwards –as explained before, this implies improving– through the literal meaning of standing on one's feet, normally after a fall or when learning to walk, in this last case the metaphor applies to starting something with little experience or knowledge about it or simply after a mistake, as happens when toddlers start walking.

As in any competition, the language used in Presidential campaigns seems to be inspired by war. The following warlike metaphors may show this point:

- (14) Barack Obama has been fighting for us. He has been struggling with us
- (15) And it could all come down to what happens in just a few key battleground states, like right here in Ohio
- (16) If we keep fighting the good fight
- (17) This is the last big shot
- (18) That's the secret weapon – it's you! You all are the secret weapon
- (19) See, those were the stories that were in his mind when he engaged in that battle

There are several examples which correspond to the same conceptual metaphor, that is, elections are war. In example (14), the President is portrayed as a

fighter, a hero who defends his people against difficulties to reach their rights, as he claims to have no enemies, either outsiders or insiders (Obama, B. 01/21/2009). The second example (15) explicitly shows that, as in real war, every battle counts to win a victory, which would be the Presidency, as well as every state or “battlefield”. Finally, in example (16), Michelle Obama gives Democrat voters courage, as if they were soldiers at war, to continue supporting the President and making an effort for him to succeed on Election Day. This moment is represented by another conceptual metaphor, Election Day is a fair shot, where the domain (shot) means an opportunity. With the aim of emphasizing the great importance of voters on that day, people are compared to the key to win a war, that is, weapons, through the conceptual metaphor: people are weapons. The fact that she describes them as *secret* highlights even more their relevance and the impact this information would have on the elections if everybody knew how significant their single vote was.

Example (19), health reform is a battle, is also related to fighting, but it does not allude directly to the elections although the latter are affected by it. This, again, reinforces the idea which is implied in example (14); that is, even though health reform was a struggle that needed facing many enemies, the President fought for it because it would benefit citizens, so the President sacrifices himself for his people, the President cares.

Other common conceptual metaphors have *house* or *building* as their source domain. This, at the same time, evokes one of the traditional roles of American wives and mothers (taking care of their homes), and so reinforces the desired connection between the First Lady and the female vote. Furthermore, many of the metaphors directly allude to one part of the house, the *garden*, which seems preferred by Michelle Obama since she wrote a book about it (Obama, M. 2012). Consider the following examples:

- (20) Build a decent life for yourself and an even better life for your kids and grandkids
- (21) [Decisions are] about laying a foundation for the next generation
- (22) We truly want to build opportunities for all Americans, we know that we have to have a balanced fiscal strategy
- (23) This country was built by men and women in our lives who wake up every day and work hard for their families without complaint or regret
- (24) That’s one of the most important things all of you can do to keep our grassroots operations running strong across this country

Example (20), life is a building refers to the great effort which is implied in getting a house on your own the same way as living does. Words and intangible aspects in the present, such as decisions can also materialize and then become something visible to reflect on. For instance in example (21), decisions are

foundations, which will be the basis for the people of the future: young people, constantly appearing in Michelle Obama's speeches. Example (22), opportunities are a building, apart from making an abstract concept touchable, indirectly shows that opportunities can exist if they are created, even from nowhere or where there is nothing by following the same process as building a house. Example (23), the country is a building, emphasizes the idea of effort. It accentuates the long process of creating a country which started with the toil of their ancestors and continues today. This also involves two ideas: first, respecting the work that has already been done before; and second, being responsible for their actions and what is left for future generations. The last metaphor with this source domain is related specifically to the garden: elections are grassroots movements. With this metaphor, Michelle Obama was asking the audience to keep on spending their money on supporting the Presidential Campaign, which conceptualizes the idea that elections are like a plant. They are first sown, then they need a growing process (which would be the campaign) and everyday care to flourish (which happens on the final Election Day by winning the Presidency).

With the purpose of emphasizing really important things in life and praising American values, Michelle Obama conceptualizes her thoughts by using *asset* as a source domain. By way of illustration, take the following examples:

- (25) Lose their health care
- (26) We've actually been gaining private sector jobs
- (27) Sacrificed and gave their lives
- (28) We don't have a minute to waste

Example (25) is significant in her speech since one of her aims throughout the campaign was to make people aware of the importance of health care and, therefore, the health care reform. By using the conceptual metaphor health care is an asset, Michelle Obama focuses on the importance of taking care of such value and revealing how good this reform is for citizens. In times of depression, as shown in example (26), this becomes even more noticeable. Jobs are an asset represents how important it is to work and, with this example, the First Lady emphasizes how much the President and his party care about the issue and how he has been fighting for creating jobs for the country in spite of the economic crisis. Example (27), lives are assets, defines true American values, that is, making the greatest efforts, even if that means sacrificing the most valuable thing for a human being—their life—to succeed. Another valuable and abstract thing for humans is time, since once passed or wasted, it cannot be recovered again. The metaphor time is an asset serves two purposes: on the one hand, implicitly, although it is explicitly appreciated too, by thanking the audience for spending time on going to the campaign events; on the other hand, highlighting the importance of every minute, especially towards the end of the campaign and on the Election Day.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have analyzed the conceptual metaphors used by Michelle Obama in the 2012 US Election Campaign as a persuasion strategy. This is interpreted as crucial in an evolution from the traditional, more passive duties associated with the role of a First Lady that the media have reflected since the 2008 Presidential Campaign. Through her activity as a speaker, made even more noticeable on account of the coverage of the main events of the campaign, she made use of classical rhetoric based on her own personal experience.

Her strategy consisted of two basic points aimed at reaching every possible voter: constant data uploading to social networks and use of a classical rhetoric and direct reference to the audience's *pathos*. In both of them she specifically aimed at female voters by constantly reaffirming her condition of wife and mother, mentioning housework as an everyday activity of hers and pointing at her daughters as the most treasured thing. By this, she might be seeking identification among a growing section of electorate that was said to be swinging their vote for the Republicans.

Her rhetorical resources seem inspired by those of her husband and other direct influences, such as Martin Luther King or Bill Clinton. Thus, she resorts to intertextuality (Allen 2000), because she shapes her text meaning by referring to other texts, such as Barack Obama's metaphors and allusions to Martin Luther King as the "young preacher [who led] us to the mountaintop" (Obama, M. 09/05/2012).

She indeed re-uses some of their most popular conceptual metaphors, classical within political discourse, such as those concerning the *path* or *journey*, or *building* and *construction*. These two metaphorical processes, to walk and to build, had previously been used in Barack Obama's speeches during his first term of service as symbolic of his conception of America in transition to a better future. A different President would guide the country to another direction and would therefore block that path or construction. Her other main strategy is to compare the elections to *war*. She envisions the President as an epic fighter, who does not combat personal opponents, but struggles to get rights for everyone. This simile is addressed to mostly black audiences, with the aim of alluding to the historical accomplishment of their community of winning the White House and, thus, identifying Barack Obama as a modern civil rights activist, whilst she prefers to reinforce her role as a mother by recounting her own experience and concerns in front of mix-raced audiences. Through a technique that combines emotions and a direct call of duty to persuade potential voters, she insists on the value of the work done by the audience and everything that defines them as a nation. By that, she means American values, those same values she states that made possible for her family to embody the American



dream, those values which imply helping each other and which were catalogued as Democratic values by Lakoff (1996). This process will chart a path which necessarily will have to be *forward* and *up*, which is a new reformulation of Barack Obama's famous HOPE principle.

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*How to cite this article:*

López Cirugeda, Isabel & Raquel Sánchez Ruiz. "Conceptual Metaphor in Michelle Obama's 2012 Re-Election Speeches." *ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 35 (2014): 129-150.

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