



SCHOOL-SCOUT.DE

Unterrichtsmaterialien in digitaler und in gedruckter Form

Auszug aus:

Speech Analysis: Barack Obama's speech on the death of Osama bin Laden, delivered on May 1st, 2011

Das komplette Material finden Sie hier:

School-Scout.de



95 The cause of securing our country is not complete. But tonight, we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to. That is the story of our history, whether it's the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for equality for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values abroad, and our sacrifices to make the world a safer place.

100 Let us remember that we can do these things not just because of wealth or power, but because of who we are: one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Thank you. May God bless you. And may God bless the United States of America.

Speech-analysis

[Introduction: who is speaking, frame of reference]

On Sunday, May 1st 2011, at 11:35 p.m., US President Barack Obama announced in a television speech from the White House that Osama bin Laden had been killed.

15 years after declaring war to the U.S., the world's most-wanted terrorist was detected in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in a compound which is situated close to a Pakistan military academy.

A Navy SEALs crew raided the compound. Bin Laden was shot in the head after resisting the attack, as officials stated. His body was placed into the North Arabian Sea¹.

Obama's speech on bin Laden's death was watched live by 56,5 million viewers² and had an enormous impact on the public. Hundreds of people cheerfully waved the American flag in front of the White House and thousands celebrated all night.

Very likely, this significant success will give Obama a political lift³ and might even alter his opponent's perception of his foreign policy.

[main part: summary with analysis of how language enhances his points]

In the first paragraph (ll. 1-5), Obama briefly informs about bin Laden's death. With the words „I can report“ (l.1), he already introduces his own position as a cheerful, but humble messenger. Even though this event is of high political significance and is regarded as one of Obama's major successes⁴, the president cautiously avoids to take the honor all by himself. At this point, he stresses that the killing had been conducted by the „United States“ (l. 2), without referring to his own contribution.

After the short introduction, Obama reviews very vividly the occurrences of the previous ten years that eventually led to this worldwide manhunt. (ll. 5-45). For about 4 minutes, he raises his audiences tension by withholding detailed information about bin Laden's death and by reviving a decade of war against the „axis of evil“ in America's national memory.

His review begins with the omnipresent 9/11 event. Obama does not describe the terrorist attack objectively; he rather calculates that it is more likely to catch his audiences emotions by vivid imagery: the phrase „hijacked planes cutting through a cloudless September sky“ (l. 8) can be interpreted as a metaphor for evil powers invading an innocent (=cloudless) Nation, his expression „actions of heroic citizens saved even more heartbreaking“ (l. 10) is made for raising patriotism and national pride His agitating description of unseen individual fates in the following paragraph (ll. 12-15), enriched by the metaphor „gaping hole“ (l.15), creates a strong awareness among his listeners that terroristic menace is not a distant danger.

Furthermore, Obama claims that the 9/11 attack made the American citizens come together. With the anaphora „We offered our neighbors a hand, and we offered the wounded our blood“ (l. 16) and the parallelism „no matter where we came from, what God we prayed to, or what race or ethnicity we were...“ (l.18), he puts emphasis on his faith in the „American family“ (l. 19), a metaphoric expression which underlines the national solidarity and unifies Obama and his audience. The question whether this rather romantic than realistic perception

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osama_bin_Laden

² <http://mashable.com/2011/05/04/obama-bin-laden-ratings/>

³ <http://real-agenda.com/2011/05/02/obama-takes-credit-for-killing-of-bin-laden/>

⁴ <http://m.commercialappeal.com/news/2011/may/02/news-analysis-obamas-campaign-promise-fulfilled-de/>

of American people can be interpreted as a political tactic or as Obama's own conviction, remains unanswered.

In the following two paragraphs, Obama gives an overview about the beginning of war against terrorism, once more emphasising with the anaphora „to protect our citizens, our friends, and our allies“ (l. 25) that it has to be seen as a defensive and just war, which was approved by other nations without restrictions.

Obama begins the next paragraph describing the efforts Americans made to fight terrorism, again reminding of the strong American unity with the anaphora „we've made (...) We've disrupted (...) we removed (...) we worked (...)“ (l. 27-30). The obviously simplifying phrase „in Afghanistan, we removed the Taliban government“ (l. 28) might lead the careful listener to the assumption that the information Obama gives and the information he leaves out in his speech are equally important. It also gives some clues about his intentions. The situation in Afghanistan has improved within the last years, but is still far from stable. The nation suffers from widespread corruption, it has the highest infant mortality rate in the world and 70 percent of the population lacks access to clean water, UNICEF reported in 2009⁵. Considering this, it is clear that a statement like „we removed the Taliban government“ is an euphemism which can even be called manipulative, since it only tells half the truth and persuades the audience to believe that the war against terrorism was thoroughly righteous and only had a positive impact.

Obama goes on by describing the obstacles he and the intelligence community had to face and how bin Laden was finally located. The phrase „bring him to justice“ (l. 43) is very interesting in this context, since it represents the attitude that the killing of a mass murderer is regarded as necessary and ethnically correct, an attitude Obama shares with most of his fellow citizens. By taking a closer look, the legitimacy of the killing action can be doubted. In the 1970's, U.S. President Gerald Ford released a law that prohibited political assassinations, which is valid until today⁶. For that reason, the killing is only legitimate if Osama bin Laden resisted the arrest and was therefore killed, a detail that U.S. officials are eager to approve.

In the next paragraph, Obama's speech comes to a climax. He finally gives his listeners the demanded details about the operation which led to Osama bin Laden's death. He points out that the extraordinarily difficult operation was conducted very carefully: „No Americans were harmed. They took care to avoid civilian casualties (...) took custody of his body“ (l. 47). Again, the President makes an effort to leave no doubts about the operation's legitimacy.

Obama calls bin Laden's death the „most significant achievement in our nation's effort to defeat al Qaeda“ (l. 51), but at the same time makes clear that the fight against the terror network will continue.

With the parallelism: „We must – and we will – remain vigilant“ (l. 54) he underlines that the American people can rely on their unity and their common goal. Again it is important to note that this achievement has a symbolic meaning which, in reality, might not be beneficial at all. U.S. terror expert Richard Clarke states that it is even more likely now that more terroristic acts of vengeance will occur and that bin Laden's death will not have noticeable effects on the terror network⁷.

Obama makes an important political move by assuring that the fight against terrorism is not a fight against Islam, that bin Laden is in fact responsible for the uncountable deaths of Muslims. He accentuates this important matter – which is often forgotten by the public – with the antithesis „Bin Laden was not a Muslim leader; he was a mass murderer of Muslims“ (l. 58)..

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan>

⁶ die Zeit, Nr. 19, 5.5.2011, S.5

⁷ die Zeit, Nr. 19, 5.5.2011, S.3



SCHOOL-SCOUT.DE

Unterrichtsmaterialien in digitaler und in gedruckter Form

Auszug aus:

Speech Analysis: Barack Obama's speech on the death of Osama bin Laden, delivered on May 1st, 2011

Das komplette Material finden Sie hier:

School-Scout.de

