

A Stylistic Analysis of Donald Trump's Inaugural Address

LIN Haoming^[a], *

^[a]Foreign Language College, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.

*Corresponding author

Received 20 August 2019; accepted 14 November 2019

Published online 26 December 2019

Abstract

Inaugural address is an important part of inauguration ceremony and every new president conceives the speech as an opportunity to promote his policies in order to appealing for people's support. A common ground is that all presidents are fully prepared for the inaugural address and every speech has become a classic work. Donald Trump, as the new president of America, are facing changes coming from the international environment, the class consolidation, the economic downturn, and the intensification of contradictions. His inaugural address is full of his personal temperament. Although numerous researchers such as Wang Zuoliang, Ding Wangdao and Xu Zhenzhong have analyzed the stylistic features of many public speakers from varied perspectives. But there are few analyses about Trump's speech style. And the author intends to analyze the style of his address from the aspects of phonetic feature, vocabulary feature, rhetorical feature and syntax feature. According to the author's findings, Donald Trump raised their people's awareness of the status quo and patriotism with the help of his unique style of speech. This paper can help us better understand the stylistic feature of speech and the connotations of Trump's inaugural address.

Key words: Donald Trump; Inaugural Address; Public Speaking; Stylistic Feature; Stylistics

Lin, H. M. (2019). A Stylistic Analysis of Donald Trump's Inaugural Address. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 19(3), 75-80. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/11407>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11407>

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is the act of delivering a speech to listeners and it can date back to ancient Greece 2,000 years ago. This kind of speech is deliberately consisted of three general purposes: to inform, to persuade and to entertain. Public speaking is generally concerned as formal, face-to-face speaking of an addresser to a numerous of listeners. In order to following the time and the development, the author choose the inaugural address of Donald Trump to make his study on it by using the knowledge of stylistics and related linguistics.

Stylistics is a branch of Linguistics which applies the theory and methodology of modern linguistics to the study of style. It studies the use of language in specific context and attempts to account for the characteristics that mark the language use of individuals and social group (Qian,2006, p1). And this paper will center on this field of study.

Donald Trump, used to be a successful businessman, is now the 45th President of the United States, and he's inauguration was held on Friday, January 20, 2017 in Washington, D.C. What is the difference between Trump's speech style and previous American presidents? This is worthy of our attention. It should be said that Trump's speech has extraordinary distinct personal characteristics. Analyzing Trump's speech can not only understand his character, but also understand his administrative idea. In this speech, trump repeatedly stressed the idea of "America First". It is no doubt that his inaugural address has a special political significance. The analysis of Trump's inaugural address can not only extend the research of public speech, but also provide some reference for the changes of American policy. Based on stylistics, this paper makes a stylistic analysis of the speech from four aspects: phonetic feature, vocabulary feature, rhetorical feature and syntax feature.

1. PHONETIC FEATURE

Public speech has been considered as a kind of oral expression, it is different from literary works, but it also possesses some features that doesn't exist in oral works. Therefore, just like many singers and actors, speakers always pay a lot of attention to the rhythm, tone, stress, stop of an expression, while fluency is also an important factor. The script of the inaugural address had been written before the speaking, the speaker needs to be fully prepared. And at this solemn situation, the president must show his ability and patriotism. If he speaks stammered, no one will believe in him. By the way there is no need to stick to the original draft stiffly, the speaker can extend the details. Meanwhile, the speaker ought to pronounce the word at a proper speed. Of course the president needs to use the American Standard Accent to completely demonstrate his determination of guarding America's tradition which has been generated by centuries. Actually, Donald Trump seldom expresses his idea with elisions or swallowing sounds, he manages himself to speak clearly in order to let listeners hear every word. He also seldom uses abbreviation. For example, he would use "have not" rather than "haven't". Whenever he says the word of "Make America ... Again", he will pause a little while and the listeners will acclaim and applaud. As here we can conclude the importance of pause.

1.1 Rhythm

One of the distinct characteristics of speech is the appropriate rhythm which lets listeners enjoy the sense of music. And that's one of the reasons why it can appeal so much to people. Donald Trump is in good use of the rhythm. He puts stress syllables at an appropriate position and makes the speech sound like a piece of poetry. All the words are so impressive that one can never forget.

For instance, "The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed across the entire world", in this sentence, he puts stress on "wealth", "middle class", "ripped", "homes", "redistributed", "world" while the "of", "has", "from", "across" are unstressed words. That arrangement deeply reveals the deteriorated situation that the middle class of Americans are suffering. He hopes to encourage citizens to fight against the unfair status quo and rebuild a new and prosperous nation. In this sentence "We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs", these words "borders", "ravages", "countries", "products" are all stressed words and also rhyme with each other word. That sentence displays his determination and courage to tackle problems and gain citizens' support.

1.2 Alliteration

Alliteration is a phonetic literary device identified by the repetition of a coherent sequence of segments which begins with an onset (Fabb, 1999). Alliteration is also

commonly used in modern music and numerous medias. Implementing alliteration can perfectly merge the sense of music and the beauty of poetry. It can also lead listeners to think carefully about the content of the speech and the emotion it expresses. For example, "stops right here and stops right now", "one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny", "American workers and American families".

In Donald Trump's speech, alliteration has also been used as a way to enforce the power of language charisma, such as in "It is time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American Flag". That paragraph combined consummate tense with emotion. And Donald Trump points out the freedom that everyone is witnessing. We can also find this spirit in The Declaration of Independence which says that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness".

2. VOCABULARY FEATURE

As three main variants of the context, the field of discourse, the mode of discourse and the tenor of discourse have collaborated in forming register. Register is a stylistic variant of a language appropriate to a particular social setting and called style. Because of different words being used, a register is distinguishable from other registers. A speech text is consisted by a myriad of words. Thus, the art of word using has greatly influenced the general level of a speech.

2.1 Common and Short Word

Considering the varied educational background of his listeners, Donald Trump used the most common words that citizens use every day instead of abstract terminology or difficult sentences. The distinct features of speech determine that listeners are not able to review it just like reading books at that situation. What the speaker needed to do is to speak at a proper tense and use the vivid but not complicated words to express his ideas and thoughts. If the speaker wants to show off his superior level of language by using difficult words, he may lose more than gain, and listeners would probably become unfocused and sleepy.

Whereas, Donald Trump had absolutely avoided these dilemmas and what he used is some daily-life words which hold the sincerest patriotism. For example, "But for too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system, flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs

and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential”.

Words like “trapped”, “tombstones”, “cash”, “crime” “gangs and drugs”, “stolen” and “robbed” are some simple but lively expressions. By using these words, Donald Trump wants to emphasize the severe economic environment and the perilous social atmosphere that citizens are facing about. His aim is to inspire patriotism, no doubt that this speech has successfully struck a responsive chord in the hearts of his listeners. Through the skillful language usage, the audience was impressed by his glamour.

2.2 First Person and the Second Person

One of the goals of speech is to create an opportunity which can entail the speaker to have a direct and warm communication with the listener in order to resonate with their heart. Therefore, the speaker needs to express his own perspective and solution actively, and that’s why most speakers use first person words such as I(me) and we(us) of a high frequency. By the using of first-person plural pronoun “we”, speakers can bridge the gap between their listeners and themselves by the way of closing their distance and merging in the mainstream of public opinion. And when they are in a same standpoint, numerous of politics will naturally be accepted by the thousands of ordinary people, without saying more than is needed and that is the art of language. Also, in the using of second person pronoun “you”, the speaker can immediately receive the reaction from his sincere listeners and his style of talking resembles a friend discussion. That kind of language processing not only do they considering the interpersonal psychology deeply but also displaying their knowledge of pragmatics.

In Donald Trump’s speech, there is no lack of the first person and the second person. For instance, “Today’s ceremony, however, has very special meaning. Because today we are not merely transferring power from one Administration to another, or from one party to another – but we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the American People. “In this example, with the fluent utilization of the first person and the second person, Donald Trump demonstrates his determination of fair power transition which is for the good of citizens.

And another example is “Your voice, your hopes, and your dreams, will define our American destiny. And your courage and goodness and love will forever guide us along the way”. In this sentence, Donald Trump revealed his understanding of people’s dominant role and hope to encourage citizens’ passion to accelerate American revitalization.

2.3 The Arrangement of Words

In order to express one’s idea clearly and precisely, a speaker should not use those flowery language. Instead of using abstract and general words, the choice of

definite language using may absorb listeners the most. The vocabulary of speech is different from other oral expression, and a speaker need to consider the expression more serious. The rigorous usage of words is beneficial to impressing listeners and help the public to accept the idea which the speaker is managing to disseminate. In Donald Trump’s inaugural address, he uses accurate words to express his idea such as concerning about serious condition which American people are facing and his sympathy to common citizens.

Donald Trump use some visual and concrete words such as “people have borne the cost” “the jobs left, and the factories closed” “the factories shuttered and left our shores” “The wealth of our middle class has been ripped” “protect our borders from the ravages of other countries” “build new roads, and highways, and bridges, and airports, and tunnels, and railways”. These words state people’s life condition and the road of innovation to the future.

3. RHETORICAL FEATURE

In his inaugural address, Donald Trump arranges his discourse structure and length at an appropriate level, and he uses parallelism, couplets and repetition properly to avoid dullness and states his thoughts and ideas clearly.

3.1 Parallelism

These parallel sentences which appear in Donald Trump’s speech is at a high rate. For example, “Their victories have not been your victories; their triumphs have not been your triumphs; and while they celebrated in our nation’s Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land”. In that speech, Donald Trump satirized those politicians who have stolen the wealth of all nation and he shows his anger to those empty talkers who are constantly complaining but never doing anything to benefit people. He also points out that he will do everything to change the unfair power arrangement. Obviously, it has strengthened the tone and set the mood by the using of parallel sentence.

Another example of parallel sentence is that “We will bring back our jobs. We will bring back our borders. We will bring back our wealth. And we will bring back our dreams”. He has made his sincere promises to his beloved and respectable citizens. What he wants is to let everyone who is living in America knows his strong determination. Not like his predecessor, Donald Trump believes himself as a reformer who will innovates the old and bureaucratic America and rebuilds a new prosperous and unprejudiced country. The key point of this parallel sentence is to emphasize the concept of “American dream” which has been generating by years, but it has been proved as an immortal but daily-new subjects.

3.2 Couplet

Using the rhetoric of antithesis can help a sentence turn into a neat and eye-catching one. It is easy to remember

it and recite it in a regular tense. Like a piece of poetry, a speech can also entail listeners to feel the beauty and its hearty power. That is what we called “the magic of language”. Combining the warmth of oration and the refinement of literature, no wonder many speeches, as a style of expression, have become one of the most precious treasure in human literature. It is without dispute that antithesis as a method of expression also helps to spread the connotation of a speech. Meanwhile, those powerful words not only impressed many people but also amazed the world.

One of the examples is “reinforce old alliances and form new ones”, there are also other instances such as “Washington flourished – but the people did not share in its wealth; Politicians prospered – but the jobs left, and the factories closed.”, “speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly”. These words are Donald Trump’s policies and his wishes to American people. The wide usage of couplets enables the speaker to promote his most loudly voices. A good speech text is constructed by every its component which means that we cannot underestimate the so called “unnecessary expression”.

3.3 Repetition

Repetition is the simple repeating of a word, within a sentence or a poetical line, with no particular placement of the words, in order to securing emphasis. Generally speaking, a speech text should pursue simplicity and get rid of redundancy. However, in order to lay stress on some specific details, with the help of a common literary device—repetition, we can arrange its occurrence along with the using of parallelism. We can absorb listeners’ attention and arouse their passion by using the device of repetition. In Donald Trump’s inaugural address, he had used that rhetoric device at a high frequency in order to strengthen his tone. He wants to appeal to citizens for their support and he hopes they will unite again and follow his leading.

For example, in first paragraph, “we will” appears 4 times and in the middle part of the speech “we will” occurs 9 times. In this part, Donald Trump is explaining the road that American people are heading. He encourages his fellow compatriots to go ahead bravely and cope with all sorts of problems without hesitation. And he insists that social cohesion is an important factor in the renewal of a great America.

Another example is in the last part of this passage, “We will make ... Again” repeat 5 times. In the last part of this speech, Donald Trump give a summary to finish his speaking, however, he does have innovation but also follows the lasted rule which all president usually preformed at last. In other words, he also states his mind of reform and benefiting citizens. No matter how many gaps people are facing, they can always unite again like ever before and it is believed what is called American spirit. And the mix usage of repetition and parallelism has largely enforced the expression of a president’s determination and stamina.

3.4 Metaphor

Metaphor is a rhetorical device in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea and is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. It is an important literary device which is used widely in speeches. This device has many functions and the first is to vivid the expression. The expressive force of a speech text can be largely enhanced through the usage of metaphor. In addition, the addresser can connect his life experience to his addressee and inspire their emotional resonance. Therefore, listeners can visualize the scene which the speaker wants to express for. Metaphor, as a useful figure of speech, can be utilized by the speaker who is planning to bring the existed expression to explain a new and unfamiliar thing to public. No wonder numerous famous politicians are keen on using that basic device in their speech text.

For instance, in Donald Trump’s inaugural address we have the following metaphors:

(1) Together, we will determine the course of America and the world for years to come.

—Together, we will determine the future and what to do for American and the world

(2) One by one, the factories shuttered and left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions upon millions of American workers left behind.

—One by one, the factories bankrupted and left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions upon millions of American workers left behind.

(3) I will fight for you with every breath in my body—and I will never, ever let you down.

—I will protect your rights with all I can do—and I will never, ever let you down.

(4) When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice.

—When you totally accept and obey patriotism, there is no room for prejudice.

As you can see, the second sentence of each pair is the explanation of the first original sentence. Metaphor plays an important role in enhancing the understandability of a speech. In these sentences, Donald Trump is trying to convey his beliefs and emotion to his beloved compatriots. It is known to us all that a large number of people conceive him as a lunatic and destroyer, but what he wants to do is to change that unreasonable image that have been generated for years. By using metaphor, Donald Trump sincerely have a confidential exchange of views with American people.

4. SYNTAX FEATURE

4.1 Declarative Sentence

The use of declarative sentences can let the speaker calmly states his ideas and emphasizes the objectiveness and sincerity of his words. By using that most frequent

used type of sentences, the addresser intends to imply those addressees that before speaking he has taken deep consideration. The following examples can explain this:

(1) We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world – but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first.

(2) We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to follow.

(3) We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones – and unite the civilized world against Radical Islamic Terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth.

“We...”, as a parallel of declarative, appears in all these examples. In example (1) Donald Trump said that he will lead American government to construct a genuine friendship with all nation. He believes that the America’s interests are what he most concerned with and so does other countries do with their own interests. Example (2) indicates that America have no intention to reinforce its hegemony but rather to become a good example worth of imitating. This example also shows his guts to making America great again. While in example (3), He want to calm down the whole world and American people that he will keep an intimate relation with America’s old friends and create an opportunity to make new friends. However, the religious extremism and terrorism are out of range, which means that those dangerous forces must be eliminated to avoid threatening the peace of America as well as the whole human society.

The successive using of three declarative sentences also demonstrates the affirmative attitude of Donald Trump and he wants to rebuild citizens’ faith in him. And the usage also indicates the role of him as an addresser who convey messages and the role of listener as an addressee who receive information.

4.2 Imperative Sentence

The function of imperative sentence is to apply for listeners’ support and to express the speaker’s idea more powerfully and emotionally. A successful speaker wants audiences to have some level of resonance and hoping them to take some actions. Also, in Donald Trump’s speech, he has used some of it to indicate that whether he is a president or not he just wants to give some suggestions. He is equal to every ordinary people, and what he wants to do is to do everything for their benefits. His sincerity helps to retain his prestige among the masses. For example: “Do not let anyone tell you it cannot be done. No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America”.

In this sentence, Donald Trump reiterated the concept of America spirit. He wishes his compatriots crossing over the gap of “inability” and starting from everything available to do. He uses imperative sentence to inspire

people’s American dream again. The use of imperative has made the speech more convincing and upgraded the speech effect.

4.3 The Arrangement of Structure

The arrangement of structure has performed a significant function in the process of expressing information from a speech. No doubt that if a speaker wants his speech to be magnificent, structure must be paid a lot attention to it. And Donald Trump’s speech are full of artfulness and artifice in drawing the structure. The speech is characterized by its clear structure and ingenious framework, and the original characteristic of the discourse structure is a major feature of it, the whole arrangement let the listener easily understand and accept it. And this speech can be divided into six parts. The general structure are as follows:

- (1) Showing his respect to all the participants
- (2) Emphasizing the importance of national effort and the special meaning of this inaugural address
- (3) The serious situation which American people are facing
- (4) Stating his plans and determination of innovation
- (5) Appealing for the awakening and support of the public
- (6) Best wishes to the United States of America

CONCLUSION

In the previous part of this paper the author has analyzed the inaugural address of Donald Trump, especially from the aspect of stylistic feature. And at last the author wants to make a summary of the previous analysis and help us understanding the concept of stylistic feature. Through this conclusion how to write and analyze a political speech would be easier.

First, Donald Trump expressed his voice vividly and powerfully. Considering the variable education background of his voters, he managed to convey his messages at a suitable speed, and he used abundant artistic techniques which has largely sublimated the connotation of his speech. The merits of high artistic achievement and universality have been merged perfectly. However, his speech is not simply molding from his predecessors while his distinct charisma has also dissipated through it.

Second, the speaker is in good use of the skill of words using to spread his ideas lucidly and clearly. The addressees of America presidential inauguration are coming from the whole country and even crossing over oceans and seas, the text of the speech needed to be prepared beforehand. Therefore, the speech has been determined to be a mix of written characteristic and oral characteristic. Therefore, word using must be managed properly, instead of abstract and difficult words, short but precise words are the best choice. Social cohesion and

group identification can be enhanced via the using of first person and second person.

Third, based on literary standard, rhetorical devices have performed a significant role in the speech as well. After his speech is finished, the text will immediately spread in internet, newspapers and TV news. Citizens can review the speech while their antecedents may not have the opportunity. People are getting increasingly interested in the presidential statement and no wonder presidents have focused on the rhetoric which is the most effective method of improving the speech.

Finally, words forming into sentences, well-organized structure is necessary for an inaugural address. In addition, his speech flashing with political logic that enhanced persuasiveness and emotional impact. A level of religious overtones also remains in his speech considering the history background of America's founding. Inspiring a number of American citizens accepting traditional patriotism is also a reason.

The structure of the speech is clear, and the layout is unique. All kinds of rhetorical devices have been used in the language of the speech to make the atmosphere lively and vivid. This speech has achieved extraordinarily high artistic attainment. The form of the article and the content have been expressed closely related to each other. The speech text has achieved a high degree of unity, with highlighting the speaker's ideas, thoughts and feelings, there is a strong appeal to let the audience have a strong resonance with the speaker. In addition, the speech is also closely connected to the pulse of the times with a distinctive style following the era. Donald Trump has

been proved to be a successful speaker by the thunderous applause and jubilation. Skilled in processing language, his speech has been considered a classic work.

The analysis of Donald Trump's inaugural address can extend the study of stylistics. It can also help us learn more about public speech and speech writing.

REFERENCES

- Fabb, N. (1999). Verse constituency and the locality of alliteration. *Lingua*, 108(4), 223-245.
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2018). *An introduction to language*. Cengage Learning.
- Liu, F. (2012). Genre Analysis of American Presidential Inaugural Speech. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 2(11).
- Qian, Y. (2006). *Stylistics: A coursebook for Chinese EFL students*. Foreign language teaching and research Press.
- Shu-hong, G. U. A. N. (2005). Analysis on a Speech from Functional Stylistics Perspective [J]. *Journal of East China Jiaotong University*, 3.
- Semino, E., & Short, M. (2004). *Corpus stylistics: Speech, writing and thought presentation in a corpus of English writing*. Routledge.
- Trump, D. J. (2017). The inaugural address. *The White House*, 1, 20-37.
- United States, & Jefferson, T. (1970). *The declaration of independence*. Achille J. St. Onge.
- Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Yajun, C. H. E. N. (2011). Stylistic analysis of Abraham Lincoln's gettysburg address. *Foreign Language Learning Theory and Practice*, (4).