

**GENRE ANALYSIS IN
DONALD TRUMP'S INAUGURATON SPEECH**

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Abstract

The present paper analyses the US President's inauguration speech on January 20th 2017 and seeks to point out how discourse reveals self-representation and social action. Following the ideas of context dependency, meaning in context and relating language to context the research focuses on genre analysis; more precisely Halliday's triadic schema, whose main domains of interest are: field, tenor and mode. Thus, the study presents the participants, processes and circumstances of the presidential speech in its lexis, as well as discursive markers of the physical distance between speaker and audience.

1. Introduction

Within the first chapter I have tried to make a distinction between the concepts of genre and discourse, which are very much alike, but we must not take one for the other. It is true that their field of interest is almost the same and their definitions sound synonymous, but great researchers are still arguing about the matter trying their best at defining the concepts as clearly as possible.

Following theoretical definitions and research approaches to genre analysis, the paper studies the nature of the social action that is taking place, i.e. the inaugural speech of the American President where the newly invested statesman presents his policy to the audience and, at the same time uses a high level of discursive manipulative power. "*Manipulation is one of the discursive social practices of dominant groups geared towards the reproduction of their power.*" (Van Dijk, 2006:363) Thus, the paper reveals how the audience receives the message and takes social action and/or reconstructs the image of governmental trust.

2. Theoretical background

Genre is a blurry concept because of its frequent connections and interference with discourse, literature, rhetoric, pragmatics and many other domains. And as is also the case for such related concepts as language, communication, interaction, society and culture, the notion of genre is essentially fuzzy. The use of genre as a concept in register and genre analysis differs from this traditional use in two important respects. Firstly, linguistic definitions of genre draw on Russian literary theorist Bakhtin's (1986) identification of speech genres as "relatively stable types" of interactive utterances. This broadens genre to include everyday as well as literary genres, in both

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written and spoken modes. Secondly, linguists define genres functionally in terms of their social purpose. Thus different genres are different ways of using language to achieve different culturally established tasks, and texts of different genres are texts which are achieving different purposes in the culture.

However, a more recent approach to genre theory is systematic functional linguistics. Scholars of this field believe that language is organized within cultures based on ideologies. This system is indebted to the work of Michael Halliday, who stated that individuals make linguistic choices according to the ideologies which have dominated their formation and education. For Halliday, contexts in which texts are produced rely on the “network of meanings” within a culture. This network of meanings is encoded in the discourse system of that culture where “situation types” occur. Therefore, contexts in which texts are produced recur in what Halliday calls “situation types”.

Since genre and discourse are very much alike, I shall talk a little about discourse as well. The two concepts intermingle as to the point when they become one and the same, they identify themselves, and they both take the form of *language use*. This characterization of discourse embodies some functional aspects, such as “*who* uses language, *how*, *why* and *when*” (van Dijk, 1997:2). Thus we are dealing with a three dimensional concept which includes language use, communication beliefs and interaction in social situations.

When we speak about discourse we must have in mind the following elements: form, content and function. The form of a discourse represents a peculiar way of organizing the text; in the content of a text, the analyst recognizes the way in which the author meant something to the audience; within the context, there is a certain significance which can be hidden or suggested. Related to the form and content, there is the function of a discourse. A discourse has one or several functions, it preserves several communications. When trying to analyze different texts and having the target of applying discourse or genre analysis, we have to focus on the detailed analysis of variation in linguistic features of discourse (specification of lexical, grammatical and semantic patterns). Genre theory approaches seek to explain linguistic variation referring to context deviation or change: explicit links are established between features of the discourse and variables of the socio-cultural context in which discourse is performed. Genre, besides register and style, is one of the technical concepts employed to explain the meaning and function of variation between texts.

Halliday explains that contexts of situation are not isolated and unique, but often reoccur as “situation types,” a set of typified semiotic and semantic relations that make up “a scenario . . . of persons and actions and events from which the things which are said derive their meaning”. By linking a situation type with particular semantic and lexical-grammatical patterns, register describes what actually takes place (the “field”), how participants relate to one another (the “tenor”), and what role language is playing (the “mode”). For example, the “field” of discourse represents the system of activity within a particular setting, including the participants, practices, and circumstances involved. The “tenor” of discourse represents the social relations between the participants—their interactions—within the discourse. And the “mode” of discourse represents the channel or wavelength of communication (face-to-face, via e-mail, telephone, and so on) used by the participants to perform their actions and relations (Bawarshi and Reif, 2010:33).

This analysis will mainly operate with discourse, genre and connections with linguistics – specification of lexical, grammatical and semantic patterns, features of discourse and variables of socio-cultural context. Following the ideas of context dependency, meaning in context and relating language to context Halliday (1985a/1989:12) and many others, included in the bibliography, have developed a schema which transforms the analysis of a text in a judgement of a triadic nature, whose main domains of interest are: *field*, *tenor* and *mode*.

Field, the social action: what is happening, the nature of the social action that is taking place: what it is that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component.

Tenor, the role structure: who is taking part, the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kind of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved.

Mode, the symbolic organization: what part language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in the situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic and the like.

With the help of Halliday's schema (van Dijk, 1997:238), language can be related to context with ideational meaning used to construct field (the social action), interpersonal meaning to negotiate tenor (the role structure) and textual meaning used to develop mode (symbolic organization). The three terms will constitute the theoretical basis of the analyses discussed in the following chapter, since "the environment (or social context) of language is structured as a field of significant social action, a tenor of role relationship, and a mode of symbolic organization" (Halliday, 1978:143). *The social action* is that which is going on, and has a certain meaning recognized in the social system. It represents a complex of acts in some ordered configuration within which the text is playing the part of "subject matter". *The role structure* represents a cluster of social relationships between the participants engaged in the act of communication (either written or spoken). The participants' attributes and the role relationships are specific to the situation, to the speech act, to the deictic referents, and they are accomplished through the exchange of verbal meanings.

3. *Inaugural speech interpretation*

Before we embark on the analysis of some data, we need to be more explicit on the connection between the theoretical elements and the corpus to be studied. Therefore, *tenor* sets the role relationship among the participants, while *field* links the social activity of which the text forms a part to the lexis of the language which accompanies or realizes the action. Thus, the tenor (speaker-audience) and the field (inaugural speech) reveal the addresser as the actor-experiencer in the communicative event, while the addressee is only patient-experiencer. These roles empower the speaker with a high degree of persuasion. The semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels will point out how the persuasive function of discourse is encoded in the discursive flow.

"To understand and analyze manipulative discourse, it is crucial to first examine its social environment. We have already assumed that one of the characteristics of manipulation, for instance as distinct from persuasion, is that it involves power and domination." (Van Dijk, 2006:362) Both power and domination are included in the social position of the speaker. Starting at the syntactic level, one of the interesting forms of manipulation is the choice of subject-pronoun throughout the speech. Mr. Trump begins his statement in the first person plural, which creates a separation from the establishment, that he, however, is now representing. Thus, the first person plural is a marker of allegiance, where *we* represents the President and the American people, while *they* stands for the former politicians who have caused negative experiences to the people.

"We, the citizens of America, are now joined in a great national effort to rebuild our country and restore its promise for all of our people.

Together, we will determine the course of America and the world for many, many years to come. We will face challenges. We will confront hardships. But we will get the job done.

Every four years we gather on these steps to carry out the orderly and peaceful transfer of power."

Then, there is a change of perspective, and the speaker opts for another personal pronoun. The people are addressed by the second person pronoun *you*, that opposes the speaker to the audience and creates a situation where the speaker is excluded from the future benefits to come:

"That all changes starting right here and right now, because this moment is your moment.

It belongs to you.

It belongs to everyone gathered here today and everyone watching all across America.

This is your day.

This is your celebration.

And this, the United States of America, is your country.”

The speech continues with third viewpoint in terms of subject choice. Mr. President decides to present the American people's burdens during the former governance, which he disbars himself from. Thus, the discourse carries on in the third person plural, but only to come back to self-inclusion and change form *they* to *we* again in: “*We are one nation, and their pain is our pain.*” The switch we-they / they-we is used here so that the speaker include himself as experiencer in the people's negative exposure to consequences of the former ruling. Further on, the speaker's choice for the inclusive first person plural is exercised as subject of future positive action.

“We will follow two simple rules: Buy American and hire American.

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.

We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example.

We will shine for everyone to follow.[...]”

This continuous sweep of agency is one of the markers of manipulation, as the newly elected American president does not rely on facts or figures to construct his self-representation, but rather relies on linguistics and stylistics to construct his image by contrast, by pitting the American poor against the elites and by taking sides according to the mappings he wishes to project in his audience's minds.

As for *field*, the social activity is the inaugural speech, where the American President presents his view on the role of presidency and his future political action. However, instead of simply presenting the new policy, the voice of the addresser indirectly stresses on the negative points of the former presidential actions. *Field* here cannot be identified with the “subject matter” (Halliday, 1978:144), but with the opposite of it.

With the lexical analysis and the most important items that help the reader comprehend the text, we must point out the key words and the manner of combing phrases so that Mr. Trump may focus the audience's attention on the negative dimension of the American current situation. Hence, it is not the case of policy presentation or what to do next, as one would expect from an inauguration speech, but rather an anti-establishment message which is meant to attract social action on the part of the audience. Thus, the speaker expects the public to reject traditional politicians while opting for the businessman, the action-man, the team-worker, the savior.

The force of the critique against former politicians and their policies resides at the lexical-semantic level, where the government is portrayed as a totalitarian, selfish body. Thus, in “*a small group... has reaped the rewards...*” the verb carries the semantic features [+OBTAIN, +TAKE IN], which conveys negative characteristics with regards to the public wealth. Later, the speaker disseminates the same antagonistic image of the former administration by enumerating a number of anti-American political and economic measures: “*enriched foreign industries*”, “*subsidized the armies of other countries*”, “*defended other nations borders*”, “*spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas*”. Throughout the whole speech, Mr. Trump conveys the dismissal of political leadership by attributing the semantic features [+FOREIGN, -AMERICAN] to the former administration.

On the other hand, the people are presented as the oppressed-taxpayers who are hopelessly forgotten by their government in “*the people have borne the costs*”, “*the forgotten men and women*”, “*mothers and children trapped in poverty*”, “*students deprived of all knowledge*”, mapped by the semantic features [+POVERTY, +BURDEN, -HOPE, -EDUCATION].

Besides the semantic level, the anti-establishment mapping is mainly conveyed by the syntactic choice of opposing main sentences in a sequence of positive experience on the part of the government, and negative experience on the part of the people. Thus, in “*reap the rewards*”, whose agent is the establishment and whose patient is the American people, the opposition success-failure favors the rulers. With “*bear the cost*”, where the agent-patient relationship is reversed, the opposition success-failure is still on the part of the government.

The speech continues with the same affective fallacy of the American people’s failure in a constant enumeration of win-lose situations, either expressed through negation “*protected itself but not the citizens*”, “*their victories have not been your victories. Their triumphs have not been your triumphs*”, or by quantifiers “*little to celebrate*”. The symmetrical pairs of sentences have the function to emphasize the gap between the politicians and the people, while the rhythmic repetition of these bipolar syntactic constructions reframe the mental projection and reinforce the message sent by the speaker.

Then, in order to preserve the balance of negative vs. positive, the discourse focuses on a brighter future, which is to come with the help of the American people who are now supported by their president. The positive nature of the turn which is to come is given by semantic features [+WORK, +HOPE, +AMERICAN] in: “*rebuild our country*”, “*restore its promise*”, “*determine the course of America*”, “*buy American and hire American*”, “*make America great / strong / wealthy / proud / safe again.*” The antagonistic image created on the past vs the present presidential administration does not stand on facts, but rather on hyperbolic future promises.

To continue the three dimensional genre analysis, *mode* has to do with the physical distance between the interlocutors (which influences the channel and the possibilities of the receiver intervening) as well as with the role language is playing in the interaction. The instance of oral discourse, i.e. the inaugural speech, constitutes a process of direct persuasion whose translation influences and reinforces particular beliefs, attitudes and values. Therefore, in his speech, Donald Trump seeks to establish agreement with his audience about the current inconvenient parts of everyday American life caused by political and economic decisions taken by former governmental officials. The selections of terms and themes in Mr. Trump’s language use has generated a strong impact on his audience. He addressed all sensible topics among which, lack of jobs, security issues, military affairs and health access for the middle class. Although it is usually expected that the inauguration speech themes would be more optimistic, addressing future plans and peaceful solutions Trump’s speech was rather aggressive and negative. He constructs his negative projection by a constant sequence of repetitions and bipolar structures, as we have mentioned above, in order to access the negative emotional reactions about the past and project a positive mapping regarding the future. In this view, the speaker attempts to motivate the favourable vote he was granted by the American people.

The strongest words to be noticed in Trump’s speech are “*power*”, “*capital*”, “*border*”, “*people*”, “*Foreign*” and the repetitions of the words “*bring back*” and “*rebuild*”. Half of these terms have a negative component as “*borders*” are easily associated nowadays with war, power with enforcements and “*rebuild*” obviously underlines that the country has been destroyed. Small parts of the speech could be extracted in order to present a more optimistic message but these parts are too close to a negative statement, and considering the context, the uplifting message disappears. An example would be “*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*” The peaceful perspective we usually find within an inauguration speech addressing ideals like world peace is followed immediately by a negative perspective of “*putting own interest first*”. Nevertheless, on the emotional scale, the radical and aggressive speech of Mr. Trump is more open to change, and thus, more optimistic. This may be caused by the constant use of the future tense followed by the targeted action – “*We will bring back our jobs, we will bring back our borders, we will bring back our wealth, we will bring back our dreams.*”

The self-representation is rather indirect and short but very powerful in his political discourse. Besides the constant shift of perspective by changing the grammatical subject, Mr. Trump reveals himself in three contradictory positions: the team worker (proactive), the mediator (passive, outsourcing responsibility) and the savior (superhero). Thus, first he poses as a team-worker who is willing to rebuild America together with the American people - *“Together, we will determine the course of America and the world for many, many years to come. We will face challenges. We will confront hardships.”* Second, he takes the role of the mediator who transfers power from Washington to the people, and then he becomes a “law and order” president, painting a stark image of a country ridden with *“the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential”*. *“This American carnage stops right here and stops right now”* he pledged. This is the climax of his gloomy portrait of the country’s status with semantic features projecting war, blood and death. As “crime and gangs” feature [+DEATH, +INJURY, +VIOLENCE] the speech follows the pattern and restores balance by coming back to the first role - the team-worker in - *“We will make America great / strong / wealthy / proud / safe again.”*

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the present American President’s inauguration speech has pointed out how discourse reveals self-representation and the opposition representation and the audience’s manipulation. Following Halliday’s triadic schema, whose main domains of interest are: field, tenor and mode the study presented the participants, processes and circumstances of the presidential speech in its syntax, semantics and pragmatics. In this view, different aims seem to be behind choices made in the systems which realize the textual metafunction, systems which permit the organization and presentation of meanings, making a text coherent with itself and with its context.

Therefore, from the syntactic point of view there is a constant change of the grammatical subject which leads to different role attributed to the speaker – i.e. the team worker, the mediator and the saviour. Moreover, symmetrical pairs of sentences which focus on wealth vs. poverty have the function to emphasize the gap between the politicians and the people. On the semantic level we are confronted with negative semantic markers, even if the most frequently used words by Donald Trump in his inaugural speech are America, American, country, nation, and people. The only positive connotation is given by the use of the future tense followed by the desired action which are governed by the first person plural subject pronoun. Together, these three markers construct the positive image of the president and project a positive metal mapping of the future for the audience.

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