A CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY OF A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE'S SPEECH

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Abstract: *This paper takes a brief glimpse into an American political speech. In order to make such an endeavour, the authors have turned their attention to concepts and terms such as rhetoric, persuasion, argumentation, discourse, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, text, cohesion, coherence, intertextuality, words, collocations, power, ideologies, social constructivism, context, implicature, inference and so on. The paper studies the presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's acceptance speech (2016). The research addresses the key elements of structure, rhythm, cohesion and coherence of the speech, tracing also the systemic feature of intertextuality. Focusing on detecting stylistically relevant rhetoric devices sustaining persuasive strategies within the political speech under discussion, the paper explains the major importance of the classic yet very productive rhetoric "rule of three", the structural parallelism, enumeration, repetition.*

Keywords: *discourse, analysis, presidential candidate.*

Introduction

A discourse analysis approach to the political speech has enabled us to identify and analyse the devices supporting discursive strategies in the political discourse genre of political speeches. Politicians often employ persuasive strategies when delivering a speech, aiming to convince an audience of the validity of their claims. Although analysts frequently consider the ideological aspects of the political speeches, there are other linguistic aspects which have not been fully explored yet.

This paper offers a comprehensive overview of the rhetorical devices sustaining the persuasive linguistic strategies in a political speech, aiming to illustrate their structure, lexical choice, and stylistic significance. Our research relies on the perspectives described by previous studies in several complex domains with a focus on the field of *discourse analysis*, offering a plurality of the visions and theories in question. In our case study, we have analyzed the presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's acceptance speech (2016). Moreover, we have investigated the use of other rhetoric devices bearing both stylistic relevance and persuasive force.

Theoretical background

Discourse analysts consider the correlation between language in use and the discursively shaped meaning. These views educate the future researchers into a better understanding of the people participating in a common discourse, a collective way of representing people, and mediating opinion and approval among the participants. This phenomenon acquires a dynamic feature when involving intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Furthermore, they are viewed as influential systemic relationships

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which are able to produce a progression within the discourse. According to A.W. He (2003: 429),

> Discourse analysis seeks to describe and explain linguistic phenomena in terms of the affective, cognitive, situational, and cultural contexts of their use and to identify linguistic resources through which we (re)construct our life (our identity, role, activity, community, emotion, stance, knowledge, belief, ideology, and so forth).

In other words,

> Discourse analysis examines patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which is used. Discourse analysis also considers the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of the language has upon social identities and relationships […] how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse (Paltridge, 2012: 2).

Introducing for the first time the term *discourse analysis*, Zellig Harris (1952) identifies explicitly two distinct yet related directions, i.e. extending the analysis beyond the boundaries of the sentence (as descriptive linguistics used to) and enlightening the existent correlation between culture and language, between linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. In his turn, Michael Stubbs (1983: 10) removes any possible confusion seeing the discourse analysis as referring both to "the study of language above the sentence (more accurately, above the clause) and also to the study of naturally occurring language".

Fairclough (2003) considers what he calls the 'textually oriented discourse analysis'- simply put as TODA- as being simultaneously socially oriented, two contrasting views, of course, but not mutually exclusive, notes Paltridge (2012). Fairclough does not see an 'either/or' approach (2003: 3). He rather sees the 'analysis of text as part of social science…the philosophy of social science' (2003: 14) and he insists on delimitating it, though not excluding it, from the detailed linguistic analysis of texts upon their vocabulary, grammar, cohesion - that is, according to Baker and Ellece (2011: 16-17), "the way that a text makes sense syntactically"- and coherence - "the ways that a text is made semantically meaningful (as opposed to cohesion, which is concerned with grammar)". In fact, the discourse analyst creates a "three-stage model of critical discourse analysis (CDA) […] in order to address how language is used to create, maintain and challenge power relationships and ideologies" (Baker and Ellece, 2011: 167). Thus, his principal point of reference remains the linguistic theory and correlative analytical methodology of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

A social analysis frequently addresses events and social practices and becomes a larger frame for introducing and identifying representations of the world, namely ideologies, by the means of spoken or written discourse. The ideologies contribute to set up and further maintain "relations of power, domination and exploitation. They may be enacted in ways of interacting (and therefore in *genres)* and inculcated in ways of being and identities (and therefore in *styles*)" (Fairclough, 2003: 218). Thus, the socially situated identities appear in the author's view as a causal effect of discourse. This effect is of central concern to the critical discourse analysis that regards it as a form of power, whereas the TODA assimilates ideologies - within the frame of the social analysis - to discourses as representations, to genres as enactments, and with styles as inculcations, according to Fairclough (2003), as the analyst considers the force of repeated pervasive instilments upon language users' mind.

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Therefore, a complex domain to circumscribe, discourse analysis focuses on the use of language throughout texts. Trying to formulate a comprehensive definition of the term *discourse analysis*, discourse analysts take into consideration that the term *discourse* itself has various significances that cross the boundaries of patterns of speech, as considered initially, towards patterns of the communication process.

According to Charteris-Black (2014), being engaged in the analysis of a political speech can be explained as becoming involved in public communication. The author defines political speech as "an orderly sequence of words delivered by an individual to a physically present audience assembled for a specific social purpose" (2014: xii) and/or to a "wider remote audience via a range of communication media".

Leading authority is disseminated through language and is intimately connected to the concept of *power.* Simpson and Mayr (2010) define power as a privileged access to social resources. Authority and status become achievable only when social resources such as education, knowledge and wealth are accessed. When generated via language, power is exercised by the dominant cultural groups that generate the language. A person with access to knowledge and education is more likely to be able to reach a superior status in the society. Also, such a person forges recognizable *socially situated identities* (Gee, 2011) that are enacted by the members of the society.

The political speech may encompass the display of more than a specific identity. When using language, Gee distinguishes between displaying who we are and how we want people to see us. Therefore, we use different styles of language, or, rather, social languages, when aiming to get our social identities enacted and recognized. So, in addition, the political speech may exhibit culture-specific ways of performing and may involve culture-specific ways of recognizing such identities (Paltridge, 2012).

Althusser provides the definition of the power as a discursive phenomenon. In his work *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1971), he stands on the fact that ideological state apparatuses (ISA) are the mechanisms enabled to spread the ideologies that support and maintain, or change, the political interactions. And Althusser explicitly refers to the family, the church, the educational system, the legal system, the media. Although ideologies are constructed and perpetuated, or challenged by means of language, making sense of their *meaning* is rather an attribute of the Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1992).

Wodak (2009: 578) sees politics as overtly including "persuasion, rhetoric, deceptive devices […] depending on the interests of the respective political party". In addition, making use of such "discursive strategies" is implying the aspect of scales. Grice (1975) utilizes the term of scalar implicature when describing a kind of implicature observed when the discourse producer uses a word belonging to a class of words. That particular set of words conveys a scale of values (Paltridge, 2012). Discourse analysts are interested in identifying such choices, in describing and decomposing the devices used in the political speech, the most prominent genre of political discourse. It is worth mentioning other significant genres of political discourse: interviews and meetings with politicians, slogans of political parties, press conferences, or pieces of news and reports on political actors or events. They may appear on television, on the internet, or printed in various forms, even on flyers addressed to the passers-by. However, our interest is in the political speech delivered in front of an audience.

Critical discourse analysts take interest in enlightening the way the political speech operates, aiming to perpetuate power hierarchies and hegemony. Combining

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micro-levels and macro-levels of analysis in revealing political and ideological finalities of the language, critical discourse analysis is, in reality, an interdisciplinary method of discourse analysis, and an explicit political approach (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006).

Psycholinguistics offers strong reasons for choosing one or another persuasive strategy and corresponding rhetoric device when designing a convincing political speech. For instance, discourse analysis and psycholinguistics share the perspective over an important characteristic of the language when describing it as 'systematic'. Consequently, analysts take into consideration both vocabulary (words operating in sets) and grammar (words joining into phrases and phrases into sentences).

John Field's (2004) outstanding research delineates several useful theories and concepts. Among them, the theory of mind, the priming effect, predictability and spreading activity are of major interest. However, psycholinguistics should be regarded as closely related to the field of connectionism, a domain which takes interest into the language processing by the human brain. Frequently, connectionism is referred to as parallel distributed processing (PDP), a term functioning, in fact, as a synonym, and indicating a certain architecture simulating the neural structure of the brain. There are several models of such structures consisting in many interconnected units (or nodes). The power they have resides mainly in the connections between them, and less in the units themselves. It is these connections that have the ability to expand or, on the contrary, to downsize the activation running through the nodes. This connectionist view has inspired the psycholinguistic view on the mental lexicon, where words may appear connected by weaker or stronger links.

According to Field (2004: 10), "the notion of connection strength […] accounts for frequency (the words that we use most are the ones that are the easiest for us to retrieve), and collocation (we retrieve certain words together because they are so closely connected)". Field indicates s*preading activation* (comparable to an electric impulse) as the psycholinguistic phenomenon partially accountable for the associative connections encountered between words, just like the word "doctor" induces the cognizing of the linked words "patient" or "hospital". The effect of spreading activation is, undoubtfully, automatic. Hence, there is no possibility of a conscious control from the listener. Spreading activation appears as a pertinent account for yet another effect under the name of *priming*. For instance, the lexical item "camel" is priming the lexical items "hump, desert and sand". Lexical items, as components of the mental store, support a classification into two major types of items: *lexical words* or content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) with a meaning indicated by the dictionaries, and *functors* or *grammatical words*, a closed set (function words without a specific meaning, but sustaining the syntactic structure of the sentence, such as: "the", "of", auxiliary "do". Weakly stressed, the grammatical words are auditorily easier detected and distinguished from the content words.

Finally, the most appealing psycholinguistic theory for the designers of persuasive political speeches could be the *theory of the mind*. Defined as "a prerequisite for the language", the theory of the mind infers two aspects: the recognition of the words like "this", "here", and "me" being used to characterize the speaker, and the "story telling". By recognizing the fact that the utterance is about the speaker and not about the hearer, the latter becomes "obliged" to react to the story narrated by the speaker and understand his or her values and beliefs, and, ultimately, to validate the expressed claims. Such a circumstance allows the speakers to "shape their productions in a way that persuades or manipulates feelings" (Field, 2004: 302-3).

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Case Study: Hillary Clinton's Speech at the Democratic National Convention (2016, July 29)

This section analyzes the persuasive strategies used in Hillary Clinton's acceptance speech, delivered at the Democratic National Convention (2016). The main persuasive strategies are rhetoric devices with stylistic significance. The context of the speech and the meaning acquired are extremely relevant, as the former is politically and historically illuminating and it influences the use of language and the design of the analysed speech. These are key issues when analysing language from a discourse analysis perspective overlapping with pragmatics.

Thus, on the 28th July 2016, at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, Hillary Clinton delivers her lifetime speech as a politician, as she accepts the nomination for the presidential elections on behalf of the Democratic Party. The historical importance of the moment is underlain by the fact that Hillary Clinton is the very first woman nominated by a major party for the presidential elections. Moreover, the significance of this event is enhanced by its very location, i.e. Philadelphia - the very place where, two hundred forty years ago, back in 1776, the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America was signed by its founders. Certainly, this is a historic moment always present in the Americans' collective memory, generally, and in the audience's memory, particularly. It is a part of a shared cultural, social, and political background knowledge context, which is able to generate intertextuality elements in the political speech. The utterance in such a context is creating a perlocutionary effect on the audience's thoughts and actions.

The first stage of the discourse analysis framework (described by Norman Fairclough as the description stage), consists in identifying the devices supporting the persuasive strategies in Clinton's speech. The second stage of this framework deals with interpreting the meaning, and the third one consists in explaining the wider social context in which the language encounter is produced.

It is noteworthy that structure, rhetoric devices, and intertextuality are the three main aspects that interest us in the analysis of the general design of Clinton's speech. In terms of structure, we are dealing with a long speech, counting 5,181 words, according to the full transcript. The text can be divided into several sections, which differ in content from one another. Consequently, we have identified the following sections: a (preliminary) "thanks" section; a "story of America - the history" section ("My friends, we've come to Philadelphia"); a "story of my life" section ("Now, sometimes the people at this podium"); a "choice" section ("So enough with the bigotry and bombast"); a "story of America - the present and the envisaged future" section ("Tonight, we've reached a milestone in our nation's march").

The opening section is focused on acknowledgements and thanks. Thus, Hillary Clinton expresses her gratitude to various important persons, namely the members of her family, the former President Obama and significant members of the Democratic Party. The rhythm of this introductory part is rather low, and it leaves space for later rhetoric effects and prosodic manoeuvre. The general tone, affectionate and warm, is retained because the speaker is touching and recollecting personal and more private aspects. Nevertheless, a special consideration is reserved to "the friends of a lifetime", a title that includes the previous characters, as well. Moreover, this noun phrase creates a perfect connection with the following section recalling events from the American history.

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It should be noted that "the story of America" begins with the formula "My friends", highlighting Clinton's intention to establish a sincere and heartfelt relationship with the audience from the very first moments of her speech. Once created, this affinity further allows the politician to develop certain persuasive strategies within the speech to be delivered. Mainly, the structure of the section relies on the repetition, as a means of achieving lexical cohesion. Thus, the repetition in this section of "we"/"we will"/"we have" sustains the persuasive strategy of constructing a positive collective identity of the audience, envisioning the image of a group that also includes the speaker as a possible group leader.

Similarly, the repetition of "most" contributes to the shaping of the optimistic portrayal when the politician enumerates several inspiring features expressed by means of three syllable adjectives in the superlative degree describing the American people. The long adjectives appear to be carefully selected for their long-lasting and potentially persuasive echo in the conscience of the hearers, irrespective of their belonging to one or another category of American citizens: "the most dynamic and diverse people…the most tolerant and generous young people…the most powerful military. The most innovative entrepreneurs. The most enduring values".

In order to establish a proper setting for a flamboyant slogan launch, Clinton positively depicts the nation in a moment of remembrance of its glorious past. "Stronger Together" is, in fact, the influential Democrat slogan of the 2016 electoral campaign: "Our Founders embraced the enduring truth that we are stronger together".

Afterwards, a conflicting frame is built around the slogan, creating pressure, implicitly demanding explanations. Thus, naturally, sentences are longer and more explicit. The pace increases revealing the climactic persuasive purpose of the section, that is showing to the electors a direction to follow, a theory to embrace. This is an audacious semantic transfer from the meaning of (just) "slogan" to the priming meaning of "guiding principle" for the considered syntagma. Clinton courageously aims at the edifying instruction of the voters:

> "Stronger Together" is not just a lesson from our history. It's not just a slogan for our campaign. It's a guiding principle for the country we've always been and the future we're going to build.

The announcement of the nomination acceptance further illustrates the climactic resolution of this rhetoric act: "it is with humility […] determination […] and boundless confidence in America's promise […] that I accept your nomination for President of the United States!". In its turn, the "story of my life" section allows the speaker to reveal to the audience important information on her family and on the values and beliefs sustaining her human and political behaviour. The repetition of the modal "can" preceded by the personal pronoun "you" strengthens the emotional and educative finality of the "lessons" shared by the audience as well. Hence, the candidate exercises the persuasive strategy of a general acceptable assumption while seeking for approval: "Do all the good you can, for all the people you can, in all the ways you can, as long as ever you can".

As far as the "*choice*" section is concerned, it is covering a warning and sensible piece of advice about the potential occupant of the highest state position. The section forcefully commences with the adverb "enough" heading an alliteration. Hence, the politician is setting a guideline in the audience's mind. While making a persuasive appeal for the proper choice of action according to her claims, Clinton rejects the alternative depicted in severe terms: "enough with the bigotry and bombast. The choice

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is clear". Then, the "story of America" section starts with an assessment of the historic significance of the moment when a longstanding and unfair barrier falls and broadens horizons: "Tonight, we've reached a milestone in our nation's march toward a more perfect union: the first time that a major party has nominated a woman for President".

We should also note that a wordplay is built around the pair mother-daughter: "Standing here as my mother's daughter, and my daughter's mother, I'm so happy this day has come". Nevertheless, in our opinion, the most illuminating phrase in this section is the reviving statement based on a metaphoric idiom, genuine marker of intertextuality and interdiscursivity present in famous American rap songs, as an expression denoting the boundless aspiration and ambition with no upper limit: "When there are no ceilings, the sky's the limit".

In its turn, the prosodic climax is achieved by two elaborate and overlapping constructions. The first one is founded on the verb in the present tense "believe" repeated eight times together with the personal pronoun in the first person "I" within the subsection. Accordingly, the words "I believe" initiate no less than eight main clauses with embedded subordinate clauses expressing personal beliefs and values. Eventually, such an exhaustive personal reference could determine the hearers to lose interest in the delivered speech. But this is not the case of the speech currently under examination. Clinton finds the bridge to the positive response of the audience as she creates an efficacious link by means of a short clause with a simple S – V – DO structure: "if you share these beliefs".

In fact, this "if-clause" subordinate prepares the way for the second complex construction using for a change, on the one hand, the personal pronoun in the second person "you", and, on the other hand, placing this pronoun and the accompanying verb "believe" in subordinate "if-clauses" instead of main clauses. One could get confused and wonder why not continue using the latter, as previously seen. The answer to that dilemma is quite ingenuous: the speaker prefers to retain the main clauses as frames for a convincing appeal expressed by means of an imperative linked to a pronoun denoting a collective group. The outcome is a collective chant, as the entire audience enthusiastically repeats the final syntagma in a mirroring answer: "If you believe […] join us!". The resulting structure consists of eight "if-clauses" and six "join us!" appeals. Moreover, a tryptic can be noticed - *that* introducing each element:

> If you believe that we should say "no" to unfair trade deals … that we should stand up to China … that we should support our steelworkers and autoworkers and homegrown manufacturers … join us.

Ending in the most suitable manner with a whole-hearted blessing, the grand finale of the persuasive rhetoric performance gathers elements of direct address to the chanting audience, and verbs swiftly passing from the present tense through present continuous to the future tense. Consequently, such a movement produces the idea of a continuity in time, while it pins down the magnitude of the moment. Together with pairs within pairs, repetition and alliteration, these components form a sealing structure aiming at securing a positive resonance in the minds and spirits of the hearers:

> That is the story of America. And we begin a new chapter tonight.
> Yes, the world is watching what we do.
> Yes, America's destiny is ours to choose.
> So, let's be stronger together.
> Looking to the future with courage and confidence.
> Building a better tomorrow for our beloved children and our beloved country.

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When we do, America will be greater than ever.
Thank you and may God bless the United States of America!

After analyzing the structure of the speech, we noticed that the prevailing persuasive strategy was represented by the so-called "story telling", or, in other words, by stories within stories. Thus, the politician is able to outline two important elements, by shaping the temporal framework and the narrative content of the speech. The first one is a positive image of the self and the second one is a positive collective portrayal of the American electors considered into a large range of social categories. Moreover, Clinton successfully integrates the first element within the second one, as she gains undoubtful recognition as a trustworthy national representative.

In order to ensure the lexical cohesion throughout the text, there are certain motifs, such as the recurring theme of the *Founders* and, jointly, of *America*, referred to in all sections of the text. The latter word, "America", is reiterated sixteen times within the speech, with a four times symmetrical distribution in the beginning and the ending part, and an eight times repetition in the middle part.

A solid structure of parallelism, repetition and contrast between future actions allows the shaping of the collective positive portrayal while stating collective commitments on behalf of both the speaker and the hearers:

> We will rise to the challenge, just as we always have.
> We will not build a wall. Instead, we will build an economy where everyone who wants a good paying job can get one. And we'll build a path to citizenship for millions of immigrants who are already contributing to our economy! We will not ban a religion. We will work with all Americans and our allies to fight terrorism.

An important role is also played by the repetition of a binding element, such as the preposition "by" within a triple made of replicated nouns. Moreover, the adverb "even" is used as an intensifier to describe a surprising yet possible situation: "You do it step-by-step, year-by-year […] sometimes even door-by-door". Nevertheless, the rhetorical "rule of three" proves to be the most valuable device endorsing the persuasive strategies of the speech. Clinton uses triples, such as: "ideas, energy, and passion"; "listening to each other […] compromising […] finding common purpose"; "our energy, our talents, our ambition".

In addition, the candidate wisely alternates the triples with paired noun phrases, even pairs within pairs, maintaining a steady pace and offering variety: "hearts and souls"; "put economic and social justice issues front and centre, where they belong"; "supporters here and around the country: hearts and souls"; "hearts and laws"; "understanding and action". In its turn, the repetition guarantees the lexical cohesion of the structure and favours the better understanding of the conveyed political message:

> I will be a President for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.
> For the struggling, the striving and the successful.
> For those who vote for me and those who don't.
> For all Americans.

Conclusion

The results of our study show that Hillary Clinton's speech contains distinctive persuasive strategies often met in political discourses. The influence exerted by the historical and political context on the design of the speech is obvious. Such a context

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has generated elements of intertextuality, such as the references to the Declaration of Independence in 1776, or the influential quotation from the Inaugural Address delivered by Frank Delano Roosevelt in 1933.

The structure of the speech, the most relevant rhetoric devices, and the markers of intertextuality have also been observed. Our analysis of the structure has established that the most prominent persuasive strategy employed was the "story-telling". Along the three main sections of the speech, this strategy has served the purpose of simultaneously shaping a positive portrayal of the self and a positive collective portrayal of the American electors, while seeking for displaying the trustworthiness of a national representative. The case study has also mentioned some other persuasive strategies present in the speech: the persuasive use of pronouns, parallelism, metaphor, and binarity, lists of nouns, punch-phrases of rhythmed monosyllabic words, imperatives, or elements of dialogue. The rhetoric instruments of repetition, alliteration, and motif have ensured the lexical cohesion of the text. Long adjectives in the superlative degree were selected by the candidate. A conflictual frame has been detected around the campaign slogan, anticipating a climactic rhetoric resolution, reinforced by adversative conjunctions and modals. Elaborate consecutive constructions comprising pairs within pairs, hinged together by if-clauses, have determined the prosodic climax calling for the audience's chanting of a refrain.

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