

The Implementation of Interpersonal Function in Political Speeches: Analysis of Attitude Resources in President Biden's Inaugural Address in the United States

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The attitude system in appraisal theory can be used to study the implementation of interpersonal functions in discourse. This study is based on J. R. Martin's appraisal theory attitude system to analyze the inauguration speech of current US President Joe Biden. The UAM Corpus Tool data analysis software was used for corpus annotation and retrieval. The research found that: Biden mainly expresses his attitude through judgment resources, supplemented by emotional and appreciation resources. The core message is to demonstrate their leadership ability and sense of responsibility, establish connections with the public, and achieve interpersonal functions.

Keywords: appraisal theory, attitude system, interpersonal function

Introduction

Political speeches are a special genre. Joseph Robinette Biden Jr., commonly known as Joe Biden, is now the 46th President of the United States. In Biden's political career, his inauguration speech on Capitol Hill on January 20, 2021 holds special significance. The 2024 US presidential election is approaching, and through discourse analysis of President Biden's inauguration speech, we can not only gain a complete and objective understanding of the US national situation and the president's attitude towards security events, but also study the ways in which the US president personally uses political speeches to construct interpersonal meaning.

Appraisal Theory

Halliday constructed a systemic functional linguistic (SFL) framework and achieved fruitful development results (Niu & Zhang, 2021). In the 1990s, Martin et al. proposed the appraisal theory based on SFL, emphasizing interpersonal meaning and discourse analysis (Chen, 2011). Martin and White (2005) advocated for a comprehensive analysis of discourse from the perspectives of attitude, engagement, and graduation to understand stance and attitude. Attitude resources reflect social evaluation (Sun & Zhang, 2018). Therefore, this article analyzes Biden's inauguration speech based on the attitude system of appraisal theory.

Analysis of Attitude Resources in President Biden's Inaugural Address

This study is based on the attitude system of appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005). Firstly, the UAM

Corpus Tool data analysis software is used for corpus annotation and statistics. Secondly, vocabulary related to national concepts is retrieved, and sentences with these vocabulary positions are extracted. The attitude system is used to analyze the extracted corpus. Finally, typical examples are cited to explain and interpret the attitude meaning and communicative purpose in the corpus. The corpus is downloaded from the electronic transcript of President Biden's inauguration speech on the official website of the White House in the United States.

The annotation results were organized into the data in Table 1. From the data in Table 1, we can clearly see the distribution of attitude resources for President Biden's inauguration speech in the United States:

Table 1

Attitude Resource Annotation Data of President Biden's Inaugural Address

System	Total	Proportion (%)
Emotion	41	30.37
Judgment	60	44.44
Appreciation	34	25.19

Table 1 shows that President Biden's inaugural speech contains a total of 135 attitude resources, indicating that the discourse contains plentiful attitude resources. Among them, the most frequently appearing resources are judgment resources (60, 44.44%), followed by emotion resources (41, 30.37%), and less frequently appreciation resources (34, 25.19%). It can be seen that judgment resources are the main means of expressing attitude and meaning in President Biden's inauguration speech, while emotion resources and appreciation resources serve as auxiliary means.

Emotion System

The emotion system, as a tool for explaining language phenomena, aims to explore the emotional responses of language users, covering their feelings towards behavior, text, and phenomena. That is to say, emotionally evaluating an entity, process, or state can be divided into four subsystems: in/security, un/happiness, dis/satisfaction, and dis/inclination (evaluating the desirability of any object, individual, or enterprise, i.e., desire/fear).

The frequency of emotion resources appearing in discourse is 30.37%, second only to judgment resources, indicating that emotion resources play an important role in the expression of attitude and meaning in discourse. Yang Xiaolei and Liang Meihong (2019) believed that the use of emotion resources is first and foremost to bring oneself closer to the audience, and only after building a positive and friendly relationship with the audience can it be beneficial to express one's attitude towards certain things. Biden used the most emotion resources for security or insecurity assessment in his inauguration speech, with the representative words being "together", such as: "Bringing America together." and "We will get through this, together."

Emotion meaning has a high degree of personification, as emotional expression is a fundamental human ability and everyone grows up with emotions (Tian, 2021). The word "together" in the above sentences is a marker of the emotion system in attitude resources. President Biden frequently used words, such as "together" in his inauguration speech, reflecting his vision for unity among the American people and his call for unity and collective strength. This emotion resource allows the audience to be influenced by the speech, building an emotional connection between the audience and President Biden, and promoting a direct connection between the audience's own emotions and President Biden. Through President Biden's statement of "Victory is never assured"

about the insecurity of the US national situation, the audience's emotions also turned to sadness with President Biden's emotions. Later, Biden's emotion in his speech was mainly positive and optimistic. He emphasized the unity and strength of the American people, and expressed confidence and hope for the future: "We look ahead in our unique American way—resistance, bold, and optimistic—and set our sights on the nation we know we can be and we must be." It can be seen that President Biden extensively utilized emotion resources in his inauguration speech. He tried to infect the audience through expressing emotions and coordinating their emotions and social cognition, which making his speech easier for the audience to understand and accept, and achieving political persuasion.

Judgment System

There are a total of 60 (44.44%) judgment resources identified, with the highest frequency of occurrence. The judgment system evaluates (criticizes or praises) human behavior, speech, beliefs, motivations, etc. in a moral or legal manner, implemented by two subsystems: social esteem and social sanction. Under the social esteem subsystem, there are three standards: normality, capacity, and tenacity, which belong to the evaluation of human behavior or speech from a moral perspective. Under the social sanction subsystem, there are two standards of veracity and propriety, which belong to the legal evaluation of a person's behavior, speech, or state.

Social esteem. Compared to emotion and appreciation resources, judgment resources appear the most frequently in President Biden's inauguration speech, indicating that the narrative focus of the speech is to convey President Biden's own values and his judgments on things. In his inauguration speech, President Biden emphasized his ability to lead the American people to maximize the advantages of the American democratic system, namely the capacity in social esteem, such as "This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward."

In the above sentence, President Biden mentioned the "challenge" facing the United States: "An epidemic that caused more casualties in the United States than the total casualties in World War II, the economic plight of millions of people who lost their jobs, and the political polarization and violence caused by racism." However, President Biden extensively used words with power connotations, such as "strength" to express his ability to lead the US government to overcome many challenges, which is the capacity in social esteem at the same time. President Biden uses positive expressions to showcase his capacity and attract audience attention and recognition, such as the words "strength" in the sentence: "We will need all our strength to persevere through this dark winter."

Social sanction. President Biden's use of the judgment resources in his inauguration speech includes not only social esteem, but also social sanction. He used the propriety in social sanction to express his determination to defend fairness and justice. For example, "A once-in-a-century virus silently stalks the country."

The word "virus" in the above sentence refers not only to the COVID-19, but also to all kinds of chaos caused by the epidemic: "Anger, resentment, and hatred. Extremism, lawlessness, and violence. Disease, joblessness, and hopelessness." President Biden establishes a metaphorical relationship between the problems facing the United States and the virus, helping the audience construct abstract concepts. He legitimizes his own expressions, and attempts to unconsciously coordinate and infect the audience's emotions, influences their rational concepts, and promotes their recognition of Biden's views. At the same time, Biden framing his own values, which helps the audience, support him in carrying out his post presidency work, such as combating political extremism, xenophobia, and domestic terrorism.

Appreciation

Appreciation is the evaluation of things (Ma & Zhan, 2021). The proportion of appreciation resources in the inaugural speech discourse is relatively low, which reflects the weak functionality of aesthetic evaluation in President Biden's inaugural speech. In the inaugural speech, President Biden used the word "love" to attract the audience's attention: "What are the common objects we love that define us as Americans?" In terms of the use of the word "love", the word is both an emotional attraction and a desire response. This word is conducive to bringing the audience closer, which is more easily accepted by the American people.

Conclusion

This study used appraisal theory for discourse analysis and analyzed the distribution of attitude resources in US President Biden's inauguration speech. Research has found that:

1. President Biden used judgment resources as the main means of expressing attitude and meaning in his inauguration speech, while emotion and appreciation resources were used as auxiliary means;
2. President Biden used the judgment resources in attitude resources to express his evaluation of human capacity, and uses emotion and appreciation resources to express his evaluation of things facing America;
3. The analysis of emotions, judgments, and appreciation of attitude resources demonstrates that the core message expressed in President Biden's inauguration speech is to call on the American people to unite and face challenges together.

The intention conveyed is to clarify his responsibilities and abilities as president to lead the people to overcome challenges, thereby invisibly building a connection between Biden himself and the people, that is, the realization of interpersonal functions.

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