

Schematic Figures as Foregrounding Elements in John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Speech

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2016
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

A writer's style of persuasion is worth analysing, especially when this style can serve as a powerful tool to convey the writer's persuasive goal in a speech as well as to highlight the aesthetics of the language used. In this case, a writer can use certain linguistic features to function as foregrounding elements in the story. This paper focuses on the use of schematic figures used by John F. Kennedy in his inaugural speech in 1961, *Ask Not What Your Country Can Do for You; Ask What You Can Do for Your Country*. Schematic figures are those dealing with excessive order or regularity, such as in the repetition of sounds, words or structures, both in a simple and complex way. Furthermore, this paper will see how these features become interesting foregrounding elements that can attract the readers' attention so that they will be more noticeable for the readers. The method used in analyzing this is the descriptive method with the referential technique. The grand theory used is Stylistics, which is a study of style in language, or more specifically, the study of distinctive linguistic features. This analysis results in the finding that the schematic figures are proven to be powerful features in realizing the persuasive goal.

Keywords: persuasion, aesthetics, foregrounding, schematic figures

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Introduction

Communication is a vital aspect of human life. It is like a bridge that relates one person to another. We can communicate and exchange the information in the form of thoughts, opinions, or feelings. Yet, whether people can communicate with others through many ways depends on the context, participants, and goals as well.

In our daily life, we may communicate the same idea in different ways of speaking. It depends on the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, the situation, the time, etc. Moreover, the ways of communicating something determine how effectively the message will be received by the hearer.

Out of the many ways of communication, a speaker has to choose one of the best ways in delivering the message appropriately. There must be a reason why we decide to choose one way of communication to others. It is arguable why a speaker chooses certain words and not other words in one text. The speaker has to decide to choose the style that he or she uses for a special purpose or intention.

According to Leech (1994, p. 12) style is the linguistic characteristic of a particular text. In linguistics there is a study which deals with the style of language, namely Stylistics. Stylistics is defined as “the (linguistic) study of style, describes what use is made of language” (Leech, 1994, p. 13). By studying Stylistics, we are able to explain something explicitly or implicitly, so that we will understand specifically “how language serves a particular artistic function.” (Leech, 1994, p.13)

Rhetoric is one of the topics in Stylistics. Rhetoric deals with some features of language that create “the art or skill of effective communication.” (Leech, 1994, p. 210) By using rhetoric in our communication, we will achieve such communication ends at a different level. Not only can we make the communication successful in transferring our ideas but we can also produce effective and beautiful form of communication. Besides, when one tries to communicate one’s ideas through writing, one must think more deeply, as it is intended to be read by others who have different ways of thinking. The reader may not see something exactly as the writer sees.

Actually, it is not a difficult thing to find some examples of the rhetorical figures in our daily life. Examples of rhetorical figures can be found in speeches, advertisements, song lyrics or any texts. A writer must make a text “interesting, clear, persuasive, and memorable, so that they will pay attention to, understand, believe, and remember the ideas it communicates.” (Harris, 2011)

This paper analyzes the rhetoric used in a speech. Most of the time, a speech is considered something boring and does not appeal much to most people. After hearing a speech which is usually quite long, people tend to forget its content easily. However, there are also speeches which are still remembered even until the next century after the delivery. In this case, there must be some extraordinary things in the texts so that they are memorable. It is believed that the use of rhetorical figures plays a prominent role in making the speech text outstanding and memorable. This is, I believe, a significant study because it encourages us to be more critical in understanding an effective way of communicating an idea. Thus, when reading a text, we will learn to take a deeper meaning through some of the rhetorical figures that are

used in the speech. Besides learning how to comprehend the context of the text, we can also learn to appreciate the form or style of the language so that we can get some pleasure from the artistic value of the speech. Moreover, we can also be encouraged to think 'out of the box' in dealing with the issue of stylistics. In short, we are expected to be able to communicate better on a meaningful level.

Stylistics itself is "the study of style ... defined as the analysis of distinctive expressions in language and the description of its purpose and effect." (Verdonk, 2002, p. 4) Style is "linguistic characteristics of a particular text." (Leech, 1994, p.12) In analyzing a text, we need to pay attention to the type, the way in which language is used in the text, and the writer's intention or reason for choosing a certain style. Moreover, in Stylistics, we deal with literary appreciation and linguistic description in order to get the aesthetic function as well as linguistic evidence. (Leech, 1994, p.13)

In making a stylistic analysis we will not focus on every form and structure in the text but more on those which stand out in it. That element "holds a promise of stylistic relevance with the reader's or listener's interest or emotions" (Verdonk, 2002, p. 6). In Stylistics the psychological effect is called foregrounding, a term which is borrowed from the visual arts. Foregrounded elements often include "a patterning of parallelism in a text's typography, sounds, word choices, and grammar or sentence structure." (Verdonk, 2002, p. 6) Other potential markers are repetitions of "some linguistic element, and deviations from the rules of language in general or from the style we expect in particular text type or content." (Verdonk, 2002, p. 6)

One style of language which stands out in the language used in speeches is the use of rhetorical figures. A rhetorical figure can be defined as a deviation of the ordinary form of expression or ideas in order to produce a greater effect. In other words, McQuarrie & Mick (1996, p. 425) stated that a rhetorical figure is an artful deviation. Traditionally speaking, rhetoric is the art or skill of effective communication. (Leech, 1994, p. 210) Rhetoric of texts deals with the superficial expressive form of language. In the perspective of rhetoric, the way of how a statement is expressed may be more important than its content. Rhetoricians see that there are many ways to express a statement. The central concern of rhetoric has always been method and manner. It is a matter of how to choose the best way to express an idea in a certain situation.

When rhetorical figures are used in a speech, persuasion is naturally the overriding goal. In rhetoric, we can identify the most effective form of expression in any given case. Thus, a rhetorical approach to the language used in a speech will cover the types of the style of speech language, specifically the use of rhetorical figures, which have an important effect.

According to McQuarrie & Mick, there are four types of fundamental rhetorical operations: repetition, reversal, displacement, and destabilization. Whatever the operations are, basically there are two things involved in rhetorical figures. The first is excessiveness of order and regularity, and the second is a deficiency of order or irregularities. This can relate to the distinction between schemes and tropes. Consequently, schemes and tropes cover two distinct modes of formal deviation, namely schematic figures covering the repetition and reversal operations, and tropic figures, covering the displacement and destabilization operations. (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, p.420)

In the rhetorical operation of repetition we find repetition of sounds in the forms of rhyme, chime, and alliteration or assonance. Repetition of words is found in the forms of anaphora (beginning words), epistrophe (ending words), epanalepsis (beginning and ending) and anadiplosis (ending and beginning). Phrase structure can also be repeated in the form of parison. (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, p.429)

Reversal is an operation which adopts more general terms of parallelism. “The rhetorical operation of reversal combines within an expression elements that are mirror images of one another.” (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, p. 432) Thus, just like a mirror, it repeats the original but in reversal order.

Besides the syntactic reversal as seen in the example above, this reversal operation can also be applied to semantic reversal, in the form of binary pairs where one term may be thought of as the reverse or opposite of the other: i.e., high/low, easy/tough. When a message structure includes both members of such a pair, the figure known as antithesis results. (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, p. 429)

With the assumption that the use of rhetorical figures must be on purpose and designed to serve a certain function, the use of rhetorical figures has an important function to motivate the potential reader/hearer. When the text is a speech, then the most normal and logical function of the rhetorical figures is to persuade the reader/hearer. Thus, it can be said that the deviation in the rhetorical figures is “to call to and arrest attention.” (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, p. 427)

Furthermore, Barthes (in McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, p. 427) said that these rhetorical figures produce a “pleasure of the text” – the reward that comes from processing a clever arrangement of signs. More specifically, Berlyne (in McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, p. 427) said that “incongruity (deviation) can produce a pleasurable degree of arousal”, which later will cause the reader/hearer to have a positive attitude towards the text.

The other function of the rhetorical figures is that it can make the text more memorable. The schematic figures, because of the over-coded forms, add internal redundancy to the message. Repetition within a text, for example, is expected to add to the memorability of the text. On the other hand, tropic figures are under-coded. Therefore, they are incomplete in the sense that they lack closure, which urges the reader/hearer to elaborate them further. This additional cognitive activity in the effort to interpret the message “increases the number of associative pathways stored in memory”. (Mitchell)

In the history of the United States, one of the most memorable great speeches is John F. Kennedy’s *Ask Not What Your Country Can Do for You; Ask What You Can Do for Your Country*, which was delivered in his inaugural address in 1961.

Discussion

In this part I would like to present and discuss the result of the analysis on the use of the rhetorical figures in John F. Kennedy’s *Ask Not What Your Country Can Do for You; Ask What You Can Do for Your Country* (1961). I classify the data of schematic

figures which will then be subclassified into the types of the rhetorical operations: repetition or reversal operations. The more detailed classification will be made in terms of the classical types of the rhetorical figures: anaphora, parallelism (repetition operation); chiasm and antithesis (reversal operation). When the classification of the data is identified, the data of the rhetorical figures will be analysed further by relating them to the functions they have in the speech.

Schematic Rhetorical Figures

The schematic rhetorical figures deal with figures showing exploitation of order and regularity. Thus, basically the schematic rhetorical figures cover the repetition operation and reversal operation.

Some things that are repeated over and over are naturally easy to remember. That is why, when a speaker wants to emphasize on a particular point, one of the most effective ways is by means of repetition.

Besides, a speaker can convey his or her message in a much more engaging and notable way by repeating it. In this way the hearer can also detect quite easily the underlying messages that the speaker wants to convey.

The next function of repetition is that it can make something sound more dramatic as well as pleasant in the ears. Stylistically speaking, words that are repeated will produce an aesthetic effect. People tend to like the sounds produced by particular sounds or words or structures being repeated.

Rhetorical Operation of Repetition

In this paper, the findings show that the speaker makes use of four types of repetition: antithesis, parallelism, chiasm, and anaphora. The analysis of each type of repetition form will be discussed further below.

Antithesis

Antithesis is creates a contrasting relationship between two ideas which are joined or juxtaposed. (Harris, 2011)) An antithesis is used to balance contrasted ideas as well as to highlight them. (“The Nation Law Firm”) There are two data of antithesis found in this speech, as seen below:

- (1) ...symbolizing an **end**, as well as a **beginning** – signifying renewal, as well as change...
- (2) ...we shall...**support any friend, oppose any foe** ...

In data (1) the words *end* and *beginning* refer to contrasting ideas. In this sentence both words refer to today, the present time. According to the speaker, today is the end of the past era, when America was led by the previous presidents. Now the country has a new leader; hence, another new era also begins. The speaker wants to say that besides an end, today is also a new beginning. Those two words are contrasting in meaning, but they refer to the same point of time, which is today. During 1950's, there were many problems faced by America. America was involved in the Korean

War, there were many crime issues, racial segregation, Cold War also happened in this period. (“U.S. Timeline”) The words *signifying renewal, as well as change* indicate that the speaker hopes that in the era after he is elected president, he can make renewal and change.

Data (2) contains two pairs of opposite words: *support* and *oppose*, and *friend* and *foe*. The function of the antithesis here is to highlight the actions which the speaker and all Americans will do to their friends and foes. They take different actions to different groups of people. They will support those that they call friends. However, those who are the foes will be opposed. By giving support, they will keep a good relationship with others considered to be their friends. Indirectly, there is a kind of persuasion to the addressees to become friends of America instead of being foes. They speaker clearly states that he and his country shall support any friend. Those who choose to become foes will create a disadvantage for themselves because they will be opposed.

Parallelism

Parallelism consists of several parts of a sentence or several sentences which are expressed similarly to show that the ideas have equal importance. Parallelism also adds balance, rhythm, and clarity to the sentence. (Harris, 2011)

There are two data of parallelism that will be discussed here, as seen below:

- (3) **United** there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. **Divided** there is little we can do...
- (4) If a free country **cannot help the many who are poor**, it **cannot save the few who are rich**.

Data (3) shows two parts of two sentences which are expressed similarly in a parallel construction. The sentences consist of two clauses and each clause starts with a past participle and then it is followed by a there-clause. The function of the parallel construction is to show that the ideas in the sentences are equal in importance. Both sentences speak about the same point, which is the importance of being united. After the declaration of America’s Independence, there were 13 colonies becoming the states of America. At first, these states were joined as an alliance, but later as a nation. The number of the states kept increasing until Hawaii joined as the last state in 1959. When Kennedy began his administration in 1961, the nation got 50 states. Through this part of his inaugural address, Kennedy reminded his citizens about the spirit of nationality. The unity as a nation was important to support the condition of the country at that time, which was in Cold War with the Soviet Union.

The parallel construction found in data (4) refers to the era when Kennedy took office and the economic condition of America was not good. America was in a recession, and there were low inflation and interest rates (“US History”). There were many poor people and few rich ones. Kennedy realizes that the big number of the poor and the small number of the rich are a problem. In order to solve this problem, the first step to do is helping the poor who are bigger in number. If the country could help decrease the number of poor people, automatically it will raise the number of the rich. The parallelism in this sentence shows that the two ideas have equal importance. In this context, both helping the many who are poor and saving the few who are rich are equally important.

Chiasm

In chiasm there are words or elements which are repeated in reverse order. It is often used for witty or aphoristic use (Wales, p. 62). There are two data of chiasm discussed here:

- (5) Ask not what **your country** can do for **you**, ask what **you** can do for **your country**.
- (6) Let us never **negotiate** out of **fear**, but let us never **fear** to **negotiate**.

The sentence in data (5) contains chiasm because there is a reverse order between the words *your country* and *you*. Here the chiasm is used for aphoristic effect. This sentence can be said to be an aphorism because it speaks about something wise. Through the sentence, Kennedy as a president tells his people what they should do as good citizens. When Kennedy first took office, America was facing quite a lot of problems. Some of them are economic problem, civil rights movement by the African Americans, and also the Cold War that still went on. (“US History”) Kennedy asked his citizens to change their ways of thinking. Considering the condition of the country, they should do something for the country for the sake of compassion, instead of keep asking the country to do things for them. The chiasm in this part gives a force to his citizens to do those two things, namely not ask what the country can do for them but ask what they can do for the country. The use of chiasm can make the force more effectively.

In data (6) the words *negotiate* and *fear* are put in a reverse order; therefore, the sentence is a chiasm. The sentence is a part of some paragraphs about the existence of two opposing powers in the world. Referring to the previous part of the speech, we know that there were two powerful groups opposing each other that brought a high tension to the world’s situation at that time. Those two groups are America and the nations that chose to be the adversary of America. Kennedy has his own thought towards this condition. He does not want them to oppose each other as enemies. He wants the two groups of nations to start again from the beginning. According to Kennedy, never negotiating out of fear and never fearing to negotiate are the best ways of the two parties to do the beginning. Again, there is an aphoristic effect in this sentence. The speaker states the concept of his plan for the future of both parties. Since the concept speaks about something wise, it can be categorized as an aphorism.

Anaphora

Anaphora is the repetition of the same word at the beginning of clauses or sentences. In other words, anaphora is an initial repetition (Wales, 1989, p.23). Anaphora can be used to underline descriptive and emotional effects. There are 2 data of this type, which can be seen in the following data:

- (7) To those old allies ...
 To those new states ...
 To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery ...
 To our sister republics ...
 To that world assembly of sovereign states, the United States

- (8) Let both sides explore ...
Let both sides ...formulate...
Let both sides seek ...
Let both sides unite ...
...let both sides join...

The anaphora in data (7) is the word *to*, followed by an addressee. The speaker addresses his speech not only to his own country, but also to others, which he divides into several categories. Besides to his country, the speech is also addressed to some other groups of people and countries. To each group mentioned, there is a message of what becomes the hope or promise of the speaker. The speaker wishes that America and the old allies of it could keep the good relationship by staying united. Kennedy also pledges that there will be a better administration that helps the new states that just get their freedom to have a brighter future. To the people from low social class, Kennedy pledges that he and the country will sincerely try their best to help them. To the sister republics, the speaker hopes that they and his country could form a new alliance to do a revolution. To the United Nations, Kennedy promises that he and his country will support it. Last, there is a request for peace to the enemies.

The use of anaphora here is to underline descriptive effects. The speaker mentions his messages to all the addressees one by one. The messages are described in six different paragraphs, each of which contains a message for one addressee. From the paragraphs we can see that in giving the messages, Kennedy puts the indirect objects at the beginning of the paragraphs. He gives more emphasis to the indirect objects, which he considers the most important part. The indirect objects become important since this speech is a president's inaugural address, in which a president tells his promises to many addressees. The indirect objects which are placed at the beginning of each paragraph will attract the addressees more.

The phrase *let both sides* in data (8) is repeated five times, with four of them placed at the beginning of the sentences. The sentences following each of them are the expectations of the speaker for both sides to do. Referring to the previous part of the speech, "to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request, that both sides begin anew the quest for peace...", what is meant by *both sides* by the speaker are America and the nations that chose to be the adversary of America.

There are five different expectations made by Kennedy. The use of anaphora here is to give an emotional effect. Through the five different paragraphs, Kennedy intends to tell his expectations of the two sides. In each paragraph, the object is the most important part since it is placed at the beginning.

Conclusion

The schematic figures used by Kennedy in his inaugural speech prove to be maximally used and effective. The data also shows that the repetition operation is mostly done in a word and sentence level. Since the genre of the text as the data source of this research belongs to a speech, this can be well understood. A speech consists of several paragraphs, and therefore, it is flexible for a speaker to make use of

phrase or sentence repetition. This is also effective in the sense that the hearers can be made less bored in listening to the speech, especially if it is a long one.

When dealing with the speakers' purpose of using such rhetorical figures in the speeches, it is found out that basically the functions of these rhetorical figures cover such points as aesthetics, memorability, and emphasis. All these functions certainly contribute to the essence of delivering a speech, namely persuasion. These three functions are also interdependent, in the sense that they all work to support one another. When the hearers' attention has been caught, it is expected that they will get more involved in the speech, and thus, what is being persuaded by the speakers can be more successfully delivered.

As an overall comment, these speakers are regarded to be successful in delivering the speeches. One of the success factors is the various uses of rhetoric figures as they function very significantly in persuasion.

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