

**LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF THE TOPOS OF RENEWAL BASED ON
THE INAUGURAL ADDRESSES OF AMERICAN PRESIDENTS**

**REPRESENTAÇÃO LINGUÍSTICA DOS TOPOS DA RENOVAÇÃO COM BASE NOS
ENDEREÇOS INAUGURAIS DE PRESIDENTES AMERICANOS**

**REPRESENTACIÓN LINGÜÍSTICA DEL TOPOS DE RENOVACIÓN EN BASE A LAS
DIRECCIONES INAUGURALES DE PRESIDENTES AMERICANOS**

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ABSTRACT: This article mainly attempted to analyze the linguistic representation of the topos of renewal based on the inaugural addresses of American presidents. In the inauguration speeches delivered from 1913 to 2021 by newly elected presidents-members of the Democratic Party of the United States of America, various means of linguistic conveying of the topos of renewal are found. To that end, descriptive methods and corpus-based approaches are utilized. Based on the results, the most widely and frequently used are language units with the semantic of newness, 'end of old', 'change' and linguistic instruments of attribution of negative attitude to certain facts, actions, periods, events, conditions, and political actors. Along with the stated, the topic of renewal was communicated by attributing negative attitudes to certain facts or periods of life and frequently employed cognitive metaphors with negative source domains like damage, disease, loss, decay, intoxication, destroy, and war.

Key words: Inauguration speech. Linguistic representation. Cognitive metaphor. Political communication.

RESUMO: Este artigo buscou principalmente analisar a representação linguística do topos da renovação a partir dos discursos de posse de presidentes americanos. Nos discursos de inauguração proferidos de 1913 a 2021 por presidentes-membros recém-eleitos do Partido Democrático dos Estados Unidos da América, vários meios de transmissão linguística do topos da renovação são encontrados. Para tanto, são utilizados métodos descritivos e abordagens baseadas em corpus. Com base nos resultados, os mais amplamente e frequentemente utilizados são unidades de linguagem com a semântica de novidade, 'fim do velho', 'mudança' e instrumentos linguísticos de atribuição de atitude negativa a

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determinados fatos, ações, períodos, eventos, condições e atores políticos. Junto com o declarado, o tópico da renovação foi comunicado atribuindo atitudes negativas a certos fatos ou períodos da vida e frequentemente empregando metáforas cognitivas com domínios de origem negativa como dano, doença, perda, decadência, intoxicação, destruição e guerra.

Palavras-chave: *Discurso de inauguração. Representação linguística. Metáfora cognitiva. Comunicação política.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo intentó principalmente analizar la representación lingüística del topos de renovación a partir de los discursos inaugurales de los presidentes estadounidenses. En los discursos de inauguración pronunciados desde 1913 hasta 2021 por los presidentes-miembros recién electos del Partido Demócrata de los Estados Unidos de América, se encuentran varios medios de transmisión lingüística del topos de la renovación. Para ello, se utilizan métodos descriptivos y enfoques basados en corpus. Con base en los resultados, los más utilizados son las unidades lingüísticas con la semántica de novedad, 'fin de lo antiguo', 'cambio' e instrumentos lingüísticos de atribución de actitud negativa ante ciertos hechos, acciones, períodos, eventos, condiciones y actores políticos. Junto con lo dicho, el tema de la renovación se comunicó atribuyendo actitudes negativas a ciertos hechos o períodos de la vida y metáforas cognitivas empleadas con frecuencia con dominios de fuentes negativas como daño, enfermedad, pérdida, decadencia, intoxicación, destrucción y guerra.*

Palabras clave: *Discurso inaugural. Representación lingüística. Metáfora cognitiva. Comunicación política.*

Introduction

Presidential (or inaugural) address is a genre of political discourse and is typically delivered in the form of a speech given by president-elect. As a certain type or genre, presidential address can be distinguished from the wider notion of political discourse by a number of characteristic features.

Firstly, it belongs to institutional political discourse, i.e. originates from political actors, not media or voters.

Secondly, the speaker, the source of the political message, is a single person, not a group of people like political party or president's office.

Thirdly, this type of address is inseparable from a certain political event, i.e. presidential elections.

Fourthly, it can only be delivered on certain day (or within a certain period) and at a specific place – both regulated by the national law.

Fifthly, presidential address is marked by a number of characteristic topoi. This notion derives from Greek word meaning 'place' and signifies a traditional subject or idea (in literature).

According to Teun A. van Dijk, it refers to stereotypical statements or formulations: the people tend to have linguistic or textual stereotypes they will often also use as a strategic way of handling the difficult task of opinion selection and formulation in discursive interaction. This stereotypical nature provides interactional ‘safety’, due to the commonsense and, hence, shared nature of the underlying opinions (Dijk van, 1983 : 73).

The topoi are ideas, concepts easily identifiable by addressees of speech. In Rhetoric, topoi, often replaced by a more modern derivative ‘topic’ signify “*loci communes*”, “*lieux communs*” or *commonplaces* as Aristotle defined them. These spheres or domains are well-known to the recipients of the speech, they are understandable, non-argued and anticipated by the most part of the community of addresses, especially in specific situations like inauguration ceremony.

Aristotle explains the significance of topoi by the fact that with the help of certain “places”, standard schemes, it is possible to develop any topic, that the stated thesis is substantiated, approved or refuted. Topoi (or topis) are universal, since they are equally relevant in solving both particular problems and problems of a general logical nature (Bulgakova, 2008 : 11).

Although Aristotle distinguished 360 topoi, for the purposes of CDA in general, and for the present research in particular, they can be roughly divided into two large groups: common, or general topoi that can be used without strict consideration of place, time and the audience, where special or specific topoi will be appropriate.

The topos of renewal is not the only one characteristic to this genre of speech, but it occupies a significant place in the structure of inaugural presidential discourse as it is constituent to one of its functions of which E. Sheigal distinguished integrative, inspirational and declarative ones. Following her classification, the topos under discussion belongs to inspirational function, which means that the president-elect intends to encourage and motivate the nation about traditional values and mighty enterprises and accomplishments to come. Newly elected president offers hope for a better future and credit to his actions, as well as acknowledges his predecessors and asserts the loyalty to their tradition (Sheigal, 2002). Following Darren G. Lilleker, citizens have faith in usual responses to political communication when it suits their disposition and they find no reason to re-evaluate their attitudes, weak or strong, towards individuals or parties. However, under pressing conditions, where specific emotional states are encouraged, voters can get engaged in “much deeper forms of cognitive consideration” (Lilleker, 2014 : 115). Bruce E. Gronbeck writes that the idea of “political communication”, is an extension of a long effort to understand relationships

between “rhetoric” and “politics”. As those two terms about how to establish, maintain, improve, and control the State, with or without the active participation of the citizen-subject, humane perspectives on government have narrowed, broadened, darkened, and brightened in varied times and places (Gronbeck, 2004 : 149). And again, turning to the work by Darren G. Lilleker, we find that attitudes are equally important for determining cognitive effort. Positive attitudes towards a topic ... lead to greater cognitive effort being expended on that topic. In considering the formation of attitudes the model will link elements of social judgement theory (Lilleker, 2014 : 17).The commitment of peoples of all nations to political activities, their keen interest in the sphere of human life underpins the relevance of the present study.

Materials and Methods

The material explored for the purposes of the topic under discussion originates from the United States of America, the unanimous leader in the accomplishments and advancements in political science in general, and precisely in political communication. The corpus of the presidential addresses analyzed cover the period from 1913 to 2021 and is limited to the ones performed by newly elected presidents, members and nominees of the Democratic Party of the United States of America. With distinguishing the means of linguistic representation of the topos of renewal as the main goal, the research presented herein was based on and descriptive methods, corpus-based approach to critical discourse analysis, as well as the synthesis of cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis methods with linguistic and extralinguistic facts taken into consideration.

Results and Discussions

The topos of renewal was particularly important for the US president-elects whose addresses are analyzed herein for they all were newly elected presidents-members of the Democratic Party to take office after presidents who belonged to the Republican Party of the United States of America. Thus the study of seven inaugural addresses for the period of over a century distinguished several ways of linguistic representation of the topos of renewal in inaugural addresses.

I. Linguistic means with semantics of “newness”

For example, Woodrow Wilson presents the voters' choice as not only a reason for another president to take the seat, but as something able to reinvigorate their own lives:

*We have been **refreshed** by a **new** insight into our own life* (Wilson, 1913).

Speaking of serious challenges, he tends to share responsibilities with all his addressees and intensifies his statement by pairing the element of newness with an archetypal metaphor of LIGHT and DARKNESS:

*This is the high enterprise of **the new day**: To lift everything that concerns our life as a Nation to the light that shines from the hearthfire of every man's conscience and vision of the right.* (Wilson, 1913).

The idea of retaking the effort from the beginning leaving behind the burden of past mistakes was developed by John F. Kennedy in his address to the nation in 1961:

*So let us **begin anew** – remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof* (Kennedy, 1961)

Another president-elect, Jimmy Carter, was very inclined to the adjective *new* in his address:

*This inauguration ceremony marks **a new beginning, a new dedication** within our Government, and **a new spirit** among us all. A President may sense and proclaim that **new spirit**, but only a people can provide it* (Carter, 1977).

So was Barack Obama who used this adjective 15 times in his inaugural address, offering the nation a very inspiring appeal:

*What is required of us now is a **new era** of responsibility* (Obama, 2009).

Yet the linguistic means he used were not limited to the ones with the 'new' component, for example:

*With hope and virtue, **let us brave once more** the icy currents, and endure what storms may come* (Obama, 2009).

President-elect Bill Clinton proved to be particularly constant in his effort to stress the topos of renewal by using numerous and various nominations with the semantics of renewal:

*Today we celebrate the mystery of American **renewal*** (Clinton, 1993).

Several nominations with the prefix re- meaning *again, anew, once more*, paired with a poetic metaphor with NATURE as the source domain creates a truly stirring and motivating appeal:

*But, by the words we speak and the faces we show the world, we force the spring. A **spring reborn** in the world's oldest democracy, that brings forth the vision and courage to **reinvent** America* (Clinton, 1993).

To **renew** America, we must **revitalize** our democracy ... To **renew** America, we must meet challenges abroad as well at home (Clinton, 1993).

Similar if not identic means were employed for the same purpose in the presidential address of Joe Biden, the acting US President as of writing time of this article:

*This is democracy's day. A day of history and hope. Of **renewal** and resolve. ... And so today, at this time and in this place, let us start **afresh*** (Biden, 2021).

II. Linguistic means with semantics of “end of old”

Instead of direct nominations of what was previously unknown / unseen / unexperienced under the rule of the previous president, the topos of novelty can be conveyed as statement on the end of something that existed before and is unacceptable, inappropriate or unwelcome under the presidency of the newly elected leader. Thus, this is how Franklin D. Roosevelt described the state of the country achieved by his predecessor:

*Finally, in our progress toward a resumption of work we require two safeguards against a return of **the evils of the old order** ... there must be **an end to speculation** with other people's money, and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency* (Roosevelt, 1933).

Thus the candidate to be the 44th US President Barack Obama, acknowledged the beginning of new period, free from the faults tolerated and even welcomed by the previous administration:

*On this day, we come **to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics.*** (Obama, 2009).

*On this day, we gather because **we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord*** (Obama, 2009).

*We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, **the time has come to set aside childish things*** (Obama, 2009).

The same way to present the topos of renewal by naming old unwelcome conditions and actions was employed by other newly elected presidents:

*And so today, **we pledge an end to the era of deadlock and drift** ...* (Clinton, 1993).

*This beautiful capital, like every capital since the dawn of civilization, is often a place of intrigue and calculation. ... Let us **give this capital back to the people to whom it belongs*** (Clinton, 1993).

We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal (Biden, 2021).

III. Linguistic means with semantics of “change”

Whatever associated with making the form, nature, content, future course, etc., of people’s lives that is supposed and expected to be different from what it is or from what it would be if late president remained or the other candidate was elected, contributes to the conveying of the topos of renewal for change is perceived as a welcome component of the country’s new objective reality led by its new president:

*There has been a change of government... The Senate about to assemble will also be Democratic. The offices of President and Vice-President **have been put into the hands of Democrats*** (Wilson, 1913).

Along with ‘change’, he used personification as to imply the human and humanistic attitude of the Democratic Party towards people as well as its power and determination. Unlike him, Bill Clinton chose personification of change itself over attributing human features to any of the political institutions:

Profound and powerful forces are shaking and remaking our world, and the urgent question of our time is whether we can make change our friend and not our enemy (Clinton, 1993).

IV. Attribution of negative attitudes to certain facts or periods of life

Another way to convey the topos of renewal is to attribute negative evaluations or attitudes to the period of previous president’s rule and the results of his decisions and the actions of his administration.

For example, this intention – to suggest some negative attitudes to the presidency of Donald Trump, the 45th US President – is clearly detectable from the presidential address of Joe Biden. To achieve this, he employs verbs with positive connotations in constructions that imply that the opposite was characteristic for the late administration and president. For that purpose, the speaker employed the metaphors with source domain DAMAGE, DISEASE and LOSS thus implicitly describing them as power that used to break, damage, hurt, destroy, and lose:

*(We have) Much to **repair**. Much to **restore**. Much to **heal**. Much to **build**. And much to **gain*** (Biden, 2021).

Similarly Joe Biden words a very intensive statement on how disengaged and disconnected his country is at the moment of his taking over the rule:

Bringing America together. Uniting our people. And uniting our nation.

The same way to imply the faults of the Republican nominee's rule was used by Woodrow Wilson:

*But the evil has come with the good, and **much fine gold has been corroded** (Wilson, 1913).*

Along with the metaphor with the source domain DECAY, he uses negatively connotated metaphors with the source domains DIRT and INTOXICATION to present and share with his addresses the certain attitude to the late president and his administration:

*Our duty is to **cleanse**, to reconsider, to restore, to correct the evil without impairing the good, to purify and humanize every process of our common life ... We have come **now to the sober second thought** (Wilson, 1913).*

Another metaphor employed for the same reason, is the one with the source domain DAMAGE as found in Bill Clinton's presidential address:

*Instead, we have **drifted**, and that drifting has **eroded** our resources, **fractured** our economy, and **shaken** our confidence (Clinton, 1993).*

Linguistic instruments related to the metaphor with source domain DESTROY are also frequently used to emphasize the moment as putting an end to the wrongs of the past associated with the late administration rule:

*We shall restore, not **destroy** (Wilson, 1913).*

Another metaphor found in the American inaugural discourse known for its high persuasive potential is the one with source domain WAR that allows the speaker to present the conditions of his taking over the leadership as severe and highly challenging:

*There are the **lines of attack** (Roosevelt, 1933).*

*And now, a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must **confront** and we will **defeat** (Biden, 2021).*

Conclusion.

Presidential address discourse is a type of political discourse marked by several specific attributes like those of time, single speaker, political event, and by a number of specific topoi defined by the three – integrative, inspirative and declarative – functions of this type of institutional discourse. The topos of renewal contributes to the performing of the

inspirative function and being conveyed in the inaugural speeches of newly elected presidents, is characterized by various means of its linguistic explication. The most widely and frequently used of them in the discourse of the president-elects nominated by the Democratic Party of the United States are language units with the semantic of newness, 'end of old', 'change' and linguistic instruments of attribution of negative attitude to certain facts, actions, periods, events, conditions, and political actors. The most widely used were language units with the component -new- like new, renew, anew, and other variants with the same semantics: refresh, afresh, revitalize, refresh, reinvent, reborn, once more, etc. Another way to communicate the situation as a new one is the model of using a component with the semantics of bringing to end + a negative nomination attributed to the actions of the late president or his administration. Another way of communicating newness is revoking the concept of change in the addressees' minds, with due attention to underlining that change is aimed at improvement compared to the moment of the delivery of the presidential address. Attribution of negative attitudes to certain facts or periods of life frequently employs cognitive metaphors with negative source domains like DAMAGE, DISEASE, LOSS, DECAY, RIRT, INTOXICATION, DESTROY and WAR.

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