AN IDEATIONAL METAFUNCTION ANALYSIS OF BARACK OBAMA'S SECOND TERM INAUGURAL SPEECH

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an ideational metafunction analysis of Barack Obama's second term inaugural speech. Ideational metafunction is one of the three metafunctions of M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and it was also used as a theoretical framework for the analysis in this study. The analysis involves the analysis of Process Types and their Participants. It was found that Material Process (process of doing) was the most frequently used Process type in the speech while Verbal Process(process of saying) was the least used Process type. It was concluded that ideational metafunction helps the reader to understand the intention and the message the speech is trying to pass.

INTRODUCTION

The Ideational Metafunction

Fawcett (1980) defines the ideational metafunction as the subject matter of a text and its context of use. The ideational metafunction is divided into two: the experiential and logical metafunctions. The experiential metafunction organizes our experience and understanding of the world while the logical metafunction is the potential of a language to construe logical links between figures.

THE CONCEPT OF PROCESS AND PROCESS TYPES

The process types are a model for which a particular experience is expressed. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), the processes are typically realized by verbs. Participants are normally realized by nouns or nominalised verbs. The process types are as

follows: Material Process, Mental Process, Relational Process, Verbal Process, Behavioral Process and Existential Process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the analysis of Barack Obama's speech, M.A.K. Halliday's SFG is a suitable theory. Halliday (1985) asserts that Functional Grammar is a theory that is developed into a formal construct of a system network. Zhuanglin (2001) opines that SFG aims to explain the internal relation in language as system networks, and these networks consist of sub-systems from which the language users make choices. According to Halliday, functional organization determines the form taken by grammatical structure. He referred to his functions of language as METAFUNCTIONS. He proposes three general functions: the ideational, the textual and the interpersonal. However, the Ideational Metafunction is the centre of focus.

ANALYSIS OF OBAMA'S SPEECH

The analysis is done at the Primary Degree of Delicacy (least detailed structure). Sentence boundaries are used to identify the sentences in the speech. Clauses are also identified with clause boundaries. The Process Types and their participants are identified and analysed.

/// My fellow Americans, the oath[Verbiage] I[Sayer] have sworn[Process: Verbal] before you[Target] today,// like the one recited by others who serve in this Capitol,// was an oath to God and country, not party or faction[Verbiage].///

/// And we[Actor] must faithfully execute[Process: material] that pledge during the duration of our service[Goal].///

///But the words[Verbiage] I[Sayer] spoke[Process: Verbal] today[Circumstance] are not so different from the oath that is taken each time a soldier signs up for duty or an immigrant realizes her dream[Verbiage].///

/// My oath[Token] is not [Process: Relational] so different from the pledge we all make to the flag that waves above and that fills our hearts with pride[Attribute].///

/// They [Token] are [Process: Relational] the words of citizens and they represent our greatest hope[Attribute].///

/// You and I, as citizens [Token], have [Process: Relational] the power to set this country's course[Attribute].///

/// You and I, as citizens [Token], have [Process: Relational] the obligation to shape the debates of our time //-- not only with the votes we cast, // but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals[Attribute].///

/// Let us, each of us [Actor], now embrace[Process: material] with solemn duty and awesome joy what is our lasting birthright[Goal].///

/// With common effort and common purpose, with passion and dedication [Circumstance], let us[Actor] answer[Process: material] the call of history// and carry into an uncertain future that precious light of freedom[Goal].///

/// Thank you.///

/// God [Sensor] bless [Process Mental] you,// and may He[Sensor] forever bless[Process Mental] these United States of America[Phenomenon].///

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Material process (verbs/verbal groups of doing things) is the most common process type in the text. Material process as a process of 'doing' is used to show the problems the Americans are facing and how the President and the people of America will help in building up their economy.

Relational process denotes existence or states of being or having: The relational process is used in the speech to refer to the state of being and the path to achieving greatness.

Mental processes (which denote ways of thinking, perceiving and feeling): Mental process is used in the speech to reflect on the achievement of the country. It also shows that the Americans are optimistic, especially among the middle class because a better America lies in their hand.

Verbal process (ways of communicating something) is the process of saying. It is the least used process type in the speech. Verbal process is used to express feelings in the speech. It is also used to praise the Americans that made America powerful.

CONCLUSION

One can conclude that Ideational Metafunction plays a very important role in making meaning in Obama's speech; it easily shortens the distance between the speech and the reader which helps the reader to understand the intention and the message the speech is trying to pass.

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