Introduction to Discourse Analysis – Assignment 1

Introduction

Political speeches are more than their content, they are tools used to influence listeners and/or diminish the opposition. A successful speech will bridge the gap between the speaker and the audience, making listeners identify with the message, believe and support the politician. To analyse speeches from this perspective, one can turn to Interpersonal Metafunction, one of the functions of language proposed by Halliday (1970) as part of his functional view of language. Ye (2010) and Nur (2015) analyse Interpersonal Metafunction in Barack Obama's 2008 presidential election victory speech and in Nelson Mandela's 1994 inauguration speech, respectively, arriving at very similar conclusions with respect to the use and role of elements of the metafunction in the two speeches. I challenge this finding and hypothesise that victory and inauguration speeches differ in ways that should surface in Interpersonal Metafunction. While victory speeches address supporters of the elect and will likely reflect on the successful campaign and celebrate, inauguration speeches present the program of the upcoming presidency and are aimed at the entire nation, thus needing to unite all citizens and make them believe and support the set common goals. To verify my hypothesis, I analyse a speech that shares the time period and speaker with that analysed by Ye: the 2009 inauguration speech of Barack Obama. This way, and by analysing the same elements of Interpersonal Metafunction as Ye, I keep many variables fixed, while varying the occasion, audience and aims of the speech in question. Then, I compare my findings with those of Ye and Nur.

References

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