

**Реторика и семиотика**  
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**Linguistic and Rhetorical Features  
of Donald Trump's Communication Style**

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**Azad Mammadov**

Azerbaijan University of Languages, Department of General Linguistics

E-mail: azad.mammadov@adu.edu.az

**Maryam Isgandarli**

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Linguistics

E-mail: maryamisgandarli@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** The article analysis Donald Trump's communication style and political discourse through methodology including methods from linguistics and rhetoric. The research focus is in lexical and syntactic repetitions, elliptical constructions and word order changes used by Donald Trump in his political speeches sending strong signals to his real and potential voters. The assumption is Donald Trump's communication style has the features of grandiosity, informality and dynamism. These three concepts have strong association with populist rhetoric, which plays a very important role in his political discourse, the first two concepts imply two conflicting trends: a desire to be above all and at the same time a desire to be closer to the audience. The article studies the way how, why, when and where Donald Trump uses the repetitions of words, phrases and sentences, ellipsis and word order changes as the linguistic verbalizations of grandiosity, informality and dynamism in his political discourse.

**Keywords:** Donald Trump, political discourse, rhetoric, lexical and syntactic repetitions, ellipsis, word order change.

### **Introduction**

Analyzing former US President Donald Trump's communication style, researchers focus on grandiosity, informality and dynamism (Ahmadian et al 2017). [1] In political discourse, a politician uses or can use his/her speech in his/her own interest and therefore try to build his/her own strategy. In order to realize this strategy, they, first of all, have to deal with language and linguistic devices. Chilton and Schaffner (2011) suggest that "It is surely the case that politics cannot be conducted without language, and it is also probably the case that the use of language in the constitution of social groups leads to what we would call 'politics' in a broad sense." [2] The use of language in political discourse implies the use of various linguistic devices, (both literal and figurative). The hypothesis is that syntactic-stylistic devices such as lexical and syntactic repetitions, elliptical

constructions and word order changes are typical of the style of Donald Trump are.

### **Theoretical framework**

Explicit and implicit coherence relations in discourse (Taboada 2009) [3] have a strong correlation with the uses of these syntactic-stylistic devices, which help to define the proportion of these relations. It is crucial in the pragmatics of any type or genre of discourse including political discourse. Politicians take this fact into account (either intuitively or intentionally) as their priority is obviously to use all available tools to be effective and successful communicators.

US politicians frequently choose repetitions of words, phrases and sentences, ellipsis and word order changes in their speeches and debates. One of the reasons is the specifics of the US political system, which requires from any politician to look at his/her political career full of numerous speeches, face to face and group debates as a war of words. In this relation, the most intriguing issue is the use of repetition, ellipsis and word order changes by the politicians belonging not to two camps rather to two different communication styles (populist rhetoric vs. non-populist rhetoric). The study of populist politicians and populist rhetoric has recently drawn a special interest. For example, based on the study of the corpus of US presidential campaign speeches between 1915-2016, Dai and Kustov suggest that less popular politicians prefer to use populist rhetoric as a tool to get better results in elections (2022). [4] Other researchers focus on the increasing trend of populism not only in American, but also in European politics (Wodak 2015). [5] In populist rhetoric, politicians frequently use various pragmatically and cognitively effective syntactic-stylistic devices, as well as the elements of figurative language such as metaphors and metonyms (see: Musolff 2004 and other numerous studies). Among these syntactic-stylistic devices, the repetition of words, phrases and sentences, various elliptical constructions, as well as word order changes draw special interest since they are common in the discourses of a politician, who uses populist rhetoric. Donald Trump is one of the most famous politicians among those, who actively and extensively use these syntactic-stylistic devices in their political discourse. Actually, some of these devices such as the repetition of *Make America Great Again* has become his political name (MAGA) widely used in US media to refer to Donald Trump.

The political discourse of Donald Trump has drawn a considerable interest among researchers in linguistics and rhetoric, as well as in political sciences. For example, a volume “Language in the Trump Era: Scandals and Emergencies” edited by McIntosh and Mendoza-Denton deals with various aspects of Donald Trump’s way of language use discussing mostly his style (2020). [6] Meanwhile, there is only one contribution by Mendoza-Denton in this volume, which explores the role of specific linguistic elements: superlatives and hyperboles in the political discourse of Donald Trump (2020). [7] Other researchers such as Sclafani (2018) [8], Hall (2020) [9], Brandt (2020) [10], Winslow (2020) [11]

and Rowland (2021) [12] have examined the rhetoric of Donald Trump focusing primarily on populism as a tool to pursue his domestic and foreign policy. Despite the fact that populism is not a new socio-political phenomenon, very few politicians have achieved a real success at this level like Donald Trump by using populism. Many objective political, socio-economic and cultural factors, which were key in this success must not be ignored. On the other hand, Donald Trump's communication style reflected in his political discourse has also been a crucial factor, which contributed to this success.

It should be emphasized that the study of Donald Trump's political speeches can help us better understand the issue of the complex relationship between monologue and dialogue in political discourse especially from the perspective of the way how monologues imply virtual dialogues. (Cap 2022) [13] In this relation, Donald Trump's political discourse is very symptomatic. The way he uses linguistic devices especially repetitions, ellipsis and word order changes in his political speeches clearly demonstrates his desire to construct an implicit dialogue with his potential voters. This strategy is typical of a populist politician.

### **Methodology**

The article aims to study lexical and syntactic repetitions, ellipsis and word order changes used by Donald Trump in his speeches from a perspective of his populist rhetoric. For this purpose, the traditional method of discourse analysis has been used to extract the direct repetitions of words, phrases and sentences, various elliptical constructions and word order changes from the data. The main focus is on the analysis of the way Donald Trump uses these very effective rhetoric instruments in his two high-profile speeches. The first one is the Inaugural Speech delivered at the Ceremony held in January 2017. [14] The second one is the speech delivered by Donald Trump to UN General Assembly delivered in September 2017. [15]

The two speeches have been selected as they are significant in terms of the implementation of important activities of President Trump. One was delivered during the inauguration ceremony. This rhetorical genre is considered to be a solemn political rhetoric and a state political discourse, since in the inauguration speech the American president presents programs, ideas and a vision for governance. The second speech was delivered by the President Trump at a significant international forum of the United Nations, which implies the disclosure of important themes, ideas and proposals. Two speeches were delivered in 2017, which gives a time span to study in the same year and draw conclusions about the legitimisation of the newly elected American president in the national and international context. The methodology is applied to both speeches. The focus is on the linguistic features of Trump's presidential rhetoric, and the criteria are established on the basis of the intense theoretical review earlier in the paper.

### **Lexical and syntactic repetitions**

In the US political system, inaugural speeches play a crucial role since the US presidents-elect start their 4 years journey on this date and they must convince the public that they are right choices even though it is obvious that not all Americans voted for them. For this purpose, different politicians use all available linguistic devices (both literal and figurative) to convince the public. Among these linguistic devices, repetitions are one of the most crucial since they are very effective rhetoric instruments at the disposal of a politician for various purposes such as to persuade, to influence and to manipulate the real or potential audience. In this regard, Wodak's remarks are quite symptomatic: "...frequent repetition can thus certainly be interpreted as a salient strategy of persuasion in pushing one's agenda". [16] Since any political discourse is primarily persuasive, repetitions are key to any politician in the implementation of his/her political agenda. Repetitions are traditionally divided into four structural types (phonetic, morphological, lexical and syntactic) in language. Among these types direct lexical and syntactic repetitions draw a special interest from a perspective of political discourse analysis.

The reason why repetition is one of the frequent choices of any politician is its huge pragmatic potential. The politicians with a clear populist agenda use repetition even more frequently. This linguistic tool helps politicians to look more charismatic and convincing. For example, the Inaugural Speech delivered in 20 January 2017. [17] clearly reflects Donald Trump's communication style typical of populist politicians, which means extremely persuasive speech aimed to influence, to control and to manipulate the local audience. On the other hand, Donald Trump tends to be a more traditional politician in his speech made at the UN General Assembly in 19 September 2017 [18] demonstrating his willingness to conform to the established standards. Thus, the language used in these two speeches demonstrates how the domestic and foreign policy priorities of Donald Trump affect his communication style. In this connection, the comparative analysis of various lexical and syntactic repetitions in both speeches can help us to understand the way how, why, when and where politicians use populist rhetoric.

The data analysis suggests that one of the most salient and frequently used repetitions in the Inaugural Speech delivered by Donald Trump is the repetition of the person deictics *we*, *you* and *they*. The repetition of *we* is central in this speech, since Donald Trump uses this repetition starting from the first sentence:

(1) *We the citizens of America are now joined in a great national effort to rebuild our country and restore its promise for all of our people. till the last sentence And yes, together, we will make we will make America great again.*

It is worthy to note that politicians, public figures, businesspeople and journalists frequently and extensively use this deictic element. It is a long-

standing tradition to refer to a political party, a team, a group of supporters, colleagues, etc. to demonstrate collective determination, collective responsibility and collective decision-making. People traditionally appreciate this approach as a desire to avoid subjective individualism in politics or as an alternative to *I*. This is the reason why Donald Trump frequently repeats *we* to focus on his commitment to collectivism. There is only one instance of the repetition of *I*, which probably signals Donald Trump's desire to show his personal commitment as well. Two other frequently used repetitions in this speech are the repetitions of *you*, *your* and *they*, *their*. In this Inaugural Speech, the instances of the uses of these two deictic elements attract special attention from the perspective of political and ideological division based on the dichotomy *you* vs. *they*. By repeating *you*, *your* (with reference to people) and *they* (with reference not only to the opposition party but to the whole establishment), Donald Trump highlights this division. There are also other very interesting instances of the uses of the direct repetitions of words and phrases such as the repetition of *America* and *American*. These two repetitions can be seen almost in all sentences of the speech.

In contrast, Donald Trump's speech at the UN General Assembly does not contain many repetitions. He uses a slightly different communication style in this speech. For example, although he still frequently repeats the personal pronouns *we*, *our*; these repetitions differ from the repetitions used in the Inaugural speech. Donald Trump has always used the repeated *we* to refer to the same object (his political and ideological allies) in his Inaugural speech, whereas in the speech at the UN General Assembly the meaning of *we* is text-dependent. The person deixis *we* refers to different objects in each piece of text of this speech, where it is used. In some pieces, the repeated *we* refers to the representatives of different states gathered at the UN General Assembly. In other, Donald Trump repeats *we* to refer to the people of the US. Donald Trump also uses *we* to refer to the people of the world. Thus, Donald Trump's frequent repetition of *we*, which refers to different objects does not aim to demonstrate his collective leadership ambitions, rather his specific communication style. Despite he can easily find an alternative to the person deixis *we*, he chooses to repeat it. Donald Trump repeats *we* so frequently in his different speeches that *we* and its repetition can be considered as another integral part of his communication style in addition to the repetition of *Make America Great Again*.

The speech at the UN General Assembly also contains other repetitions such as the direct repetitions of *The United States*, *America*, *American* and *Americans*. Donald Trump frequently repeats *The United States*, which is obviously due to the audience-oriented differences in these two speeches. (The speech at the UN General Assembly with an international audience sharply differs from the Inaugural Speech with the mostly national audience in terms of tactics, strategy and language.) On the other hand, such patriotically marked, but less formal words as *America*, *American* and *Americans* are also frequently

repeated in the speech at the UN General Assembly. The reason is both the ideological stance and the communication style of the politician, who highlights these words almost in all his speeches aimed at the local audience. The same is true for the words *strong, sovereign and independent nations* repeated by Donald Trump in his speech at the UN General Assembly. Thus, the politician tends to repeat those words and phrases, which clearly reflect his political and ideological priorities. These linguistic devices are crucial in understanding the pragmatic function of the repetitions in Donald Trump's political discourse.

As per the repetitions of sentences, Donald Trump used this type only at the end of his Inaugural Speech as seen below:

(2) *Together, we will make America strong again. We will make America wealthy again. We will make America proud again We will make America safe again. And yes, together, we will make we will make America great again.*

The repetition of *we will make America* sends a strong signal to the audience about the policy of the politician and about how he is going to pursue it. The reason why he did not actively and extensively use repetitions of sentences (which usually can produce even stronger pragmatic effect on the audience) is that he probably did not consider them as pragmatically effective tools in both speeches. The speech in the Inaugural Ceremony is addressed to the whole nation holding diverse political and ideological views. The speech at the UN General Assembly is addressed to an international audience.

### **Ellipsis**

Since success is critical to any politician, he/she is eager to achieve it using all pragmatically and cognitively effective syntactic-stylistic devices. In this regard, the role of ellipsis appears to be crucial because of its unique feature: the lack of any explicit linguistic device and the existence of implied meaning or “meaning unexpressed” (Van Craenenbroek and Temmerman 2019). [19] Despite this and much other research in the field, the theoretical debates on ellipsis such as the issues of abstract structure and recoverability in its study have drawn considerable attention in recent years (Van Craenenbroek and Temmerman 2019, etc.). In addition, further studies in this field suggest that ellipsis plays a very important role in discourse (Kehler 2019) [20] from stylistic, pragmatic and cognitive perspectives.

It is worthy to note that the usage-based analysis of any language including English shows that certain grammatical phenomena such as ellipsis could be typical for all languages despite the well-known morphological and syntactic features (the dominance of the analytical forms and relatively strict or fixed word order), which make ellipsis not so common in English in comparison with the languages of other types such as synthetic (Latin, etc.) or agglutinative (Japanese, Turkic) languages with the relatively free word order. Therefore, the investigation

of ellipsis in political discourse can reveal new and very important features of this phenomenon which are not in line with the traditional structural approach.

The ability of ellipsis to provide minimum explicit linguistic devices and at the same time to deliver necessary message relying on extra-linguistic and linguistic contexts is important in political discourse. It makes political discourse dynamic, non-redundant and both pragmatically and cognitively effective, which lead to the widespread use of ellipsis in this type.

Comparing with the speech at the UN General Assembly, Donald Trump used more elliptical constructions in his Inaugural Speech. It has a big potential from the perspective of a politician., since he/she tends to use less words and to deliver more messages to the audience. Despite the fact that ellipsis implies an empty place in a sentence and in a text during discourse production, this emptiness is actually meaningful. The following piece of text from the Inaugural Speech illuminates it:

*(3) Today's ceremony, however, has very special meaning, because today we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another..., or from one party to another..., but we are transferring power from Washington, D.C., and giving it back to you, the people.*

Donald Trump uses two elliptical constructions (*from one administration to another*) and (*from one party to another*) based on the assumption that the meaningful emptiness in these constructions can be easily recovered by the audience.

Dynamism and recoverability based on shared knowledge make elliptical constructions so attractive for any politician. The reason is to use the speech time as effective as possible and also to demonstrate that a politician shares a lot with the audience as seen in the following three pieces of text from the same speech:

*(4) The establishment protected itself, but ... not.... the citizens of our country.*

*(5) We've defended other nation's borders while refusing to defend our own...*

*(6) Finally, we must think big and... dream even bigger.*

Three elliptical constructions (*but ... not.... the citizens of our country*), (*while refusing to defend our own...*) and (*and... dream even bigger*) used by Donald Trump demonstrate how the politician can manipulate using this very effective instrument. His style to elide certain words, phrases and sentences illustrates his commitment to grandiosity, informality and dynamism.

It is worthy to note the important role of the previous linguistic context which enables the use of textual ellipsis, which was used by the politicians during his speech at the UN General Assembly:

*(7) The United States is one out of 193 countries in the United Nations, and yet we pay 22 percent of the entire budget and more.... In fact, we pay far more than anybody realizes. The United States bears an*

*unfair cost burden, but, to be fair, if it could actually accomplish all of its stated goals, especially the goal of peace, this investment would easily be well worth it.*

*(8) In remembering the great victory that led to this body's founding, we must never forget that those heroes who fought against evil also fought for the nations that they loved.*

*Patriotism led the Poles to die to save Poland, the French to fight for a free France, and the Brits to stand strong for Britain....*

The linguistic contexts and the knowledge UN General Assembly delegates share create a communicative situation favorable to the use of the textual elliptical constructions (*and yet we pay 22 percent of the entire budget and more....*) and (*Patriotism led the Poles to die to save Poland, the French to fight for a free France, and the Brits to stand strong for Britain....*).

The reason why Donald Trump tends to use more ellipsis in his Inaugural Speech is his desire to demonstrate his views, principles and even the way of thinking shared by his audience.

### **Word order change**

Another effective syntactic-stylistic device frequently used by Donald Trump in his speeches is word order change. Traditionally, it is believed that every language has its own mental and unmarked word order, and many linguists wrote about specific word order for every language (Greenberg, 1973 [21], Mithun 1992). [22] The traditional textbooks on English Grammar such as Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English suggests that (1999): “*Word order in English is relatively fixed and the meaning of a sentence depends on the position of words in that sentence.*” [23] The studies in the field suggest that despite the relatively fixed word order in the English sentence, the place of the adverbials is quite flexible. In this connection, Verspoor and Sauter write (2000) [24] that “*The only constituent that may occur in many different places is an adverbial.*” Meanwhile, one of the most well-studied aspects of word order is its pragmatic aspect. But sometimes this aspect is not in line with the traditional word order rule. For example, in the literary, political and media discourses, the grammatical correctness of syntax may sometimes have to yield to the principles of information dynamics in terms of word order. In other words, normal word order model is only basis for possible communicative changes and its reordering plays an important role to highlight these changes. Such word order change has a strong pragmatic effect and helps the receiver to identify focus in the whole text and discourse.

The position of time and place adverbials in the English sentence plays a very important communicative role in discourses across genres. In this connection, political discourse attracts special attention. Politicians usually move time and place adverbials to the front position, middle and post positions to



highlight the communicative dynamism of that part of their speech. Comparing with the middle and post positions, the front position of the adverbial elements is more communicatively dynamic in the English sentence. That is why the move of time or place adverbials to the front position gives an additional communicative value in political speeches. For this purpose, Donald Trump actively uses such constructions in his speeches. The following pieces of texts from the Inaugural speech clearly demonstrate it:

(9) *Every four years, we gather on these steps to carry out the orderly and peaceful transfer of power; and we are grateful to President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama for their gracious aid throughout this transition. They have been magnificent. Thank you.*

(10) *In America, we understand that a nation is only living as long as it is striving.*

The front positions of the time adverbials *Every four years* and *For too long* and the place adverbial *In America* highlight the importance of this part of text. The same holds true for his speech at the UN General Assembly:

(11) *In America, we do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to watch. This week gives our country a special reason to take pride in that example. We are celebrating the 230th anniversary of our beloved Constitution -- the oldest constitution still in use in the world today.*

The use of the place adverbial *In America* in the front position highlights its communicative value explicitly focusing on place. The reason is the ideology of the politician who always says *America first*.

Thus, these examples illustrate how political speeches are constructed in line with the intention of the authors putting the time and place adverbials on the front position. This position of the time and place adverbials has more communicative value than its traditional position following the subject and the verb. Such fronting of time and place adverbials has the effect of emphasizing and of giving a strong impulse to the related processes in discourse.

Considering political discourses, the strong pragmatic effect of word order is seen in this type. Pragmatically and stylistically colored word order enables to create an emotional image thanks to the unusual moving of the element in focus. One of the most effective ways to produce a pragmatic and even cognitive effect on the audience is to change the traditional SVO order rule in the English sentence, which is called inversion. This syntactic-stylistic device has various grammatical, functional-pragmatic, and cognitive aspects (Givon (1993) [25], Birner (1995) [26], Chen (2013). [27]) It is more typical of the various genres of literary discourse, especially of poetic and fictional texts. In non-literary texts, the position of the verb or object before the subject is not common and clearly reflects how communicative dynamism is strengthened by the emphatic inverting

of the traditional word order typical for the English sentence. For example, in political discourse, politicians can prioritize the principles of information dynamics over the grammatical correctness of syntax, in particular in terms of word order. The instances of inversion in political texts signal the desire of a politician to send strong messages to his/her audience. Inversion is very typical for the communication style of Donald Trump. The following pieces of text from his Inaugural Speech are quite symptomatic from the perspective of the way of how the politician realizes his intention using very untraditional word order change such as fronting of the object and the verb before the subject as seen below:

- (12) *At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction, that a nation exists to serve its citizens.*
- (13) *At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America, and through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other.*
- (14) *Now arrives the hour of action.*
- (15) *So to all Americans, in every city near and far, small and large, from mountain to mountain, from ocean to ocean, hear these words.*

These examples demonstrate the power of inverted word order to highlight the pragmatic intention in political speech. Thanks to its change, a communicatively and emotionally important part of the text is highlighted. The placing of the verbs *is*, *will be* and *arrives* before the subjects *a crucial conviction*, *a total allegiance to the United States of America* and *the hour of action* signals the importance of the ideas that have just been introduced to the audience. Donald Trump tries to use this untraditional position of the verbs to focus on these ideas.

Such reordering, which is widely common in political discourses has clear pragmatic functions. In addition, they carry an ideological slant through a text, establish a relationship between the sender and the audience and help to pre-determine the nature of the audience in the sense that political texts often address an implied audience rather than an actual one.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, lexical and syntactic repetitions, elliptical constructions and word order changes are among the most effective tools at the disposal of any politician, especially with a strong populist rhetoric to deliver his/her message to the audience. The political discourse of Donald Trump is very symptomatic from this perspective.

The results of the analysis suggest that comparing with the Inaugural Speech addressed, first of all, to the national audience, repetitions, ellipsis and word order changes are less common in the speeches delivered by Donald Trump to the international audience, such as his speech at the UN General Assembly. The reason why these devices were used so frequently in the Inaugural Speech is

obvious as any politician's priority is, first of all, local or domestic audience and she/he makes the utmost efforts to deliver her/his message to this audience in the most effective way. At the UN General Assembly, on the other hand, the audience is international and do not represent an immediate electoral interest.

By repeating certain words and phrases, Donald Trump highlights the objects, these words and phrases are used to refer to various pragmatic goals. Donald Trump repeats words and phrases simply because any repetition in language is his communication style. Despite the fact that it is difficult to put a clear distinction between these two instances in his political discourse, the repetitions of words, phrases and sentences are obviously those linguistic elements he lives by.

It is worthy to note that the instances of repetition of *we* have certain specific property due to the fact that this person deixis is used to refer to different objects. Donald Trump's repetitions of *we* during his speech at the UN General Assembly clearly demonstrate this property.

Ellipsis enables a politician to build an implicit dialogue with his/her audience based on shared knowledge. Donald Trump frequently uses this instrument of implicit manipulation in contrast to repetition and word order changes, which can be considered as the instruments of explicit manipulation.

Word order change is another effective instrument in political speeches. It highlights the element, which stands in untraditional position and thus gives additional communicative and emotional impulse to the whole political discourse. Therefore, word order changes and especially inversion are typical for Donald Trump's communication style.

Thus, political discourse is a unique social interaction between a politician and his/her real or potential audience. The size of the audience has a strong correlation with the popularity of a politician, which is crucial for a politician like Donald Trump. Therefore, repetitions, ellipsis and word order changes are among the most common linguistic choices of this politician.

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**Azad Mammadov.** *Professor and Chair of Department of General Linguistics, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku, Azerbaijan. The study of text and discourse has always been in focus since early years of my academic career as a linguist. Books: Studies in Text and Discourse Cambridge Scholars; papers published in International Journal of Sociology of Language, Cambridge University Press, etc.*

**Maryam Isgandarli.** *PhD student, Institute of Linguistics, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. Research interests deal with the analysis of political discourse with a special focus on populist rhetoric.*

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