| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

A Stylistic Analysis of Joe Biden's Inaugural Political Speech

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| **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, a stylistic approach has been used to investigate the linguistic features of President Joe Biden's inauguration political speech. Special importance is given to its linguistic characteristics that affect the structure of the selected political speech. This paper is an attempt to highlight the political language of Biden's political speech. The aim is to seek out how political speeches are packaged to persuade citizens and readers and how stylistic analytical tools assist readers in interpreting the language of Biden in the selected speech. The data has been collected from Time Magazine. The data selection is restricted to Biden's inauguration political speech and has been chosen based on certain foregrounding features that indicate a powerful stylistic effect on readers. The qualitative method has been used to analyze the selected data. In the analysis, some linguistic features, such as graphological, syntactic, grammatical deviations, transitivity, and modality have been used to investigate the style of the selected speech to reveal persuasion. The findings show that Biden's inauguration political speech achieves power, and persuasion through the use of certain stylistic features including lexical and grammatical categories such as abstract nouns, personal pronouns, mental processes, and certain modal auxiliaries. It is concluded that the lexical items that Biden uses are crucial in passing his message to his nation. However, the tendency to use distinctive foregrounding features in the consistent repetition of lexical items and sentence structures are stylistic technique used by Biden for the sake of persuasion.

1. Introduction

On January 21, 2021, Joe Biden gave his inaugural speech in American political history. The Inaugural Address is a ritual that marks the inauguration of a new President and the political shift from unelected to elected one. It is the goal of many former US presidents' inaugural addresses to uplift and unite the country. One of the famous lines from President John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural speech to the US is to ask yourself, "What can you do for your nation?" Americans have been inspired by this lovely term in many different ways (Nurkhamidah et al., 2021). The inaugural address has been recognized since the United States of America presidency (Shaw, 2017). The communicative style used by the president in his inaugural address has been shifting over time (Stuckey, 2010). This study is an attempt to investigate the stylistic features of Biden's political inaugural speech. The analysis focuses on certain distinctive linguistic features including graphological, lexical, and grammatical categories, as well as coherence. There are some questions that this study tries to provide an answer for:

1. How can graphological, lexical, and grammatical categories trigger the foregrounding features that Biden's political speech frequently used in the selected speech?

2. How do the word choices influence the persuasive power of the speech and its emotional significance? What stylistic effects does Biden's speech create on the readers?

2. Theoretical Framework

Stylistics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the analysis of linguistic and expressive features in fictional and non-fictional texts. For a long period, Stylisticians focus mainly on literary texts, such as novels, plays, poems, and others. Subsequently, "a literary text is not radically different from any other linguistic act, spoken or written" (Stockwell & Whiteley, 2014). Stylisticians examine how language is used in specific contexts, to identify the choices of words, sentence structures, rhetorical devices, the patterns of language use, such as the use of cohesive devices and coherence, etc. to understand how texts are structured and how they function in communication to convey meaning and create particular effects on the reader.

According to Leech and Short (2007: 61), lexical categories are divided into a 'General' category to explain whether the vocabulary is 'simple or complex, descriptive or evaluative, specific or general, formal, informal' or whether the text shows any 'rare use of specialized vocabulary'. The second category deals with nouns classified into concrete and abstract, with the latter including the following kinds: 'events, perception, processes, moral qualities, social qualities' (Leech & Short, 2007: 61-64 in Abdulla, 2016). Concrete nouns are those nouns that could be 'observable and measurable', whereas abstract nouns are those nouns that are 'non-observable' and 'non-measurable' (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985: 247). Leech defines abstract nouns as those that have 'no physical form' and cannot be seen or touched. They can stand for 'general feelings, ideas and concepts', qualities, states, events and actions, and a number of them are recognized by 'their endings' such as 'ion', 'al', 'sion', 'tion' (Leech 1989: 9-11 in Abdulla, 2016).

Leech and Short (2007: 61-62) classify adjectives as (physical, psychological, visual, auditory, describing color, referential, emotive, evaluative, etc.). They also classify verbs as states, actions or events, movements, physical acts, Speech Acts, psychological states or activities, perceptions, transitive or intransitive, active or non-factive. Leech and Short classify grammatical categories to sentence complexity: simple or complex structure, and whether the complexity of the sentence structure is related to the uses of coordination or subordination (Leech & Short 2007: 62).

Simpson's (1993) model of **transitivity** is preferable to Halliday's (1976, 1994) model where he uses 4 processes (material, mental, relational, and verbalization) rather than six (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential) as mentioned in Halliday's (1994) categorization. These processes have participants and have the role of, for instance, actor, sensor, carrier, sayer, behaver, etc. Such processes represent actions of doing, sensing, being, existing, saying, and behaving, respectively. Simpson categorize three Mental Processes 'Cognition' (think, know, understand, etc.), 'Reaction' (like, love, hate, etc.) and 'Perception' (sense, hear, see, etc.), whereas Halliday's model contains four: Perception (sense, see, feel, taste, etc.), Cognition (think, believe, etc.), Emotion (like, love, hate, fear, etc.), Desideration' (want, wish, decide, plan, etc.). Simpson uses only 'Circumstance' to include generally all adverbials without identifying them separately as in Halliday's model which consists of the basis of various criteria, such as place, time, manner, etc. Simpson includes behavioral processes within material processes, whereas Halliday puts it as a distinct process (in Abdulla, 2016).

In his model of point of view, Simpson (1993, 42-47) classifies **modality** into positive (deontic and bulimia), negative (epistemic and perception and neutral (unmodulated categorical assertion) shadings. **Deontic** is based on permission, obligation, and actions which demonstrates a continuum of commitment from permission: "may leave" through obligation: "should leave", to requirement: "must leave". According to Simpson deontic modality is "the modal system of "duty", as it is concerned with a speaker's attitude to the degree of obligation attaching to the performance of certain actions". According to Abdulla (2018), the deontic modality is represented by: "Permission: may, can…'' and "Obligation: must, should…, as well as Requirements: must" and **Boulomaic** is expressed by the speaker's hopes, wishes, and desires can desire, hope. **Epistemic** is concerned with "the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed" and the epistemic modal operators such as must, certainly and necessarily" render the speaker's commitment to the factuality of propositions explicitly dependent on their knowledge" (Simpson, 1993: 42-45). Epistemic modality is expressed by the modal auxiliary that expresses possibility including may, might, maybe, could be, and must be, as well as certainty which includes *a will, would, certain,* etc., and necessity which is expressed by 'must'. In the analysis, the epistemic modal auxiliaries *can* and *will*, as well as *must* be examined to investigate the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of a proposition expressed.

Since the data selected for this stylistic analysis is political speech, it is crucial here to define the language of politics which refers to the strategic use of language in political contexts to communicate, persuade, and influence public opinion and policy. Political speeches have various forms such as inaugural addresses, campaign speeches, state of the Union speeches, and addresses to the nation. Politicians exploit political speeches as a means of public communication to attract listeners to their agenda. They use various techniques such as persuasion to connect to several concepts such as justice, power, authority, and other related political issues. Political speech refers to the communication delivered by politicians or political figures to convey their ideas, policies, and agendas to the public. It is a form of persuasive communication aimed at influencing public opinions and inspiring actions. Political speeches reflect the speaker's political ideology, values, and vision for the future. They are characterized by the overuse of certain

words and the emphasis on specific themes and values in the speeches of different political figures. The use of rhetorical devices such as parallelism, repetition, antithesis, metaphor, rhythm, and rhetorical language is to emphasize key points, persuade the audience, and establish agreeable arguments. Abdulamir (2023) states that the use of language in politics has led to changes in several concepts and ideas related to political issues, such as citizenship, democracy, freedom, justice, equality, terrorism, and others. Accordingly, the linguistic game that politicians use to persuade people in media broadcasts can have an effect to manipulate people to be under their control to serve the authoritative interests. The linguistic choices in political speeches are purposeful and used to over-emphasize certain ideas that reflect political ideologies to inspire the audience.

In this paper, Biden's inaugural speech is selected due to the references to the unity and cooperation of the nation to achieve togetherness, historical events, as well as national values which are all connected to certain stylistic features explained in section 3. About the adopted **stylistic approach**, politicians express their ideologies through language to build efficient communicable messages between themselves and people. Hence, **Stylistics** as an analytical approach can be used as a supportive tool to interpret the language of political speeches since politicians use certain strategic techniques to convey their messages in effective and persuasive ways. The stylistics of political speech focuses on investigating the use of certain distinctive linguistic choices such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in connection with the foregrounding features such as parallelism and deviation.

3. Methodology

This section includes research methods, data collection, data selection, and data analysis. A **qualitative research method** is used to investigate Biden's inauguration speech. Qualitative technique refers to research that provides descriptive analysis of the linguistic features of different types of texts. The ultimate goal of the analysis is to provide a clear relationship between stylistic and political speech. In some places in the analysis, the quantitative method has also been employed to extract the frequent uses of the selected linguistic features including graphological, lexical, syntactic, rhetorical, and other types of features. The **data** has been **collected** from a transcript of Joe Biden's inauguration Address on January 21, 2021, obtained from Time Magazine. The steps of data analysis are to break down the data into smaller units for descriptive analysis. Data was gathered randomly in President Joseph Biden's inauguration speech at the United States Capitol Hill. The **data selection** is restricted to Biden's inauguration political speech. Since the data captures political speech used worldwide that is appropriate for political communication. Some selected extracts have been chosen in the selected speech samples which include certain foregrounding features that are noticeable distinctive features to draw the reader's attention. Biden emphasizes how important how important it is for Americans to stand together. He is concerned about prevailing unity to establish agreement among its citizens. Biden aims to prevent people from fighting based on their ethnicity, beliefs, etc. He discusses the ability to democratize all facets of American society. His three principles are being kind are being kind, pursuing justice, and accepting one another's viewpoints. Furthermore, he contends that America contributes to the advancement of human rights, equitable treatment, unification, and international peace. The **data analysis** focuses on the following distinctive stylistic and linguistic features:

1. Graphological features which include the writing system such as punctuations.
2. Lexical categories such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, as well as some formal and specialized vocabulary.
3. Grammatical categories involve complex sentence structures, passive voice constructions, and conditional clauses.
4. Grammatical cohesive devices and coherence.
5. Rhetorical features such as persuasive strategies, repetition, parallelism, modality to express certainty, caution, or uncertainty (e.g., "may," "could," "seem"), and modality markers to convey obligation or permission e.g., "shall," "must," "may".

In this paper, any distinctive linguistic features including lexical: abstract nouns and grammatical categories: personal pronouns, modality, transitivity, as well as rhetorical devices such as repetition strategy are all investigated to convey Biden's political ideologies to inspire the audience and create persuasive and stylistic effects.

4. Analysis and Discussion

In the selected data, the following stylistic features will be analyzed: lexical and grammatical categories, the overuse of the modal auxiliaries 'can' and 'will', the personal pronouns 'I' and 'we', and the items 'much' and 'together', as well as others. The selected speech consists of 7 pages, and 20 paragraphs and is well formed grammatically, with 209 sentences, and over 768 phrases with 2384 words**. Concerning, graphology**, the use of capitalization with the following abstract nouns *Unity, Opportunity, Security, Liberty,* and *Dignity* reflect Biden's ideology to establish within American society. The speech includes paragraph breaks and punctuation to create pauses and emphasize key points, as seen in the use of ellipses and commas to convey a sense of reflection and connection with the audience. The visual layout of the speech, with its use of spacing and line breaks, also contributes to the overall impact and delivery of the message. These graphological features enhance the speech's readability and help convey the intended tone and emphasis to the audience. With regard to **lexical categories**, there are 489 nouns and 327 verbs in a total of 2538 words. In addition, prepositions and nouns have been used 170 times. Biden uses some distinctive abstract nouns including

liberty, dignity, security, triumph, resilience, oath, etc. The uses of these words help readers understand Biden's ideology through the language he uses to create his prestige and credibility.

In connection to **grammatical categories,** from its arrangement, the whole speech is primarily segmented by sentences that serve the syntactic features. The **sentence pattern**s are **150** sentences in this paper, including **69** simple sentences, **15** compound sentences, **70** complex sentences, and **20** compound-complex sentences. Among them, simple sentences and complex sentences account for the largest proportion. Complex sentences express complex ideological content in reflecting the intricate relationships. Biden uses single verbs. There are 327 verbs in the whole text.

Another strategy that Biden employs is the overuse of **repetition** in some sentences with the same word order which is the noticeable distinctive feature, for example, the pronoun 'much' has been used **6** times to signify the challenges that American people faced under the pressure of a current situation, Biden highlights to encourage people to work together, to dispense the critical period facing American people.

> We'll press forward with speed and urgency, for we have **much to** do in this winter of peril and significant possibility. **Much to** do, **much to** heal, **much to** restore, **much to** build, and **much to** gain." In this sentence, the structure of "**much to**"

The repetition of 'much' is a distinctive foregrounding feature called **parallelism.** Biden uses these parallel structures to convey the message of the items followed, which are the verbs 'repairing, restoring, healing, building, and gaining'. All of which follow the pattern of [to + infinitive]. The above verbs are related to the bright side of the future of America that Biden wants to establish. These verbs refer to mental processes about transitivity. In the following sentences, **repetition** is the salient features used in the speech that refer to the frequent uses of certain linguistic features for the sake of emphasis and stylistic effects.

Moreover, **lexical repetition** occurs at the level of **personal pronouns** and **modality**. Biden uses the second-person plural 'we' **12** times and the epistemic modal auxiliary 'can' **9** times to show a sense of commonality between the people of America and himself as emboldened in the explained sentences below. The deictic pronoun 'we' is used to refer to someone closer to the deictic center of the speaker. The epistemic modal auxiliary **'can'** is used with the lexical verb 'do' which is a material process used to emphasize the action of doing as in: "with unity, we can do great things". Biden uses the abstract noun 'unity' to reassure his nation that together they can fulfill their goals. The pronoun 'we' is another affirmation to be a part of his community without being separated from them.

In another sentence, the **mental perception verb** 'see' is used as in: 'we can see each other not as adversaries but as neighbors' to encourage the American people not to be in opposition to each other. The two abstract nouns 'adversaries' and 'neighbors' have been used as an opposition to one another to convey his insistence to be close together as 'neighbors' rather than being conflictive and disagreeable. The **mental cognitive verb** 'treat' in Biden's speech 'we can treat each other with dignity and respect' is a call for showing 'respect' and 'dignity' to the. These are abstract nouns that bring with them certain notions such as love, intimacy, and mutual understanding. The verb treat is a material process used to refer to actions that need to be taken.

Biden uses the lexical item 'right' in "we can right wrongs…, *put* in we can put people to work in good jobs" as a verb to refer to the faults that have occurred to rectify them during his period of ruling the country. In the next part of the sentence, he uses the material process 'put' to focus on finding an opportunity for people to obtain a job. Biden uses the verb 'teach' in 'teach' in 'we can teach' our children in safe schools which is a mental cognitive process to show his readiness that safe education will be facilitated for children to be taught. The verb 'overcome' *and* 'we can overcome this deadly virus' is a mental cognitive processes used concerning the deadly virus which Biden means here Corona. He seems to promise his people to control this pandemic virus. The verbs '*reward*' and 'rebuilt' are mental cognitive processes in "we can reward work, rebuild the middle class" which are an indication of a promise that Biden gives to his people to reconstruct the middle class which has been neglected in America. The two verbs 'deliver' and 'make' in the sentences 'we can deliver racial justice' and 'we can make America, once again, the leading force for good in the world' are mental cognitive, and material processes, respectively, used by Biden to emphasize on racial indiscrimination and making America the most powerful force to initiate safety and security over the world. Accordingly, the verbs: *do, see, treat, right, put, teach, overcome, rebuild, deliver,* and *make* are used by Biden. All of these are an indication to encourage the American people to: unite and work together; have respect and appreciation towards one another; create a secure atmosphere, provide good health care services to eliminate coronavirus, have job opportunities, teach our children, reward, rebuild, deliver racial indiscrimination, make American power prior.

In the below sentences, the epistemic modal auxiliary **'will'** is used to refer to Biden's certitude, a strong confirmation of his seriousness to establish unity, togetherness, power, success, and commitment towards his nation, For instance, the sentences 'we

will need together and 'we will need our strength are repeated **2** times which are clear indications for his confirmation of the necessity of unification between his nation and Biden's ideology to gain power to diminish darkness and enlighten hope to his country. The verb 'need' is a mental process used to stress his obligation towards his country. The **adverb** 'together' is used to refer to the sense of togetherness and companionship that they can achieve to improve the country's success, progress, and development. He continues using the deictic pronoun 'we' in the sentences "we will defeat", we will not fail 'and "we will get through" to refer to someone closer to the deictic center of the speaker. Biden seems to affirm that by using the mental processes 'fail', 'repair, and the relational process 'get' to convey that together we can overcome any failure and disappointment and can defeat them. Biden continues to state: 'We will repair our alliances, we will lead not merely by the example of our power but by the power of our example'. The verbs 'repair' and 'lead' are material and mental processes, respectively.

Biden wants to improve American foreign affairs with their alliances to repair the previously neglected political issues by having a 'strong and trusted partner for peace, progress, and security. He uses the evaluative adjectives 'strong and 'trusted' to give value to the improvement that he seeks and he uses the concrete noun 'partner' to bring evidence that the American nation will become the source of 'peace', 'progress' and 'security' which are all abstract nouns. Later, he states that:
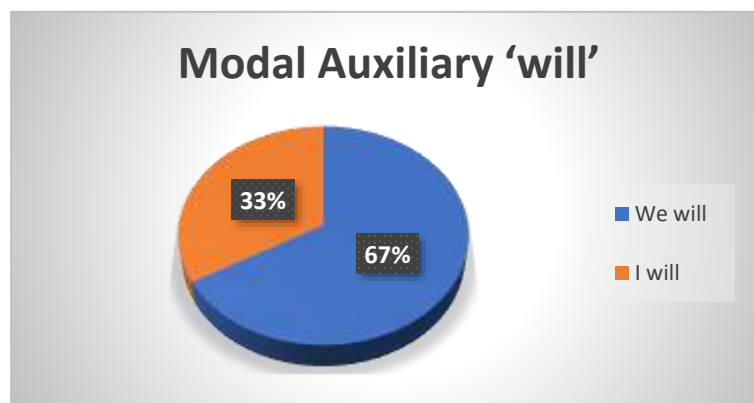
> We **will** honor them by becoming the people and nation we know we **can** and **should** be. [...] We **will** be judged, you and I, for how we resolve the cascading crises of our era. [...] I believe we **must** and I believe we **will**, we **will** write the next chapter in the American story.

In the above sentences, Biden wants to state that during his ruling period, he will honor the American people by rebuilding the country, launching unity, providing safety, etc. The reason is that Biden believes that by following his ideological policy he and his nation could solve the crisis. There is a profusion of using the epistemic modal auxiliaries of 'will' and 'must' to refer to the speaker's certitude and seriousness of the action. The deontic auxiliaries 'can' and 'should' are used to refer to the necessity of how the policy of America policy will be.   Furthermore, Biden also uses 'Í will' in most of his speech, for example, he states that:

> **I will** defend the Constitution. [...] **I will** defend our democracy. [...] **I will** defend America. [...] **I will** be a President for all Americans. [...] **I will** fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did. [..] **I will** always level with you" I will give my all in your service thinking not of power, but of possibilities.

The first personal pronoun 'I' is used **7** times with the epistemic modal auxiliary 'will' which is used **6** times to signify Biden's political policy and his authoritative power, supportive stance, ready disposition, hard-working ethic, and commitment to executing justice over his country.

The following Chart 1 rated the percentage of 'I will' and 'we will' which have been used 33% and 67%, respectively. The frequency of 'I will' is higher by one third over 'we will' which is rated by two-thirds. The profusion of using 'we will' indicates Biden's commonality and togetherness in ruling the country. This is a techniques used by him to achieve persuasion strategy to encourage people to follow his political ideology.

Chart 1: Modal Auxiliary 'will'

In Chart 1 above, the frequency of the first personal plural 'we' is significantly higher than that of the singular first singular personal pronoun 'I'. In this sentence, the second person is used to make suggestions to the audience and ignite confidence. However, the use of the third person is less, because in speeches, the third person refers to other people who are not present.

In the sentences below, the reciprocal pronoun "one another' is repeated **4** times followed by the three mental processes of the perception verbs: listen, hear, and see to convey Biden's messages to establish a strong connection between the American nation and his ideology. The repetition of this pronoun is a clear indication of his insistence on achieving such goals. In sentence 4 below, the mental process shown is used to inform people that respect must be followed to be the language of communication between his nation and himself.

1. Let us listen to **one another**.
2. Hear **one another**.
3. See **one another**.
4. Show respect to **one another**.

The proper noun ''American in (1) below is used to refer to the people of America and ''America in (2) and (3) is used to refer to the state. The repetition of America twice indicates that Biden urges his nation to seek for changes since it is possible that under his presidency he can achieve success, prosperity advancement. His argument to change America is seen in the following phrases 'better than this in (2) and (3) which is a comparative construction to show his readiness to reform and change what needs to be changed and improved under his authority. The mental process 'believe' indicates his insistence and confirmation for this change.

1. My fellow **Americans**, we have to be different than this.
2. **America** has to be better than this.
3. And, I believe **America** is better than this.

5. Results and Findings
To draw **the findings**, it is crucial to restate the addressed research questions:

The first research question of this paper was: how can graphological, lexical, and grammatical categories trigger the foregrounding features that Biden's political speech frequently used in the selected texts? To answer the first question, the following findings have been drawn:

1. Biden uses some distinctive abstract nouns including "liberty," "dignity," "security," "triumph," "resilience," "oath," etc., and some abstract nouns are capitalized to help readers understand Biden's ideology through the language he uses to create his personal status and reliability.

2. Biden's speech consisted of **150** sentences: **69 were simple** sentences, **15** were compound sentences, **70** were complex sentences and **20** were compound-complex sentences. Among them, simple and complex sentences account for the largest proportion. Complex sentences express complex ideological content in reflecting the complicated relationships.

3. The epistemic modal auxiliary **'will'** is used to refer to Biden's certitude, strong confirmation of his seriousness to establish unity, togetherness, power, success, and commitment towards his nation. The percentage of 'I will' and 'we will' have been used is 33% and 67%, respectively. The frequency of 'I will' is higher by one-third over 'we will' which is rated by two-thirds. The profusion of using 'we will' indicates Biden's commonality and togetherness in ruling the country. This is a technique used by him to achieve a persuasion strategy to encourage people to follow his political ideology.

4. The use of rhetorical features such as repetition by parallelism at the levels of lexical and grammatical structures is indicative of persuasive stylistic techniques employed by Biden.

The second research question was: how do the linguistic choices influence the persuasive power of the speech and their emotional significance? And what stylistic effects does Biden's speech create on the readers?

1. Different linguistic tools such as pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse have different influences on understanding the purpose of the speech.
2. The stylistic analysis reveals how linguistic elements such as the use of abstract nouns, personal pronouns, and mental processes reveal Biden's hope, resilience, and call to truth defending.
3. The sentence structures, including simple, complex, and compound-complex sentences, are used to create a rhythmic and intricate narrative in the speech.
4. The use of distinctive abstract nouns enhances the power and credibility of the speech.
5. The functional tone of political speech is mostly persuasive to change the listener's original belief, thus encouraging the listener to adopt a specific attitude. Because the discourse of political speech is based on strong persuasion and motivation, its language has rich stylistic features hidden in its pragmatic connotation.

6. Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the stylistic analysis of Joe Biden's inauguration speech reveal how the linguistic choices including the graphological features, such as the use of punctuation play a crucial role in emphasizing key points and establishing Biden's ideological stance within American society. The lexical categories such as preferences of abstract nouns, personal pronouns, mental processes, grammatical categories, rhetorical devices, as well as the foregrounding features of deviation and parallelism, as well as the repetition strategy at the level of lexis and grammatical sentence structure all create a powerful political speech that effectively conveys Biden's clear messages to his people. These linguistic and stylistic choices in Biden's inauguration speech contribute to its persuasive power in conveying themes of unity, hope, resilience, and truth in defending the American people. The entire speech of Biden aims to motive and persuade the American nation to unite and agree by the deliberate use of certain linguistic and stylistic features. Thus, political discourse is ultimately effective since it combines these language strategies to change the opinions and attitudes of its listeners.

7. Study Limitation and Further Research

Joe Biden's Inaugural Speech has been examined within certain formal features of stylistics. Due to that stylistic analysis is subjective in its interpretation; different analysts might interpret Biden's speech in various ways. This can lead to focusing too much on certain aspects while overlooking others, which might alter the study's results and findings. The study concentrates on certain linguistic features including abstract nouns, sentence structures, and rhetorical feature which are crucial; however, it does not examine other linguistic elements such as cohesive devices and coherence, as well as schemata to increase the speech's persuasive power due to word limits. In addition, factors such as the political climate, audience attitudes, and media influence, which significantly affect how the speech is received, are not examined in this study. Hence, the above mentioned linguistic theories could stylistically be studied. Other further research can be carried out to analyse multiple speeches by Biden to understand comprehensively the persuasive power behind his speeches. In addition, it helps stylisticians to extensively interpret his language and show the stylistic effects to readers. Although, this study includes some quantitative data, further research can be investigated quantitatively to extract frequency to count other linguistic features.

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