

The Language of Leadership: Analyzing Public Speeches of Presidents (Literature Review)



Yulia Bulgakova, Veronika Shabanova, and Anastasiya Eliseeva

Abstract The present review is an investigation of the ways in which public addresses of outstanding country leaders are analyzed by modern Russian and English-speaking linguists. Our analysis covers the time period between 2012 and 2017 and includes the review of scientific publications from peer-reviewed linguistic journals which have public speeches of presidents as their core subject of study. For our search we use such widely acknowledged online databases as Google Scholar, Web of Science, and e-library. An attempt is made to identify the major trends and key issues in these latest publications, followed by proposing suggestions for further international comparative research in this field. As we demonstrate in this review, political discourse and, specifically, the language of public addresses of American and Russian presidents have been thoroughly analyzed on multiple levels and according to different criteria over the last half-decade, but further analysis in this field still remains extremely relevant. Our paper contributes to the body of knowledge on this topic in two ways. Firstly, the literature is reviewed in order to provide an overview of the key characteristics in the public addresses of outstanding world politicians that scholars choose to analyze, as well as the levels of analysis (we divide all publications into four major streams). Secondly, possible future directions of research are identified in order to stimulate progress in this important area of study.

1 Introduction

Therefore, the present review focuses on the latest linguistic studies of the language material provided by public speeches of the most outstanding presidents in Russia and the USA. We selected this particular topic because these two countries have been confronting on the world political arena for many years and their presidents

Y. Bulgakova (✉) · V. Shabanova · A. Eliseeva
Moscow Region State University, Moscow, Russian Federation
e-mail: ys.bulgakova@mgou.ru; vp.shabanova@mgou.ru; aa.eliseeva@mgou.ru

© Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2018
W. Strielkowski, O. Chigisheva (eds.), *Leadership for the Future Sustainable Development of Business and Education*, Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74216-8_8

never fail to attract the undivided attention of the world with their eloquent speeches. Our key interest is to classify and structure the plethora of research findings published by scholars on the topic in the last half-decade (2012–2017), which brings forward the following research questions:

Research question 1: What central characteristics of the public speeches of presidents have mostly become the targets for linguistic analysis between 2012 and 2017?

Research question 2: What directions for future research on the topic can be identified in light of the findings made in previous studies?

In addressing these questions, the present review contributes to the body of knowledge on this topic in two ways. Firstly, we review the work of other authors by focusing on the studies of language of American and Russian presidents in the chosen period and offer our own classification of the main latest trends of research in this field. Secondly, we suggest possible future avenues of research that might offer a more holistic account of the language criteria used for political discourse analysis.

2 Political Discourse: Presidential Speeches as a Target for Linguistic Analysis

Political linguistics is a relatively new area of study that emerged in the latest decades at the intersection of such human sciences as linguistics, politology, sociology, psychology, and a few others. The key subject of study of political linguistics is political communication and its components. The underlying feature of political communication is political discourse, defined differently by many scholars due to its complexity.

In the present review, we choose T. Van Dijk's definition of political discourse and therefore address it as a combination of genres limited by the social sphere of politics: government discussions, parliamentary debates, political party programs, public speeches of politicians, etc. (Van Dijk 2008). The literature on the topic is abundant, which is hardly surprising, yet quite challenging for scientists choosing the language of politics as the object of their research.

The linguistic approach to analyzing this language material is of great interest to all the aforementioned spheres of study, as it offers objective results in case of applying quantitative methods of analysis and provides clear answers to the questions of how exactly the phenomenon of leadership is constructed verbally.

Using the work of previous authors on this topic as a platform, we attempt to create a classification of language criteria employed by modern linguists for their analysis of political discourse.

3 Methods and Review Approach

In our review we focused on peer-reviewed academic articles in both English-speaking and Russian journals from the following sources: Google Scholar, Web of Science, and e-library. This approach is feasible because it improves replicability and transparency. The date of publication was restricted to 2012–2017. Although such restriction of the analysis may fail to provide statistical representativeness (which was not our objective), it nevertheless enables a thorough and systematic review as it offers an adequate insight into the most important aspects of the political discourse analysis.

In the search, the following keywords were used as criteria for inclusion: “political*” and “discourse*,” which were run for matches with the terms “president*,” “speech*,” and “analysis*” (the same search was repeated in Russian with the following keywords: “политический*,” “дискурс*,” “анализ речи*,” “президент*”). These primary keywords were intentionally broad in order to cover as many articles in our first search and produced a plethora of articles that were less relevant to our study.

The first search yielded roughly 19,000 articles in English and 11,000 articles in Russian (as of 24 June 2017). We had to specify the criteria and eliminated the articles in the social sciences that did not focus on language analysis, and non-reviewed journals, still leaving about 7000 relevant items in total. As we were looking for the dominant modern trends in political discourse research and not for statistical precision, we decided to limit our scope to the first 500 publications in each language ranked as the most cited sources. We checked the titles and the abstracts looking for the names of American and Russian presidents (these could not be summarized as a search keyword or key phrase). This approach resulted in 48 relevant articles (27 articles in English and 21 articles in Russian). All these articles were scan-read and analyzed according to different criteria which we generated deductively and classified into four streams.

4 Results and Discussion

Having studied the selected articles published by English-speaking and Russian-speaking scholars on the topic of presidential language, we found that all literature in question published within the time period of 2012–2017 could be roughly divided into four following major streams depending on the primary focus of the analysis (authors’ classification). Stream One mainly targets language portraits of certain political leaders and the components of their public image. Stream Two concentrates on different genres of presidential address, oral or written. The articles in Stream Three dwell on manipulation techniques and rhetoric patterns of politicians. Stream Four covers linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of presidential language. Further, we shall present these streams in detail.

4.1 *Stream One*

The first stream of articles we classified under the subtitle “Personas.” The publications in this group within the analyzed scope of literature are not so numerous and include four English and two Russian papers dedicated to the construction of “language portraits” of certain country leaders (Mizsei-Ward 2012; Schonhardt-Bailey et al. 2012; Wingfield and Feagin 2012; Hernández-Guerra 2013; Kubyschkina 2012; Gavrilova 2013). Three of these articles discuss the ways of creating the public personal image of the former American President Barack Obama (Mizsei-Ward 2012; Wingfield and Feagin 2012; Hernández-Guerra 2013); one paper dwells on Ronald Reagan’s presidency (Schonhardt-Bailey et al. 2012). Out of two Russian articles, the first one analyzes the language portrait of George Bush, Jr., while the other one presents a comparative study of the rhetoric techniques of two Russian presidents, Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin (Gavrilova 2013).

4.2 *Stream Two*

The articles in the second group can be summarized by the subtitle “Genres.” This stream targets certain genres of presidential address to the citizens of the country, which can be either oral or written. These two subdivisions may be classified further into “preelection speeches,” “inaugural speeches,” “primary debates,” “presence in mass media,” “presence in social media,” etc. The selection of articles in Stream Two contains eight published papers in English and only one Russian paper. Following the trends of time, the subgenre “social media presence” proves to be the most analyzed category, covering the presence of American presidents on such popular social media platforms as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Blitvich 2012; Volders and Milan 2013; Jeon and Mauney 2014). Television debates of American candidates running for presidency are also a good source of language material, as two extensive studies conducted by English-speaking scholars are dedicated to this subgenre (Cienki and Giansante 2014; Mascaro and Goggins 2015). The only Russian article in this group dwells on the presence of Russian presidents in mass media (Kluyev 2016).

4.3 *Stream Three*

The third stream of articles is by far the most extensive in our selection. This group can be entitled “Manipulation techniques and rhetoric patterns,” and this subdivision seems to be of major importance to researchers as it offers practical and definite answers to the question of “What exactly makes this leader so good at convincing people?”. According to our results, there are nine English articles and ten Russian

articles that can be Bocharova classified into this category. Most of these papers also concentrate on specific linguistic features that comprise the techniques and patterns of interest, so they can be cross-classified into Stream Four (Bocharova 2013).

Manipulative argumentation techniques employed by political leaders in their public addresses are reviewed quite often by both English and Russian-speaking authors (Bocharova 2013; Mishchuk 2013; Shakhova 2013; Avetisyan 2015, etc.). Other rhetoric techniques aimed at particular goals of the speaker (e.g., political trolling, evaluative techniques, running-for-president rhetoric) were the primary target of four articles (Dilliplane 2012; Burroughs 2013; Gavrilova 2013; Cap 2015). A more conceptual approach was employed by the authors who chose to analyze rhetoric techniques of politicians through the prism of their behavior in conflicts (Maisel 2012; Ryadovaya 2013), revealing the ideological views and values (Sim et al. 2013; Sowińska 2013), verbalization of integration strategy (Atman 2012), or even through constructing a verbal political image of the countries run by certain presidents (Goloborodko and Serikov 2015).

4.4 *Stream Four*

The fourth category of articles is presented by 17 papers, 8 in English and 11 in Russian. This group is of special interest for us as it dwells on linguistic features and stylistic peculiarities of presidential language.

An obvious discrepancy of the core objects of study is observed when we compare the search results in two languages. The English-speaking authors tend to choose a major and urgent social/political concept or the image of a certain politician as their focal point and then use linguistic or stylistic analysis as a means of presenting how this concept is constructed, e.g., terrorism rhetoric under the Bush administration may be analyzed by means of discourse analysis (Bartolucci 2012), deception in political discourse may be revealed through linguistic style matching of the political speeches (Booker 2012), and construed meaning in political discourse may be examined with the help of a case study based on analyzing metaphoric use (Shepard 2013). We noticed that pure linguistic analysis is rarely used on its own without a major concept to support, unless the authors are of Russian descent – in this case, even articles written in English seem to focus more on proving some linguistic hypothesis, quite often in comparative cross-cultural vein, e.g., analyzing the linguistic peculiarities of modern political discourse in the USA and Russia (Davletbaeva et al. 2016). The only exception to that in our selection of papers is a study dedicated to unknown agents in translated political discourse (Schäffner 2012).

Russian authors, on the contrary, seem to favor a deeper and more thorough approach to analyzing linguistic material and quite often make it their core issue of study, e.g., stylistic or lexical features of political discourse (Mitina and Falileev 2012; Popova and Taratynova 2012; Chudinov 2012), verbal representation of

aggression in political speeches (Kaufova 2015), compliments as a speech strategy (Drygina 2013), cognitive structure of the concept “power” (Chironova 2013), etc.

Many articles have targeted a specific stylistic device of metaphor and metaphoric use in political discourse, sometimes giving detailed classifications of metaphors employed by politicians in their public addresses to convey some ideas through transferred meaning (Kubyshkina 2012; Charteris-Black 2013; Kerimov 2014). Verbal irony and humor in politics have also been analyzed extensively through the use of tropes and canned jokes (Shilikhina 2013; Pechenkina and Vasilyeva 2014). Some papers dwelled on the use of phraseology by popular world leaders (e.g., Sedykh 2012). One Russian article in the drawn scope had intentions of the politician revealed by language means as its target (Manaenko and Manaenko 2013).

The initial selection of publications from all the four streams we suggested can also be reclassified according to the methods employed for analyzing the language data. The majority of researchers in the 48 publications we analyzed depending on their aims used the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, subjecting the language material to discourse analysis, content analysis, intent analysis (analyzing the intentions of the speaker), and to a wide range of variations of linguistic and stylistic analysis.

5 Conclusion

This review has shown that previous research on the topic, even presented through our search limitations, can be summarized in two main trends. The English-speaking researchers focused predominantly on urgent and relevant sociopolitical issues that were analyzed with through the prism of collected linguistic material, thus applying pragmatic approach. Russian linguists provided a more thorough language analysis, and their approach can be characterized as more theoretical.

Based on this observation, we believe that political linguistics could benefit from further Russian publications with a more generalized view of political discourse and putting major sociopolitical events of the country into spotlight. At the same time, English-speaking linguists could make use of the language analysis methods so thoroughly examined and developed by Russian scholars. More cross-cultural comparative and contrasting studies would also be of great interest to political linguists worldwide, as a palpable lack of such publications is observed at the moment. Therefore, we are convinced that it is essential for researchers interested in the language of politics to contribute further to the current understanding of how leadership in politics is made to happen, as this topic seems inexhaustible and always relevant.

Like any review, our own analysis had its limitations. One of these is the comparatively small amount of quantitative work included in this review. We suggest that future research should use quantitative methods more often to offer testable and more generalizable results. Moreover, mutual interdependencies within the four main objects of analysis in political discourse literature (personal image of

the presidents, their rhetoric techniques, the genres of public political address, and the linguistic features of political language) should be scrutinized further.

Excluding some articles from our initial search and limiting it to a certain period and particular criteria may have resulted in an entirely subjective outcome. Thus, enlarging the search scope in further studies of the topic might bring more generalized results. Nevertheless, we believe that our review of the academic publications dedicated to linguistic analysis of the speech of outstanding politicians of our time has provided fertile ground for future research.

Acknowledgments We would like to express our gratitude to the managing team of the Prague Institute for Qualification Enhancement and particularly to Wadim Strielkowski on behalf of the management of the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Languages, Moscow Region State University, Russia.

References

- Atman OV (2012) Verbalization of the integration strategy in the discourse of the USA Saturday presidential address. *Philological sciences. Quest Theory Pract* 6(17):19–22
- Avetisyan Z (2015) Speech impact realization via manipulative argumentation techniques in modern American political discourse. *World Acad Sci Eng Technol Int J Soc Behav Educ Econ Bus Ind Eng* 9(6):1808–1813
- Bartolucci V (2012) Terrorism rhetoric under the Bush administration: discourses and effects. *J Lang Polit* 11(4):562–582
- Blitvich PGC (2012) Chapter two. Politics, “Lies”, and Youtube: a genre approach to assessments of im/politeness on Obama’s 9/9/2009 presidential address. *New perspectives on (im)politeness and interpersonal communication*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, pp 62–90
- Bocharova EA (2013) Political discourse as the means of mind manipulation. PhD abstract. (Belgorod)
- Booker LM (2012) When worldviews collide: what linguistic style matching and distal language reveal about deception in political discourse. PhD thesis. University of Memphis
- Burroughs B (2013) FCJ-165 Obama trolling: memes, salutes and an agonistic politics in the 2012 presidential election. *Fibreculture J* 22(2013):258–276
- Cap P (2015) Crossing symbolic distances in political discourse space: evaluative rhetoric within the framework of proximization. *Crit Discourse Stud* 12(3):313–329
- Charteris-Black J (2013) *Analysing political speeches: rhetoric, discourse and metaphor*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke
- Chironova II (2013) The cognitive structure of the concept “Power” in Russian and English-speaking political discourse. *Law Polit* 12:1720–1730
- Chudinov AP (2012) Discourse characteristics of political communication. *Political Linguist* 2:53–39
- Cienki A, Giansante G (2014) Conversational framing in televised political discourse: a comparison from the 2008 elections in the United States and Italy. *J Lang Polit* 13(2):255–288
- Davletbaeva DN, Yashina ME, Sharafieva AD (2016) Linguistic peculiarities of the modern political discourse of Russia and the USA. *J Org Cult Commun Confl* 20:242–247
- Dilliplane S (2012) Race, rhetoric, and running for president: unpacking the significance of Barack Obama’s “A More Perfect Union” speech. *Rhetor Public Aff* 15(1):127–152
- Drygina YA (2013) Compliment as a speech strategy in English-speaking political discourse. *Philological sciences. Issues Theory Pract* 11–1(29):86–89

- Gavrilova MV (2013) Cognitive and rhetoric basics of presidential speech (based on public addresses of V. Putin and B. Yeltzin). Directmedia, Moscow, 295 p
- Goloborodko AY, Serikov AV (2015) The discourse of “soft power” in the context of image construction of modern Russia: factors and techniques of shaping the competitive identity. *Humanitarian of Southern Russia* 4:41–50
- Hernández-Guerra C (2013) Textual, intertextual and rhetorical features in political discourse: the case of president Obama in Europe. *Rev Lingüíst Lenguas Aplicadas* 8(1):59–75
- Jeon L, Mauney S (2014) “As Much As I Love You, I’ll Never Get You to Understand”: political discourse and ‘Face’ work on Facebook. 22nd Annual Symposium about Language and Society-Austin University of Texas, Austin, TX, April 2014. pp 67–75
- Kaufova LA (2015) Speech aggression in the British political discourse. *Philological sciences. Quest Theory Pract* 10–1(52):83–86
- Kerimov RD (2014) Political discourse as a special verbal category (on the example of German language). *Philological sciences. Quest Theory Pract* 11–1(41):100–103
- Kluyev YV (2016) Political discourse in mass communication: analysis of public political interaction. Directmedia, Moscow, 263 p
- Kubyshkina EV (2012) American political discourse under G. Bush, Jr.: the evolution of metaphors. *Polis. Pol Stud* 1:100–112
- Maisel LS (2012) The negative consequences of uncivil political discourse. *PS Pol Sci Polit* 45(3):405–411
- Manaenko GN, Manaenko SA (2013) Discursive words and the intentionality of the analytical text in political discourse. *Pol Linguist* 2(44):65–71
- Mascaro CM, Goggins SP (2015) Technologically mediated political discourse during a nationally televised GOP primary debate. *J Inform Tech Polit* 12(3):252–269
- Mishchuk ON (2013) Linguistic manipulation in political discourse. *News of Tula State University. Humanitarian Sci* 1:247–253
- Mitina SI, Falileev AE (2012) Stylistic devices in the language of political culture (illustrated by public addresses of British and American leaders in English). *Humanitarian Sci Educ* 4:97–101
- Mizsei-Ward R (2012) Politics, race, and political fly-billing: Barack Obama as ‘The Joker’. *Comp Am Stud* 10(2–3):177–187
- Pechenkina PE, Vasilyeva SL (2014) Language means of verbalizing irony in political media-discourse. *Philological sciences. Quest Theory Pract* 4–1(34):171–174
- Popova TG, Taratynova NV (2012) Political text and its lexical peculiarities. *Rhema* 3:90–97
- Ryadovaya NS (2013) Comparative analysis of argumentative strategies of political discourse in a crisis (based on public speeches of American and Russian Presidents). PhD thesis. Moscow
- Schäffner C (2012) Unknown agents in translated political discourse. *Target. Int J Transl Stud* 24(1):103–125
- Schonhardt-Bailey C, Yager E, Lahlou S (2012) Yes, Ronald Reagan’s rhetoric was unique – but statistically, how unique? *Pres Stud Q* 42(3):482–513
- Sedykh AP (2012) Emotional and expressive components of the phraseological discourse of V. Putin and A. Merkel. *Political Linguist* 2:39–45
- Shakhova BM (2013) Different approaches to studying political discourse. *Philological sciences. Quest Theory Pract* 9–1(27):195–198
- Shepard CL (2013) Metaphoric use and construed meaning in political discourse: the third US presidential debate as a case study. PhD thesis. Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- Shilikhina K (2013) Canned jokes in Russian public political discourse. *Eur J Humour Res* 1(2):84–100
- Sim Y, Acree BD, Gross JH, Smith NA (2013) Measuring ideological proportions in political speeches. Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP) Seattle, Washington, USA, 18–21 Oct 2013. pp 91–101

- Sowińska A (2013) A critical discourse approach to the analysis of values in political discourse: the example of freedom in President Bush's State of the Union addresses (2001–2008). *Discourse Soc* 24(6):792–809
- Van Dijk T (2008) *Discourse and power*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 308 p
- Volders S, Milan S (2013) *Agenda-setting theory in political discourse on twitter*. PhD thesis. Tilburg University
- Wingfield AH, Feagin J (2012) The racial dialectic: President Barack Obama and the White racial frame. *Qual Sociol* 35(2):143–162