

## SUMMARY

**TITLE:** The art of rhetoric in the American presidential campaigns in 2008, 2012, 2016

Political actors are increasingly using the language not as a means of communication but as a tool for competition, in the knowledge that they need to show themselves to the public as credible and competent people. Politics is a specific area of social activity that is largely constituted by words, and the language used by its participants - especially politicians - is an important element influencing their image.

The effectiveness of all political speeches, including those made during presidential campaigns, depends on many factors. One of the most important is the theme of the speech, which often significantly affects the mood of the crowd. However, winning its favor is a much more demanding process, which cannot be reduced to the content of the message, *inter alia* - and perhaps above all - because of the role played by the candidate in this process.

People who apply for public positions often inspire public trust, among others through their proficiency and experience in using the language in public speaking, as well as their ability to express their beliefs and effectively infect others with these ideas. Therefore, the story they tell (create) must effectively combine elements of reasoning and emotions. The area that best covers both of these areas is rhetoric, an art that is commonly believed to have the greatest power of mobilization in democratic societies.

The modern American political class is keen to use rhetoric and the tools it provides. In turn, any attempt to determine the influence of these tools essentially refers to the essence of the art of rhetoric which is persuasion. This work adopts a similar approach, in which 'the art' is seen as 'effective' and rhetoric as 'persuasion.'

The main aim was to investigate whether there is a correlation between the number of rhetorical figures of repetition (types), their total number and the electoral success of candidates running for election in the US presidential campaigns in 2008, 2012 and 2016. In addition, the study aimed to determine possible differences in the selection of rhetorical figures of repetition between the candidates - representatives of the Democratic Party and Republicans.

The above mentioned electoral success brings to mind the connotation with the victory in the elections. In most democratic countries, however, electoral victory is a candidate's victory in popular vote. The electoral system in the United States, although developed in a democratic system, differs significantly from that of most modern democracies. According to the American electoral system, the majority rule gives way to the majority of votes won by a given candidate. Thus, a candidate who, in most modern democracies wins popular vote, loses in the United

States if the success in popular vote does not result in winning the majority of the electoral votes.

However, no matter how the electoral process in the US differs from most modern democracies, the results obtained in this study were to have the greatest potential to create generalization. Thus, the winner in this study was the candidate who won more votes from the US population in popular vote, although it should be emphasized once again that under the US electoral system this is not always synonymous with winning the race to the White House.

This dissertation consists of five chapters - three theoretical and two practical. The first theoretical chapter presents the language of presidential candidates as a field of political science. In contrast, politics is presented as a subject of interest in various disciplines, including linguistics. This chapter also discusses academic disciplines, which are the fields of linguistics and are used in research on the discourse of presidential campaigns. However, the greatest attention is paid to 'rhetoric' as the art of influencing people, for example during the presidential campaign. In addition, the chapter discusses the three concepts that most frequently appear in the literature on political speeches, i.e., 'language,' 'communication' and 'discourse,' while arguing that the latter concept best covers the scope of the present study, i.e., the use of rhetorical figures of repetition in two genres typical of presidential campaigns in the United States.

The second chapter outlines the American political system. It discusses the historical background of the country where documents regulating its functioning were created. It then reviews the process of the US presidential campaign, assuming that it is necessary to understand the rules of the election process to understand its results. For the same reason, the chapter discusses the issue of political parties in the United States. The issue of party affiliation is also addressed, which is, *inter alia*, due to differences in ideological assumptions between the main parties, which are presented in the chapter in the form of excerpts from the programme documents of the Democratic and Republican Party.

The third chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the discourse of the presidential campaign in the United States. The topic was built and developed on the basis of the functional theory of political discourse, whose basic assumptions were used to define the characteristics of the presidential campaign discourse. This chapter also describes the genres of discourse, presents the current state of research on it, and offers insights into the application of content analysis in research on presidential campaign discourse.

Two subsequent, practical chapters follow the above described theoretical parts of the dissertation. Each of them deals with a different kind of discourse of the American presidential



campaign - the fourth chapter is devoted to speeches during party conventions, during which a candidate officially accepts the party's nomination for President of the United States, and the fifth chapter - stump speeches, unified in terms of content and message. The analysis of the transcripts of these speeches in terms of rhetorical figures of repetition is preceded each time by an introduction on the essence of the genres. In addition, the fifth chapter contains a section devoted to the content of stump speeches, which were selected on the basis of the date and place of the speech and the highest repeatability of their content elements.

The methodology of the study was based on the analysis of the content of authentic source materials in the form of transcripts of speeches representative of two genres of the American presidential campaign discourse. The main research methods were document examination and text analysis, while the unit of analysis was a rhetorical figure of repetition, whose occurrence in speeches was examined qualitatively and quantitatively based on two classifications. The first was the classification of figures according to a repeated element (letters, syllables or sounds, words, clauses or phrases, and ideas), the second took into account the affiliation of particular figures to the fields of linguistics. In total, the texts of speeches by American presidential candidates were analyzed in terms of 34 rhetorical figures of repetition. The figures that formed the basis for comparison and subsequent analysis were selected on the basis of the existing classifications of figures and as a result of the corpus analysis.

It is widely accepted that a text meets the requirements of rhetoric when it combines its basic categories, i.e., invention, layout, style, memory and delivery. Rhetorical figures, including figures of repetition, belong to the canon of style. Thus, like style itself, they do not constitute the whole of rhetoric, but only one of its elementary parts. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the ideas they express are deeply rooted in language, they remain the focus of linguistic studies.

In addition, a factor that influences the unflagging interest in rhetorical figures is the possibility of verifying their impact on the recipients, for example by analyzing their reactions, divided into affective or negative ones. The results obtained from such a study can then be used to assess what affects the electoral success of a given candidate. However, such research has very serious limitations, namely - it can only be conducted in an environment where there is a direct communication channel between the sender and the recipient. However, for most of the speeches during the American presidential campaign, the communication channel of candidates with potential voters is indirect. Moreover, an additional reason why this method of assessing the impact of certain strategies on audiences is of little use in the discourse of US presidential campaigns is the fact that it usually gathers the enthusiasts of a given candidate, rather than

opponents and undecided people. Thus, the possibility of assessing the actual reactions of the audience decreases.

Repetition as a stylistic procedure is a powerful tool of persuasion, whose effectiveness has been confirmed and documented, for example in a number of psychological studies. In linguistic studies, repetition appears as the focus of attention of studies which aim at elaborating mechanisms for automatic detection of rhetorical figures of repetition. Such research, while undoubtedly contributing to a better knowledge of them, has little potential to create generalizations, mainly due to the fact that a detection algorithm can be developed for only a few figures of repetition, automatically excluding from this group figures whose meaning is based on the understanding of often abstract relations between words or expressions.

As far as current research on the discourse of the presidential campaign is concerned, the literature collected in this dissertation shows that on the one hand it aims to define all the rhetorical strategies applied in a given type of text, and on the other hand, although it focuses on a certain group of rhetorical figures, these elements are often examined in texts created at different times and by different authors.

Critics of the first approach to researching presidential discourse often emphasize the fact that the study of many factors (types of messages, strategies) can negatively influence its accuracy. However, this method provides insight into the entire communication process during the campaign and allows for the development of theoretical foundations that can later be applied systematically to the entire presidential campaign discourse. On the other hand, research on a selected aspect of a certain whole allows for a detailed study of the topic and thus may contribute to the formulation of conclusions for prospective research or may become part of a broader approach. All these advantages outweigh the disadvantages of this method, which is the risk of presenting idealistic results that do not reflect the essence of the whole phenomenon.

Despite the differences in the conceptual and practical framework of these approaches, both types of discourse research underline the importance of applying rhetorical figures and strategies to discourse, the overriding aim of which is to influence potential voters in order to gain their support.

However, the research carried out in this doctoral thesis differed from most of the research studies currently being carried out, not only in terms of its subject matter but also in its scope.

The texts of the speeches analyzed belonged to two different genres of the American presidential campaign discourse. The first subject of comparison was the six speeches of the candidates at party conventions, during which they officially accepted the nomination for

President of the United States, the second - twenty-four stump speeches standardized in terms of content and message.

The hypothesis made, i.e., the assumption that candidates who used more types of rhetorical figures of repetition and in a greater number than their opponents won popular vote was verified by reference to sub-hypotheses, which were as follows:

1. The candidate winning popular vote (CWPV) incorporated a greater number of rhetorical figures of repetition in each of the two genres under study than the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV).
2. The candidate winning popular vote (CWPV) incorporated a greater number of rhetorical figures of repetition in two genres under study than the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV).
3. The candidate winning popular vote (CWPV) incorporated more types of figures of repetition in each of the two genres under study than the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV).
4. The candidate winning popular vote (CWPV) incorporated more types of figures of repetition in two genres under study than the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV).
5. The candidates winning popular vote (CsWPV) as well as candidates losing popular vote (CsLPV) incorporated at least 15 different figures of repetition in two genres under study.
6. The candidates winning popular vote (CsWPV) incorporated a greater number of rhetorical figures of repetition in two genres under study than the candidates losing popular vote (CsLPV).
7. The candidates winning popular vote (CsWPV) incorporated more types of figures of repetition in two genres under study than the candidates losing popular vote (CsLPV).

As no studies of a similar scope (examination of rhetorical figures of repetition in the speeches in which the candidate officially accepts the US President's nomination and in the stump speeches) and period (the last three US election campaigns) have been carried out to date, it was necessary to verify the main hypothesis and the above sub-hypotheses by obtaining answers to a number of research questions, such as:

1. What were the types of rhetorical figures of repetition in each of the two genres of presidential campaign discourse used by the candidate winning the popular vote (CWPV) in a given year, i.e., in 2008, 2012, and 2016?
2. What were the types of rhetorical figures of repetition in two genres of presidential campaign discourse used by the candidate winning the popular vote (CWPV) in a given year, i.e., in 2008, 2012, and 2016?



3. What were the types of rhetorical figures of repetition in each of the two genres of presidential campaign discourse used by the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV) in a given year, i.e., in 2008, 2012, and 2016?
4. What were the types of rhetorical figures of repetition in two genres of presidential campaign discourse used by the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV) in a given year, i.e., in 2008, 2012, and 2016?
5. Who used a greater number of various types of figures of repetition – Democratic or Republican candidates and what were they?
6. Who used a greater number of rhetorical figures of repetition in each of the two genres of presidential campaign discourse – the candidate winning the popular vote (CWPV) or the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV) in a given year, i.e., in 2008, 2012, and 2016?
7. Who used a greater number of rhetorical figures of repetition in two genres of presidential campaign discourse – the candidate winning the popular vote (CWPV) or the candidate losing popular vote (CLPV) in a given year, i.e., in 2008, 2012, and 2016?
8. Who used a greater number of rhetorical figures of repetition in two genres under study and in three most recent election campaigns – Democratic or Republican candidates?

The results obtained confirm the main hypothesis and six sub-hypotheses of this study. The Democratic Party candidates, who were also winners in popular vote, included a greater number of rhetorical figures of repetition in their speeches than the candidates who lost the vote (Republicans).

Contrary, however, to the findings concerning the total number of figures of repetition in the five selected speeches, the results of the most frequently used types of figures of repetition do not reveal such stark differences between the CsWPV and CsLPV. Rather, it was noted that all the candidates relied to a great extent on similar groups of figures of repetition.

Moreover, it was revealed that all the candidates relied heavily on similar groups of figures. It should also be emphasized that the number of figures of repetition was each time higher for the winners of the popular vote in each of the genres examined. However, in case of the candidates who took part in the presidential campaign of 2012, the number of the figures was the same when five analyzed speeches were taken into consideration.

When figures are divided due to repetition, the results show that candidates, both representatives of the Democratic Party and the Republicans, were the most likely to use figures to repeat letters, syllables or sounds. These results are confirmed by the second division of the figures, which was drawn up for the purposes of this work, which took account of the fact that the figures belonged to linguistic fields. As it has been shown, political opponents also relied

on the same group of figures in this case, i.e., those that show a lexical-phonological affiliation. On the other end of the spectrum, there were figures with semantic affiliation. The use of figures from this group was significantly lower for the candidates both those who won the public vote and those who lost them in three campaigns.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the above results, except for the fact that the candidates who won more votes from American citizens (Democrats) used more types of rhetorical figures of repetition and in greater numbers, are that politicians - representatives of both parties in the US elections - primarily sought to make their statements more attractive, hence the largest number of figures of lexical-phonological affiliation.

In addition, it can be seen from the analyzed speeches that politicians more often chose simple repetition of words, phrases or sentences instead of multidimensional, connotative figures whose use requires interpretation, deduction and/or expertise. The language of their statements is devoid of excessive ornamentation and complicated grammar structures. One can even risk a statement - it is simple, and the only aspect that distinguishes it from everyday speech is the occasion-dependent (election campaign) content. The reason for such an approach may be one - to construct an easy message and enable potential voters to understand it quickly.

Although the rhetorical figures of repetition have been used to construct effective persuasion by representatives of both parties in the two types of presidential campaign discourse examined and the three most recent campaigns in the United States, the extent to which they have been used by winners of the popular vote allows us to claim that the chances of winning a given candidate increase in proportion to the number of figures identified in the study as the most frequent.

28.04.2020r.

Elżbieta Piemiek - Niemczuk