

# ***Rhetoric and President of United States Image Projection: An Analysis of the Inaugural Address Made by Donald***

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**Abstract:** Before taking office, every U.S. President delivers an inaugural address to the whole nation, which is a custom and tradition in the United States. Through this administration, the president articulates his mission and resolution in his term, and he also often uses the specific occasion to build up an image of responsibility and authority of himself in the hearts of the citizens. This paper aims to conduct a discourse and rhetorical analysis, using Donald Trump's 2017 inaugural address as the corpus, with the help of corpus analysis tool AntConc4.2.4 database for frequency analysis and detailed lexical presentation. The study explores how Donald used linguistic techniques to construct his nice presidential image during the inaugural address. Finally, the research finds that Donald, by employing Aristotle's rhetorical Appeal theory, successfully portrayed himself as a "high-ranking, diligent, people-loving, and guardian of the people" presidential figure. And also it aims to provide insights into how using language can influence and mobilize public opinion by studying Aristotle's rhetoric theory and Trump's inaugural speech. Additionally, it offers the researchers a successful example of the application of Aristotelian rhetorical appeals, enhancing the understanding of how presidential images are crafted and displayed in public speeches.

**Keywords:** Aristotle, rhetoric, inaugural speech, image projection.

## **1. Introduction**

The role of rhetoric in shaping political leadership and public perception has been pivotal throughout history. Effective communication is essential for political leaders to convey their visions, justify their policies, and build their public personas [1]. The inaugural address of a United States President is particularly significant as it sets the tone for their Party administration and outlines their intended policies and overall governance style. Inaugural speeches by U.S. Presidents have served not only as policy outlines but also as rich rhetorical artifacts that reflect the strategic use of language to craft a desired presidential image. These speeches are ceremonial yet critical, aimed at uniting the country and setting a legislative agenda, while also constructing a narrative that positions the President within the national history [2].

This study aims to dissect the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed by Donald Trump in his inaugural address. By applying the principles of Aristotle's rhetorical theory—ethos, pathos, and logos—this paper is going to seek to understand how Trump sought to shape his presidential image and appeal to the citizens of the United States of America. The analysis will focus on the frequency of rhetorical devices, the thematic structures of his speech, and the overall impact of his rhetoric on

public perception [3]. Speech level involves three scales: logos, pathos, and ethos. The study focuses on persuasion rhetorical strategies rather than on other discourse strategies.

Aristotle's rhetoric, as an essential component of interpersonal and public communication, has attracted the attention of scholars from many research areas. However, most studies of rhetoric just focus on the theoretical perspective and the attention to the study of rhetoric from the perspective of analyzing public speech is paid relatively less. Besides, the corpus-based studies on the use of rhetoric are insufficient. Therefore, this study employs the corpus-based approach to do an analysis of rhetoric in American President Donald's inauguration speech. Thus, Donald's inauguration can be understood and appreciated more comprehensively and reasonably and also provides researchers a good example of how Trump constructed his presidential image successfully, which can help to understand him and his public speech strategy much better and more comprehensively.

## **2. Literature Review**

Academic exploration of Aristotle's rhetorical theories is not lacking, both domestically and internationally. The volume of literature investigating his ideas is quite substantial. Additionally, due to differences in domestic and international contexts, the nature of these studies varies. Aristotle's rhetoric is one of the most essential components in the field of western rhetoric and it has always been drawing attention from scholars at home and abroad. In this chapter, studies of Aristotle's rhetoric would be manifested, including literature and research at home and abroad of rhetoric.

### **2.1. Pertinent Literature at Home**

The translation and research of Western rhetoric and Aristotelian rhetoric theory in China did not begin until the end of the 20th century [4]. From the translation perspective, there are two influential Chinese versions of "Rhetoric." They are: the version translated by Yan Yi, found in Volume Nine of the Complete Works of Aristotle edited by Miao [5] and the version translated by Luo Niansheng, titled Rhetoric [6]. Among the foreign works on Aristotle's Rhetoric that have been translated into Chinese, notable examples include Rhetoric and the Polis: Aristotle's Rhetoric: an art of Character translated by Ma Yong [7]. Additionally, other rhetorical works that related with Aristotle's rhetorical ideas have also been translated into Chinese. These include La Métaphore vive by Paul Ricoeur [8], translated by Wang Tangjia, and The Birth of Rhetoric: Gorgias, Plato and Their Successors by Robert Wardy, translated by He Bochao [9].

### **2.2. Pertinent Literature Abroad**

Aristotle's "Rhetoric" was written in the 4th century BCE but did not receive significant attention until after the 13th century. In the first half of the 19th century, the renowned English theologian and logician Richard Whately redefined the Western rhetorical tradition, previously dominated by Cicero's ideas, into a developmental process originating from and epitomized by Aristotle in his book Elements of Rhetoric (1828). This self-awareness of rhetoric has led to extensive research and fervent discussions on Aristotelian rhetorical theory and ideas since the mid-19th century, as well as a surge in modern translations of "Rhetoric. Among the influential versions are the modern Greek editions edited by Rudolf Kassel [10], and English translations by W. Rhys Roberts [11]. Additionally, E. M. Cope, Sandys and Grimaldi provided detailed annotations and commentaries on "Rhetoric." Kennedy's new translation is titled On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse [4].

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Collection

The corpus selected by the Donald inauguration address comes from the UC Santa Barbara's *The American Presidency Project* which consists of the documents of published collections of presidential documents.

The choice of Donald J. Trump's inaugural address as the corpus for this study is significant because the speech marks a formal expression of his political direction and governance philosophy, which is crucial for analyzing how he uses public discourse to shape his presidential image. This research employs a thorough analysis of the full text of this address, examines how Trump employs rhetorical strategies to construct his image as a leader and further assesses the impact of this image construction on the implementation of his policies and public perception.

#### 3.2. Instrument

This study uses AntConc4.2.4 Tool.

Antconc is designed by Laurence Anthony, Ph.D. from Center for English Language Education in Science and Engineering, School of Science and Engineering Waseda University, Japan, as a Unicode compliant freeware concordance program for Windows, Mac OSX, and Linux systems. By using Active State's Perl-App Compiler in Perl, Antconc generates various executable files for various operating systems [12].

By running AntConc, KWIC (referred to as a keyword in the context) concordance lines and concordance plots can be generated, clusters, collocates, file views, wordlists, key-word lists and frequencies are also analyzed. Moreover, the basic functions of AntConc are the concordance of fixed words or various phrases and regularities of collocations and the viewing of concordance items in the contexts in order to get lexical meanings and pragmatic functions [12].

### 4. Data Analysis and Result

The following analysis will dissect Trump's inaugural address from the perspective of Western rhetorical discourse, focusing on Aristotle's three modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos and logos. This analysis aims to elucidate how Trump utilized rhetorical strategies to construct his presidential image as an esteemed leader, a diligent and caring practitioner of governance, and a guardian of the people's welfare.

#### 4.1. Ethos and Constructing the Image of an Esteemed Leader

Aristotle referred to "ethos" as "the most effective means of persuasion." Ethos is an intangible asset that can have an "amplifying" effect in speeches. Appeals to character primarily involve the influence derived from the speaker's virtue. Personality is an intangible asset that can be "synergistic" in speech [13]. Aristotle once stated, "If the audience believes, through the speech, that the speaker is a trustworthy person, then the speaker has successfully utilized character." In speeches, speakers often employ linguistic techniques such as Clever Appearances to appeal to character. This paper will interpret Trump's use of appeals to character in his inaugural speech from these aspects.

##### 4.1.1. Hedges

Hedges are primarily used to temper commitments, allowing the speaker to present views on open-ended topics, thereby controlling the audience's excessive involvement in the discussion [9].

With the help of AntConc 4.2.4, performing a frequency analysis of the use of modal auxiliary verbs in Donald Trump's inaugural speech revealed that modal verbs were employed a total of 46 times. Among these, the mid modality verb "will" was used 42 times, the mid modality verb "should" was used once, and the high modality verb "must" was used three times. It is evident that mid modality verbs were used most frequently in Trump's inaugural address. The use of mid modality verbs provides the audience with a space for negotiation, highlighting Trump's image as honest and meticulous. For example:

- (1) We will unite other nations against terrorism and we will eradicate them constantly.
- (2) We will protect you. We will be protected by the military.

In sentences (1) and (2), "will" is used a total of four times. Mr. Trump used words such as "must" and "need" sparingly in his inaugural address, avoiding tough tones and empty words. Therefore, hedges help him to shape an honest, rigorous and humble personality, which is helpful to establish the presidential image.

#### 4.1.2. Clever Appearances

In speeches, "Clever Appearance" refers to the speaker's use of their own identity to present attitudes or viewpoints, thereby gaining the audience's trust [9]. Speakers often employ this technique to express pledges and determinations to the audience. For example:

- (3) I, now, take the oath of allegiance to Americans.
- (4) I will fight with all my breath. I will never let you down.

In sentences (3) and (4), Trump skillfully uses the first-person pronoun "I" to convey his pledge to the American people: sovereignty of the people, by the people, for the people. On one hand, this demonstrates Trump's sincere attitude; on the other hand, it showcases his strong determination to serve the people. Thus, through clever appearance, Trump shapes an image of a resolute president and establishes authority in the minds of the audience.

### 4.2. Pathos and Constructing the Image of a Diligent and People-Loving Practitioner

Pathos involves placing the audience in a receptive state of mind by stimulating their emotions. Its primary purpose is to encourage the audience to accept the rhetorician's viewpoints and opinions, ultimately motivating them to take action [14]. It focuses on engaging the audience's emotions to generate persuasive power. If a speaker can engage the audience's emotions, they can persuade them. Conversely, without the audience's emotional support, it is challenging to achieve the desired impact of the speech. In Donald Trump's inaugural speech, he primarily used engagement markers and attitude markers to appeal to the emotions of the audience, thereby gaining their support.

#### 4.2.1. Engagement Marker

Engagement markers are the most direct means by which a speaker appeals to emotions, primarily involving interaction with the audience during a speech to bridge the distance between speaker and listener. Speakers use the first-person plural to achieve a collective participation effect. The first-person plural primarily functions to include or exclude, with the focus in participation markers on the inclusive usage.

Using AntConc 4.2.4, a frequency analysis of engagement markers in Donald Trump's inaugural speech was conducted. The results are as follows: The first-person plural was used a total of 100 times in the text of Trump's inaugural speech, with "we" used 50 times, "our" 48 times, and "us" twice. This demonstrates Trump's frequent use of the first-person plural in his inaugural address.

- (5) We've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry, subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military.
- (6) And the crime, and the gangs, and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.

In sentence (5), Trump emphasizes that the status quo of America sacrificing its own interests to promote the development of other countries is not what the American people wish to see. He uses engagement markers to resonate with the American people, demonstrating his determination to change this alongside the people, thereby gaining their trust. In sentence (6), Trump points out the presence of poverty, corruption, crime, and drugs in America—factors that do not align with the aspirations of the American people for their lives. He frequently uses the first-person plural to make the public believe that he, as President, can enact change.

#### 4.2.2. Attitude Marker

Attitude markers can be positive or negative and can influence the rational thinking of the audience. Speakers can stimulate the latent emotions of the audience through strategic language use. In his inaugural speech, Trump frequently employed attitude markers to achieve emotional interaction with the public. For example:

- (7) And we are grateful to President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama for their gracious aid throughout this transition.
- (8) These are just and reasonable demands of righteous people and a righteous public.

In sentence (7), Trump used the commendatory words “grateful” and “gracious” to express profound respect for the former president and his family, conveying positive energy to the audience and influencing their emotions. Since Trump previously mentioned that the American people wish for their children to attend excellent schools, for their families to live in safe communities and for themselves to have good jobs, in sentence (8) he uses “just,” “reasonable,” and “righteous” twice to assert that he considers these desires of the American people to be just and reasonable. This also indirectly reflects his commitment to the public—that he can help them achieve their aspirations—thereby mobilizing their enthusiasm and support for his presidency.

### 4.3. Logos and Constructing the Image of a Guardian of the People

The appeal to reason originated from the concept of reason in ancient Greece, which emphasized convincing people with reason and persuasion through argument to make the recipients agree with their views [15].

#### 4.3.1. Transition Marker

Using AntConc4.2.4 to analyze the frequency of transition markers in Donald Trump's inaugural address revealed that the word “and” appeared a total of 76 times, while “but” appeared 13 times. The use of these transition markers helped to clarify the segments of Trump’s speech and endowed the discourse with a strong sense of logic.

- (9) We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies and destroying our jobs.
- (10) Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth. Politicians prospered, but the jobs left. And the factories closed. The establishment protected itself but not the citizens of our country.

In sentence (9), Trump mentioned that other countries manufacture products that are originally from the United States. Then he spoke about other countries taking investment opportunities from the U.S. Finally, he discussed how other nations deprive American citizens of job opportunities. For the audience, the initial mention of other countries making American products and taking investment opportunities might not incite significant anger among the general populace. However, the mention of immigrants from other countries taking jobs from Americans easily stirs up anger, as employment is closely tied to the personal interests of the American people. The word "and," as a transitional marker, not only serves to connect these semantic relationships but also enables Trump's speech to progressively build upon each point, thereby influencing the audience effectively.

In sentence (10), a neatly arranged series of parallel structures in the speech, the word "but" is used three times, employing strong contrasts to provoke the audience's indignation: from the prosperity of Washington to the unprofitable populace; from politicians getting rich to people being unemployed and their basic survival being insecure; from bureaucratic darkness to the insecurity of the people's safety. The seemingly simple transitional word "but" plays a significant role in Trump's inaugural speech. On one hand, it arouses the anger of the American public, resonating emotionally with them; on the other hand, it makes the American people feel that he, as president, has recognized and will improve the current conditions in the United States. Thus, it is easy for the American people to trust him, believing that he will seek their welfare.

## 5. Conclusion

Trump's speech employs ethos to present himself as a decisive yet relatable leader, using hedges and modal verbs like "will" to appear authoritative and committed. Pathos plays a central role, with first-person plurals such as "we" and "our" fostering a collective identity, emotionally engaging the audience. His direct addresses create urgency and solidarity, aligning listeners' emotions with his message. Logical structuring through transition markers, especially contrasts like "but," enhances the speech's coherence, clarifying his arguments and reinforcing his persuasive appeal by outlining problems and solutions clearly.

Overall, Donald J. Trump's inaugural address is a masterclass in rhetorical strategy, aimed at establishing his ethos as a leader, stirring pathos to connect with the audience on an emotional level, and deploying logos to rationalize his presidential agenda. Through these techniques, Trump not only communicates his vision but also actively constructs his persona as a leader committed to national revival, securing audience trust and acknowledgment of his leadership capacity. This strategic use of rhetoric significantly contributes to the persuasiveness of his speech, positioning him effectively as president who is both a guardian of American welfare and a decisive, action-oriented leader.

Many studies are confined to the language itself, using critical discourses or meta-discourses for text analysis without considering the communication and permanence of text. With this in mind, some suggestions for future research are proposed. Future research should focus more on investigating the immediate and long-term effects of Trump's rhetorical strategies on public opinions is another promising area. This could utilize empirical methods, such as surveys or social media analysis post-speech, to gauge shifts in public sentiment and engagement. Analyzing changes in public opinion could help quantify the influence of rhetorical strategies on national and international perceptions.

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