

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2021.37.01.12>

Suggestive potential of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential speech 'Annual Address to the US Congress'

Сугестивний потенціал президентської промови Франкліна Д. Рузвельта
«Щорічне звернення до Конгресу США»

Received: January 18, 2021

Accepted: February 22, 2021

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Abstract

The article deals with suggestive potential in Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech devoted to the issues of confronting World War II threats and proposing aid to those European countries where it broke out. The speech was addressed to the United States Congress. The rally of congressional representatives opposed the government to propose assistance to the countries in need having faced the consequences of the Great Depression. Thus, the politicians considered the war on another continent was unlikely to have a detrimental effect on the country's interests. Suggestive influence is based on the inculcation of information to affect an interlocutor's uncritical perception to alter their attitudes and actions. Implementation of such a phenomenon in Roosevelt's speech is realized through variative repetitive information about the potential threat from the aggressor to US liberty and confrontation of the New Order Hitler wants to impose on democratic societies. Moreover, Roosevelt appeals to the congressional representatives' awareness through the system of images that makes it possible to describe actions and regimes of those who put the world order under threat. It goes in contrast with the USA's system, order, and democracy. Suggestive influence in Roosevelt's speech presented by linguistic units at different levels to indicate the potential threat to America. Discourse strategies in the analyzed speech are

Анотація

У статті аналізується сугестивний потенціал президентської промови Ф. Рузвельта, присвяченої питанням протистояння загрозі Другої світової війни та надання допомоги тим країнам Європи, в яких вона розпочалася. Промова звернена до конгресменів США, більшість із яких було проти надання подібної допомоги після світової економічної кризи та вважала, що війна на іншому континенті не могла зашкодити інтересам країни. Сугестивний вплив базується на навіюванні інформації задля її некритичного сприйняття адресатом з метою зміни його настанов та коригування дій. Реалізації подібного впливу в промові Ф. Рузвельта сприяє варіативне повторення інформації про потенційну загрозу з боку агресора для США та її свободи, протиставлення світового режиму, до якого прагне Гітлер, світу демократичних суспільств. Апелювання Ф. Рузвельтом до уяви конгресменів відбувається за допомогою системи образів, що дозволяють схарактеризувати дії та режим тих, хто загрожує світу, а також протиставити їх устрою, порядку та демократії США. Засобами актуалізації сугестивного впливу в промові Ф. Рузвельта є різноманітні мовні одиниці на позначення інформації про потенційну загрозу США. Стратегічна організація дискурсу аналізованої промови

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expressed with the help of tactics of opposition and tactics of sacralization. They are implemented by multilevel linguistic units of evaluative semantics, units that bear sacred meaning, as well as epithets, metaphors, comparisons, and truisms.

Key Words: presidential speech, strategy, suggestive influence, suggestive potential, tactics.

Introduction

The English word '*suggestion*' originates from the Latin one '*suggestio, gestus*' that bears the meaning '*gesture*'. This notion means "inculcation and persuasion that is realized through the use of uncritical and unobtrusive influence" (Ilnytska, 2006), that can be "imposed on a person's will power and feelings" (Vertyanina, 2005). In the contemporary interpretation, *suggestion* is the process of intrusion into a person's mental sphere associated with the impairment of criticality in a purpose perception and realization that is being imposed on. This process becomes possible if an active person's attitude to an interlocutor is substituted for the intentionally created passive perception. Information that is perceived through suggestion is hardly likely to alter (Sidis, 1898). Suggestion is also considered to be an organized strategy that helps handle extreme situations by the general public (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

Contemporary linguistics provides a definition of the notion *political suggestion* that is under the analysis. It is "the unique form of mental and speech interaction of individuals enshrined in socio-political communicative practice and is manifested in suggestive political discourse. Moreover, the analyzed linguistic phenomenon primarily affects suggestive influence with verbal means to shift an interlocutor's socio-political attitude through an uncritical presentation of information and its intrusion" (Yudanova, 2003). The suggestive effect in political discourse is implemented to solve practical tasks.

The suggestive nature of such a discourse is based upon irrational and subconscious information perception caused by the majority of recipients' necessary political experience. Political suggestion provides the information so that an interlocutor believes and interprets it as

реалізується за допомогою тактики протиставлення і тактики сакралізації. Вказані тактики передаються різнорівневими мовними одиницями оцінної семантики, одиницями із сакральним значенням, а також епітетами, метафорами, порівняннями, трюїзмами.

Ключові слова: президентська промова, стратегія, сугестивний вплив, сугестивний потенціал, тактики.

the real one with no intention to verify it. The scholar I.Yu. Cherepanova (1999) claims that it is possible to achieve suggestive influence if the critical information is frequently repeated. However, its identification units should not be identical, as it will impede their memorization and implementation of the suggestive influence.

The paper aims at analyzing suggestive potential of Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech. It also presents the ways of identifying strategies and the means of suggestive influence actualization in political discourse. Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech is a good example how to achieve successful results influence indirectly the politicians and persuade them.

Theoretical framework

Suggestive influence is used in political discourse to solve vital pragmatic tasks. According to scholar G.A. Goncharov (1995), suggestive influence affects the changes in mental attitude that occur not only as logical reasons but also as arguments that do exist for or against the common beliefs, through imagination development and formation of positive or negative systems of images relating to a particular object, human, situation, or habit. Suggestive influence appeals to a human's subconscious, and it affects psychic beyond its rational thinking. The positive suggestive practice caused by one's thinking is based upon overcoming pathological distortion of a human's mindset. Contrasting plays a vital role in actualizing suggestive influence, and it is aimed at creating two opposite worlds' perceptions in discourse. One of them is predominantly positive, albeit the second one is mostly negative. Such contrast also helps to appeal to an individual's subconsciousness (Goncharov, 1995). There are plenty of means to illustrate the contrast. Among them, lexemes, phrases, and

sentences should be highlighted. These units, getting the extra meaning in the discourse, can also help actualize the communicative intentions of the suggestive influence. Communicative strategies also contribute to the implementation of the purpose.

There is no unified definition of *communicative strategy* though this notion is widely used in contemporary linguistics; take O. Sheigal as an example. The researcher considers this notion of being “the general plan or vector of speech behavior, that is shown in the choice of step-by-step language actions, the strategy of language behavior that is accepted due to intentional communicative situations in general and is aimed at the accomplishment of the ultimate communicative goals in the process of interaction” (Sheigal, 2000). Another scientist, O. Issers (2003), believes that communicative strategy is “the specific way of speech behavior that can be achieved, keeping in mind the primary intention”.

Political suggestion strategies are realized in discourse through the use of communicative tactics and linguistic means. Such means are called linguistic markers of political suggestion, but they hardly have “suggestive meaning” (Yudanova, 2003). Their suggestive potential becomes apparent, employing verbal elements of a discourse. Context and extralingual information play a crucial role in interpreting the meaning in these units and identifying suggestive potential. Such kind of information clarifies the situation, its topic, and participants of communication.

Inculcation, as well as suggestive influence, is implemented with the help of linguistic means. Some scholars tend to explain the effectiveness of the suggestive function because “a word can trigger physical changes in a human’s body as it has a material basis” (Romanov, Cherepanova, 1998). Consequently, verbal communication may have a direct impact on an interlocutor and change the psychological state. A linguistic unit can be compared with physiological processes in its powerful effectiveness. Suggestion, realized through a word, influences the psyche’s subconscious state. The latter arose earlier the human ability to think analytically.

Implementation of suggestive influence has a positive effect on an individual’s imagination to create a particular system of images (Zheltuhina, 2003). Various means of imagery (metaphors, epithets, similes) play a significant role in this process. Additionally, truisms that are obvious or

self-evident can be useful in implementing suggestive influence (Komlev, 2000) and they are considered a platitude as they have been said and repeated many times before. Their use in a politician’s discourse influences the subconsciousness and latent persuasion of an addressee.

Apart from linguistic means, suggestive influence can be achieved using paralinguistic ones. Among them, organs of sight are considered to be the most significant as they can provide information in the holistic system (Sidis, 1898). Suggestive effectiveness and suggestive potential are explained by the so-called subliminal message (the 25-frame effect) on group and mass communication.

Methodology

Suggestive potential of the American President (Franklin D. Roosevelt) political speech is under analysis. It is called *Annual Address to the US Congress* and was given on January 6, 1941. The speech is devoted to the issues concerning the World War II threat. The suggestive potential of this speech is determined by the politician’s communicative intention to exert indirect influence on the rally of Congressmen to convince them to resist the USA’s potential threat. Another aim is to provide the countries where the war has broken out with ammunition.

It is highly appropriate to claim that presidential speeches are part and parcel of the political discourse. They usually take up the pivotal position in this discourse as presidents tend to lead political processes (Corcoran, 1979). This type of discourse has been of great interest among linguists as this linguistic phenomenon was and still is “one of the major mechanisms in establishing and regulating state and public relationships as well as in influencing the general public” (Kushch, 2004) or “the mass addressee in order to gain and retain power” (Polyakova et al., 2020). Political discourse is a process resulting from a communicative activity connected with political affairs and politics in the broad sense and is studied by *political linguistics* (Chilton & Schäffner, 1998) and *political discourse analysis* (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013).

Suggestion as the kind of speech influence is analyzed within the framework of *psycholinguistics* and *suggestive linguistics*. The former tends to analyze speech as a mental phenomenon, its realization in evolution and perception mechanisms, and how it affects human’s mental activity within sociocultural

interaction (Leontiev, 2005). *Psycholinguistics* bears the inter-disciplinary nature that has sprung up on the brink of psychology and linguistics. It provides interrelation of cognitive and linguistic mechanisms. The object of psycholinguistics is the speech influence on a human's consciousness and subconsciousness, which becomes apparent in alterations of psychological attitudes and mental sphere (Shahnarovich, 1995). Therefore, suggestive communication has become the object of *psycholinguistics*.

Suggestive linguistics looks into the suggestion mechanisms based on latent persuasion through verbal and non-verbal communication appealing to human's subconsciousness (Cherepanova, 1999). The examined subject remains the cross-disciplinary science that comprises psycholinguistics and pragmalinguistics, communicative and cognitive linguistics, semantics, and rhetoric. Some scholars stress that suggestive linguistics is the communication-oriented paradigm for speech influence research (Romanov & Cherepanova, 1998).

Suggestive potential analysis of the mentioned Roosevelt's speech involves a descriptive method. Also, methods of synthesis and analysis to characterize the basic concepts of scientific research ('speech influence', 'suggestion', 'political suggestion', and 'communicative strategy'). Contextual-interpretive method and pragma-semantic analysis are used for thorough research of lexical units to implement the suggestive influence in the presidential speech.

Results and discussion

Franklin D. Roosevelt, as one of the American political icons of the 20th century, led the country during the Great Depression and World War II. He was the only politician in the US who served four consecutive terms as a president. F. Roosevelt is the central figure in the US policy, along with G. Washington, T. Jefferson, and A. Lincoln (Kuklick, 2009).

The President possessed outstanding leadership qualities; he evaluated the situation and took necessary measures effectively. Having taken office, F. Roosevelt enacted a range of reforms. *The New Deal* helped to recover the country from the economic crisis and raise the American living standards. These reforms' primary goals were to combat unemployment and restore the banking system (Polenberg, 2000). Apart from being an experienced leader and an efficient politician, the President also had exceptional eloquence. Due to

it, he was able to justify his point of view and persuade the interlocutor as well as the public in his viewpoint. Therefore, his political speeches bear significant and suggestive potentials. According to B. Kuklick (2009), suggestion is "the standard means that helps to handle difficulties. What is more, American politicians were among the first ones that realized the suggestive word's hidden potential to the public".

The speech, which was later called *Four Freedoms' speech*, announced by the political leader on January 6, 1941, had the suggestive potential. Even though it was one of the regular annual appeals to the congressional representatives, it is of utter importance to the country. Primarily, the speech was essential to F. Roosevelt, as he wanted to get support from the Congress members to help the European countries that were at war. It is highly appropriate to stress out that the vast majority of congressional representatives were against assisting Europe. They had the standpoint that the war on another continent could hardly threaten the freedom of the US. Secondly, the analyzed speech was fundamental not only for American society but also for the whole world and comprised four types of freedom as *freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear*:

"In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want – which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear – which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor – anywhere in the world ..." (F. Roosevelt, 'Annual Address to the US Congress', op. cit. Rauch, 1989).

Repetitions, which are the means of specifying and conveying critical information, help implement the suggestive potential in the political leader's speech. The word *freedom* is not the only unit that defines it and is used 13 times in a politician's address. He also used the lexemes *liberty*, *independence*, and repeated them a few times. These words explain the key ideas in the politician's speech concerning the issue that one of the key points of the speech is that the country is on the brink of war. The passage of the speech helps justify the thought:

"The need of the moment is that our actions and our policy should be devoted primarily – almost exclusively – to meeting this foreign **peril**. For all our domestic problems are now parts of the great emergency" (ibid.).

He also uses the noun *peril* with an adjective *foreign* to attest to his evident argument in the passage. The idea of menace to the American society is also conveyed in other passages of the speech with the help of nouns *threat*, *danger*, as well as its derivative *threaten*, which are repeated continually:

"I address you, the Members of the Seventy-seventh Congress, at a moment unprecedented in the history of the Union. I use the word 'unprecedented,' because at no previous time has American security been as seriously **threatened** from without as it is today ..." (ibid.).

"The assailants are still on the march, **threatening** other nations, great and small..." (ibid.).

"In fulfillment of this purpose we will not be intimidated by the **threats** of dictators that they will regard as a breach of international law or as an act of war our aid to the democracies which dare to resist their aggression ..." (ibid.).

"That is why the future of all the American Republics is today in serious **danger** ..." (ibid.). "And today it is abundantly evident that American citizens everywhere are demanding and supporting speedy and complete action in recognition of obvious **danger**" (ibid.).

Additionally, the politician keeps repeating the lexeme *war*:

"When the dictators, if the dictators, are ready to make **war** upon us, they will not wait for an act of **war** on our part" (ibid.).

"Yes, and we must all prepare – all of us prepare – to make the sacrifices that the emergency –

almost as serious as **war** itself – demands ..." (ibid.).

The repetitions help implement the suggestive influence and convey the politician's ideas about the country's threat. Because of the above, it is possible to speak that it allows him to emphasize essential information in the phrase *war threatens our freedom* suggested to American congressional representatives. Most believed that the war in Europe "can't and won't touch the USA" (Polenberg, 2000), albeit the passage clarifies that the war does not threaten US freedom.

The repetition of the lexeme *war* in Roosevelt's speech can be regarded as the exhortation to the congressional representatives to support those who suffer from war to oppose it and provide a defense to their own country.

"I also ask this Congress for authority and for funds sufficient to manufacture additional munitions and **war** supplies of many kinds, to be turned over to those nations which are now in actual **war** with aggressor nations..." (Rauch, 1989).

"I recommend that we make it possible for those nations to continue to obtain **war** materials in the United States, fitting their orders into our own program. Nearly all their material would, if the time ever came, be **useful for our own defense**..." (ibid.).

"We must all prepare to make the sacrifices that the emergency – almost as serious as **war** itself – demands. Whatever stands in the way of speed and efficiency in defense preparations must give way to the national need" (ibid.).

The analysis of Roosevelt's speech strategic organization helps determine the strategy of suggestive influence actualization in it. The predominant one is the strategy of *contrasting two worlds*: the regime Hitler was striving to oppose a democratic society. This strategy is realized through the tactics of opposition.

"Every realist knows that the democratic way of life is at this moment being directly assailed in every part of the world – assailed either by arms, or by secret spreading of poisonous propaganda by those who seek to destroy unity and promote discord in nations that are still at peace" (ibid.). Implementation of tactics of opposition is achieved with positive evaluative expressions that describe a democratic society – *the democratic way of life*, and peaceful nations –

nations that are still at peace. The negative evaluative expressions help define Hitler's actions and intentions – assailed either by arms, or by secret spreading of poisonous propaganda, those who seek to destroy unity and promote discord.

The examples of this tactics is found in other parts of the speech:

“That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called ‘new order’ of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb. To that new order we oppose the greater conception – the moral order...”

...The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society” (ibid.).

The linguistic units of various levels with the contrasting evaluative meaning are the means of actualization tactics of opposition. Their purpose is to create a contrast between Hitler's world (*that kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called ‘new order’ of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb; that new order*) and the world of American democracy (*the moral order; the world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society*).

Clarification of four kinds of freedom stated in the speech occurs before the mentioned passage that also adds to implement the tactics of opposition. The contrast is shown with evaluative units that describe two worlds, peculiarities of their governance, nations, and representatives (*‘new order’ of tyranny, dictator; the dictator nation; the aggressor nation, dictator peace, enemy, conquerors vs. the moral order, the democratic way of life, a good society, a free nation, healthy and strong democracy, American citizens*).

The contrast of the two worlds helps implement the suggestive influence on American congressional representatives appealing to their imagination. The tactics of opposition is used along with the tactics of precaution:

“As a nation, we may take pride in the fact that we are softhearted; but we cannot afford to be soft-headed.

We must always be wary of those who with sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal preach the ‘ism’ of appeasement.

We must especially beware of that group of selfish men who would clip the wings of the American eagle in order to feather their own nests” (ibid.).

The politician, characterizing the representatives of his nation using positive evaluative utterances (*as a nation, we may take pride in the fact that we are softhearted*) and precluding American congressional representatives from war (*but we cannot afford to be soft-headed; we must always be wary of; we must especially beware of*), describes negatively the instigators of the war (*those who with sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal preach the ‘ism’ of appeasement*). Moreover, the speaker uses the unit *selfish* (*that group of selfish men*) and the descriptive construction with metaphorical meaning concerning the country's potential actions and its freedom (*who would clip the wings of the American eagle in order to feather their own nests*).

The metaphoric expression *the American eagle* (the symbol of freedom in the USA) plays an essential role in realizing the tactics of opposition. It helps to oppose the independent American society to those who have the intention to affect detrimentally its values and corrupt the country's freedom. The American citizens tend to call it *a national bird, a bird of freedom, the United States eagle, American eagle* (Stephanson, 1995). Such symbols “are ingrained in the public's collective conscious/subconscious and offer a “ready-made” algorithm for interpreting events” (Kravchenko, Goltsova, & Kryknitska, 2020).

The contrast of American society to aggressors and instigators in the analyzed passage is rendered by personal pronoun *we* and demonstrative pronouns *that, those* as the deictic means. These units perform the role of identifying the representatives of opposing nations and acquire the axiological connotation in the speech, specifying them in terms of *‘ingroup – outgroup members’* (Van Dijk, 1987). The pronoun *we* is the inclusive unit that bears the positive evaluative connotation, albeit the pronouns *those, that* describe the foreigners and have the negative evaluative sense (Kushch, 2017).

Roosevelt also uses various epithets to emphasize contrast and create a system of images. The majority of them help give characteristics, describe attributes and qualities of those who bear threat to the whole world and

their country in particular (*the dictator nation, the aggressor nation, selfish men, 'new order' of tyranny etc.*). Additionally, epithets (*healthy and strong democracy, free society, the moral order*) and simile (*to act as an arsenal*) are used by the speech giver to describe his motherland, specifics of its governance, laws, and rights.

The use of truisms that are the means of apparent information actualization (*we may take pride in the fact that we are softhearted, the Nation's hands must not be tied when the Nation's life is in danger*), common truths (*peace cannot be bought at the cost of other people's freedom*), as well as a famous saying (*As men do not live by bread alone, they do not fight by armaments alone*), also contribute to the realization of suggestive influence in the politician's speech.

Furthermore, the suggestive strategy of sacralization is the primary one in the American political discourse, according to the linguist E.T. Yudanov (2003). The researcher bears the opinion Americans consider that their actions, values, and the future is sacred and is predetermined by God, and this idea appeals to the nation. Moreover, it is rooted in ancestors' consciousness, contributes to the nation's unification, and evolves patriotic feelings (ibid.). The idea dates back to the 19th century, when the first settlers arrived in the continent and settled down. It has become the foundation of the widespread doctrine all over the country in the second half of the 19th century. The principle was for the idea of territorial expansion of the USA. An American journalist and democrat, John O'Sullivan, called it 'Manifest Destiny' in his article *Annexation* in 1845 (Merk, 1963). This phrase was not used anymore in politics at the dawn of the 20th century, albeit later, it acquired another meaning like the '*American mission to spread democracy in the world*' (Stephanson, 1995).

The tactics of American nation sacralization is the tool to actualize the strategy of sacralization, which is obvious in the passage:

"This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its million of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God" (Rauch, 1989).

The utterance represents the communicative tactics; the key elements of it convey the idea of the nation's sacralization (*this nation, has placed its destiny, faith in freedom, under the guidance God*). Not only the expression of *this nation* is

identifying the American nation but also the phrase with the unit *free* (*free men and women*).

The idea of sacralization is also reflected in the American presidents' speeches, for instance:

"And may that Being who is supreme over all, the Patron of Order, the Fountain of Justice, and the Protector in all ages of the world of virtuous liberty, continue His blessing upon this nation and its Government and give it all possible success and duration consistent with the ends of His providence" (Waldman, 2010).

"With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own" (Waldman, 2010).

"In this dedication of a Nation we humbly ask the blessing of God. May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come" (F. Roosevelt, 'First Inaugural Address', op. cit. Waldman, 2010).

American presidents inaugural addresses tend to finish with the utterances – "God bless you, and thank you" (R. Reagan, 'First Inaugural Address', op. cit. Waldman, 2010); "Thank you and God bless you all" (B. Clinton, 'Inaugural Address', op. cit. Waldman, 2010); "May God bless you all, and may God bless America" (Waldman, 2010), which reflect American nation sacralization.

Conclusions

Suggestion is the kind of an interlocutor's latent persuasion and psychological influence on subconsciousness. Uncritical introduction of information and its suggestiveness help implement such influence that can be achieved with repetitions, contrasts, and appeal to a human's system of images and provokes it. Moreover, truisms are of great importance to achieve the aim. The predominant role in gaining suggestive influence belongs to lexical units. The suggestive potential is apparent in the context. Extralingual situation of discourse formation enhances the understanding of their meaning. Paralingual units are additional in achieving suggestive influence.

The notion of political suggestion is connected with the indirect influence on the interlocutor of political speech. It is aimed at altering socio-political ideology. Suggestive influence is done

in political discourse to solve vital pragmatic tasks. Presidential speeches take the key position in political discourse due to presidents' significant role in political processes.

Roosevelt's speech *Annual Address to the US Congress* that was delivered to the congressional representatives within a few months after World War II broke out has suggestive potential. Its suggestive character can be explained by the communicative purpose of the speech giver to influence indirectly the politicians to persuade them to confront the potential threat to the US and provide war ammunition to the European countries where the war started. The Americans hardly supported the ideas owing to the world's economic recession. The means of suggestive influence actualization in discourse are the linguistic units of various levels that replicate the essential information about the US's potential threat. The strategies of suggestive influence realization are the ones that help contrast the two worlds through opposing them. What is more, the constant use of the sacralization strategy proves that the American nation is highly sacralized. The described tactics are realized by means of evaluative semantics units of various levels, units that have the sacred meaning, as well as epithets, metaphors, similes, and truisms.

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