Positive Discourse Analysis
of Hillary Clinton’s Concession Address

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As a new field in the Discourse Analysis, Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) is increasingly arousing more attention of linguistic scholars at home and abroad. However, in the field of the concession addresses, the studies on this kind of political text are limited. The winners of presidential election always draw much attention from the world and their speeches, for example, presidential inaugural address has been a hot study topic of linguistics. Nevertheless, the losers of presidential election are always neglected by the world and the study on concession address is scarce and rare. Therefore, the meaning of study on the concession speech helps fill the gap of the discourse analysis. This thesis applies the PDA under the framework of appraisal theory to analyze five concession speeches with a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. This study aims to complement CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) to emphasize positive social construction of political discourse.

Keywords: appraisal theory, positive discourse analysis, concession address

Introduction

As an important speech, political speech plays a significant role in public speech, drawing great attention from home and abroad. Due to the uniqueness of political discourse, many scholars tend to analyze political discourses from the perspective of critical discourse analysis to reveal the hidden hegemony and power resulting from the different ideologies and cultures. However, a new kind of discourse analysis increasingly arouses linguistic scholars’ attention, which is Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA). Different from CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) focusing on the deconstruction of society, PDA focuses on the construction of society and peaceful solution to the problems. Unfortunately, in the field of the concession addresses, the studies on this kind of political speech are few and far between. In the Concession addresses, as failed presidential candidates, how they use appraisal resources to show their magnanimity after losing presidential election is the focus of this study.

Theoretical Framework: Appraisal Theory

Appraisal theory is concerned about “human” in interpersonal function, focusing on the evaluative resources in discourse. Appraisal theory is comprised of three sub-systems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation system.

Attitude System

Attitude system relates to people’s feeling and evaluations. Attitude itself is divided into three regions of
feeling, “affect”, “judgment” and “appreciation”.

Affect relates to how people feel about. It has two evaluations: positive and negative affect. More detailed classification can be: un/happiness, in/security, and dis/satisfaction.

Judgment is concerned with resources for assessing people’s behaviors. As with affect, judgment has positive and negative evaluations as well. Judgment system itself can be classified into “social esteem” and “social sanction”. Judgments of esteem have to do with “normality” (how unusual someone is), “capacity” (how capable they are) and “tenacity” (how resolute they are). Judgments of sanction have to do with “veracity” (how honest or truthful people are) and “propriety” (how far beyond reproach).

Appreciation is traditionally referred to as aesthetics, concerned with the evaluation of things and phenomenon. Under appreciation, it can be divided into three subcategories: reaction (whether they catch our attention or please us), composition (balance and complexity), and valuation (how innovative, authentic, timely).

Engagement System

Engagement system contains the same or different voices in texts. There are two parts in Engagement system: Monogloss and Heterogloss, the former only contains one voice but the latter contains many voices. Heterogloss has always been the focus of study for it harbors different voices to agree or refute. Under Heterogloss, there are dialogic contraction and dialogic expansion.

Dialogic contraction closes down dialogic space, including two subdivisions: disclaim and proclaim. Under disclaim, there are two parts: deny and counter. Deny is simply a negation of propositions while counter uses another proposition to substitute the former one. Under proclaim, there are three parts: concur, pronounce and endorsement. Concur shows the speaker’s agreement with intended audience via locutions, such as: “of course”, “surprisingly”, “definitely”, “naturally”, “certainly”, etc. Pronounce shows speakers’ inscribed attitude towards certain idea, which is pretty obvious. Endorsement is defined as external voices are described as correct, effective and undeniable.

Dialogic expansion falls into two subsystems: Entertain and Attribute. Entertain mainly is realized by modality from internal voice. Under Attribute, there are two subclasses: acknowledge and distance. Acknowledge expresses speaker’s neutral standpoint, not explicitly showing speaker’s attitude. Distance, as its name shows, distinguishes speaker from the proposition distinctly.

Graduation System

Graduation runs through the whole appraisal system. It is a scalable system, which is concerned with the degree of different attitudinal resources and engagement resources. Graduation System has two subcategories: force and focus. Force is concerned with intensification or quantification. And focus is concerned with prototypically.

By analyzing Hillary Clinton’s Concession Address from the perspective of PDA under the framework of appraisal theory, the present study aims to discover how political orators use language to lift up spirits of people after losing election.

Positive Discourse Analysis of Clinton’s Speech

Realization of Attitude Resources

Hillary Clinton strategically adopts a variety of attitude resources to realize her interaction with audience
and construe positive relation with audience. The exact data of distribution of attitude resources are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive affect</th>
<th>Negative affect</th>
<th>Positive judgment</th>
<th>Negative judgment</th>
<th>Positive appreciation</th>
<th>Negative appreciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percentage</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 1, we can see there are a total of 36 attitude resources adopted in the concession address. There are 14 appreciation resources, accounting for the largest proportion of 46.2%. While the negative appreciation only appears once, heavily outnumbered by positive appreciation. Appreciation is concerned with our evaluation of things or natural phenomenon. The following examples (Example (1)-(3)) are some typical examples showing how Hillary uses positive appreciation to her campaign and her strong supporters, the Obamas.

Example (1) Being your candidate has been one of the greatest **honors** [Positive Appreciation] of my life.
Example (2) This **vast**, diverse, creative, unruly, energized [Positive Appreciation] campaign.
Example (3) To Barack and Michelle Obama, our country owes you an enormous debt of gratitude. We thank you for your **graceful**, determined [Positive Appreciation] leadership.

There are 11 affect resources, accounting for 29.3%. Affect resources directly express the speaker’s feeling. In her concession address, Hillary employs many positive affect resources to express her gratefulness to be involved in this campaign, and only a few negative affect resources to show her disappointment. See Example (4), (5), (6) and (7):

Example (4) I’m so **grateful** [Positive Affect] to stand with all of you.
Example (5) But I feel **pride** and **gratitude** [Positive Affect] for this wonderful campaign.
Example (6) I’m **sorry** [Negative Affect] that we did not win this election.
Example (7) I know how **disappointed** [Negative Affect] you feel because I feel it too.

There are nine judgment resources in the speech, accounting for the least proportion of 25%. Judgment resources are concerned with the assessment of people’s behavior. Hillary adopts many positive judgment resources to praise those working for the country to invisibly get align with them. See Example (8) and (9):

Example (8) I will always be grateful to the **creative**, **talented**, **dedicated** [Judgment: Capacity] men and women at our headquarters in Brooklyn and across our country.
Example (9) Never doubt that you are **valuable** [Judgment: Capacity] and **powerful** [Judgment: Capacity].

Realization of Engagement Resources

Dialogic contraction and expansion are alternatively adopted by Hillary to bring in other voices to support her viewpoints to interact with audience. Through analysis of the concession speech, we can find dialogic contractions are much outnumbered than dialogic expansion. It is mainly attributed that for Hillary wants to restrict other voices to strengthen persuasive effect of her voice by dialogic contraction. The distribution of engagement resources is listed in Table 2.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proclaim</th>
<th>Disclaim</th>
<th>Entertain</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage</strong></td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 2, it is clear to us that much more Contraction resources are used than Expansion resources. It shows Hillary closes down dialogic space to make her authorial voice more unwarrantable. In a word, Hillary employs Contraction and Expansion strategically to make her speech more persuasive. See Example (10), (11), (12) and (13):

Example (10) Let me add, our constitutional democracy **demands** [Proclaim: Pronounce] our participation.

Example (11) Our campaign was **never** [Disclaim: Deny] about one person or even one election.

Example (12) We **must** [Entertain] accept this result and then look to the future.

Example (13) Scripture **tells** [Attribute: Distance] us, let us not grow weary in doing good.

**Realization of Graduation Resources**

Graduation Resources are profusely employed in the concession address with force resources much richer than focus resources, just as Table 3 shows.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Force</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td>Raise</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hillary uses many an up-scale force resource like “all” 10 times, “every” and “each” 8 times and comparative and superlative glossary to highlight his attitude and proper engagement. Example (14), (15), and (16) are some of the typical examples.

Example (14) So let’s do **all** [Force, Raise] we can to keep advancing the causes and values we **all** [Force, Raise] hold dear, making our economy work for **everyone** [Force, Raise].

Example (15) To build that **better stronger fairer** [Force, Raise] America we see.

Example (16) Sometimes **really** [Focus: Sharpen] painful ones.

**Conclusion**

This study explores the distribution laws and appraisal strategies in the concession address from three aspects—attitude, engagement and graduation. Furthermore, it reveals the universal appraisal strategy used in concession addresses. Thus, we can learn how political orators use positive discourse strategy to build a harmonious, loving and united society. And through the analysis of concession addresses, we can also learn how language is used to construct society by showing its positive side.
References