

## The Functional Stylistic Analysis of Kennedy's Inaugural Address

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### Abstract

Kennedy's Inaugural speech is one of the most brilliant English political speech owing to its political significance and unique eloquent style. This thesis attempts to explore this speech from the perspective of functional stylistics through qualitative and quantitative methods as to reveal Kennedy's speech style and political insights.

**Key words:** Functional stylistics; English political speech; Kennedy

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### INTRODUCTION

The inaugural address is an important part of the inauguration ceremony because it is the first time that new presidents make public appearance and give the speech. In the inaugural address, presidents will announce their own policies and persuade the public to accept and support them. It not only shows the personal style of each president, but also most of them can be regarded as excellent articles with considerable aesthetic interest.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, a democrat, as the 35<sup>th</sup> president of United States of America. During his term of office, he carried out the concept of "new frontier", revitalized the American economy, fully maintained the world hegemony of the United States, and demonstrated his outstanding political talent during the period of cold

war. And his eloquence is also extraordinary, his speech skills in the 1961 Inaugural Speech were displayed to the full extent. This speech is gorgeous, magnificent and infectious. It has always been regarded as a classic speech. This thesis will analyze the speech from the perspective of functional stylistics and reveal Kennedy's stylistic features and political insights.

### 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Functional stylistics originates from rhetoric and dialectics in the ancient Greek period, but it was not officially formed until the appearance of Prague School in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1970s, Halliday shared an influential thesis named *Linguistic Function and Literal Style* at the literary stylistic seminar in Italy. Since then, functional stylistics has truly exerted great influence on the world. Functional stylistic is the abbreviation of 'systematic functional stylistics', which specifically refers to a stylistic branch based on Halliday's systematic functional linguistics. Halliday is one of the founders of functional stylistics. He assumes the functional theory of language can be used to conduct stylistic study properly. "The functional theory of language is an explanation of language structure and linguistic phenomenon from the perspective of what role it plays and serves in our lives." (Halliday, 1994).

Many experts and scholars begin to focus on using functional stylistics to analyze the literary and practical writing from the perspective of literature, linguistics and translation. Zhang Mang(2002) tries to explore the stylistic feature of *The Mark On the Wall* and the functional stylistic in stylistic analysis of novels of stream of consciousness. Wang Lu and Zhang Delu(2009) studies the foregrounding in code switching to explore the stylistic effect in code switching in fiction and they propose a analytic frame to the name and brand in Chinese fiction. Wang Jin(2004) applies this theory in the

translation of ancient Chinese poems to check out whether its form matches its meaning.

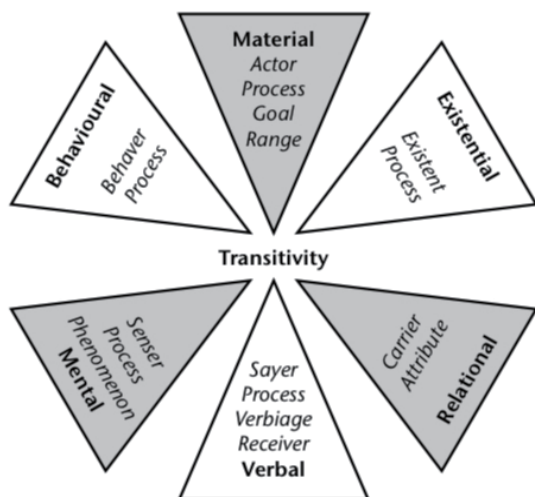
From above, we can discover although many scholars and experts had analyzed Kennedy's Inaugural speech, they mostly focus on his rhetoric devices. And therefore this thesis tries to analyze it from the perspective of functional stylistics, and solve the following problems:

- What stylistic feature do John F. Kennedy give?
- What is John F. Kennedy's style?
- What causes John F. Kennedy have such stylistic features?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Halliday (1994). proposes three metafunctions(ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function) as follows: a. Ideational function is to express the ideas and experience; b. Interpersonal function is to mediate in the establishment of relationships. c. Textual function is to provide the formal properties of language.

The ideational function is to convey new information unknown to the hearer, There are two parts in the ideational function: transitivity and voice. Transitivity involves the grammar clause in the ideational aspect, and it contains 6 six processes: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process. You can see these six processes in detail in the below figure (Halliday, 1994).



The interpersonal function concerns all uses of language to express social and personal relation. It is about the social world, especially the relationship between speaker and hearer and is concerned with clauses as exchange. In this respect, a clause can be divided into two parts, mood and modality (Halliday, 1994).

As for textual function, it refers to the existence of a mechanism in the language, which can organize any stretch of verbal or written discourse into a coherent and unified chapters and make a living fragment distinguish from a random permutation (Halliday, 1994).

## 3. FUNCTIONAL STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF KENNEDY'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

### 3.1 Metafunction Analysis of Kennedy's Inaugural Address

#### 3.1.1 Analysis From Ideational Perspective

Ideational function is used to convey new information, and communicate a content that is unknown to the speaker. The ideational function is a meaning potential, because whatever specific use one is making of the language he has to refer a category of his experience of the world. There are six different types of processes represented in language: material process, mental process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process.

**Table 1**  
Distribution of Speech Processes in Kennedy's Inaugural Speech

Speech Processes	Numbers of process	Percentage of process
Material process	35	53.8%
Mental process	12	18.5%
Relational process	3	4.6%
Behavioral process	8	12.3%
Verbal process	5	7.6%
Existential process	2	3.1%
Total	65	100%

According to Table 1, we can discover that material process takes the lead with the largest proportion in speech processes (53.8%). It follows by mental process and behavioral process that they represent 18.5% and 12.3% respectively. In addition, existential process occupies the last place with only 3.1%. We choose six representatives of these speech processes and list them according to the order of the table and then analyze them in detail .

In Kennedy's inaugural speech, we discover he uses the following verbs in material process, for example, "seek to", "unit", "join in", "begin", "summon", "forge", "go forth" and so on. Kennedy summon people to have confidence to face what they are going to meet and be willing to serve the country. He shows the audience he is capable to lead the America to win the battle with the Soviet Camp and he could take some measures to contribute to the construct of the United States.

As for the mental process, it will reveal the inner activity of the addresser. Among all the verbs concerning mental process, the verb "pledge" makes an appearance repeatedly. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, pledge means to promise the performance of by a pledge, It corresponds to their speaker's intention that he wants to leave a good impression on listeners and show them his political plan about America in the future.

When it comes to relational process, it can be easily noticed that he intend to use some relational verbs like "be"(is) and "become" so as to explain the situation of current world and make his political policy more accessible. Through such explanation, listeners could

be aware of the tense political situation and support his policy.

The behavioral process has some similarities with mental process, but it emphasizes the way of behaving compared to the other. Likewise, some inside and outside factors could influence the behavioral process. In Kennedy's inaugural speech, he transfer his own idea to the audience, for example, We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom, he tries to settle the difference between the Republican and Democratic Party by praising what America has achieved now is the result of the win-win cooperation. And he smartly shift the focus of America's success to win freedom among people, and he lay a foundation for further speech to criticize other "autocratic" countries.

Speaking of verbal process, the most famous saying in this speech cannot be ignored, 'ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.' He tries to lessen some people's anger about American incompetence and remind them to be patriotic and make sacrifice for future development.

The proportion of existential process is in the end of these six processes. A case in point. United there is little we cannot do... Divided there is little we can do ... Kennedy attempts to unit all the American citizens to serve the country and make their own efforts for the development of their own country.

### 3.1.2 Analysis From Interpersonal Perspective

#### 3.1.2.1 Analysis of Mood

According to Halliday, the mood structure consist of three types, and they are declarative mood, imperative mood and interrogative mood. The distribution of mood structures in Kennedy's speech are shown in Table 2:

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of mood structures in Kennedy's inaugural speech**

Mood structure	Number	Percentage
Declarative	37	71.2%
Imperative	13	25%
Interrogative	2	3.8%
Total	52	100%

From the above Table 2, it can be seen that declarative sentences account for the largest proportion (71.2%), and it follows by imperative sentences (25%). The share of interrogatives is smallest and it only represents only 3.8%.

The different distribution of mood structure reveals the speaker's communicative purposes. Inaugural address is similar to some other political speeches, but it has its own unique features owing to its prominence as the first public speech given by the new president. The majority of his speech are declarative mood because Kennedy wants to show the audience what he is going to do as a new president and how he will lead American citizens move on. They are used for giving out information. And the rest part are imperatives and interrogatives. In this speech their function overlap to some extents. Imperatives are normally

used to strengthen the audience's morale so that they are willing to support and accept the addresser's initiatives. Kennedy encourages the public to fight for the America and have the confidence to beat the socialist camp during the cold war period. Actually its interrogatives are not jut for the answers that he is uncertain, but to give the opportunity to audience to get involve in so that they could accept his ideas easier. The examples of these three mood structures are selected to illustrate in detail:

- i. The world is very different now.
- ii. And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.
- iii. Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and west, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

In sentence A, Kennedy uses declarative mood to caution American the tense political relations with the Soviet camps and continue their revolutionary scientific research. In sentence B and C, Kennedy encourages American citizens to serve the country and make some sacrifice. He advocate it's a great honor to be part of the development of the greatest country ever by the usage of imperative and interrogate mood.

#### 3.1.2.2 Analysis of Modality

Modality is the space between yes and no. That is to say, it deals with the intermediate stage between yes and no, such as "sometimes", "maybe" could be expressed by modality. It includes modalization and modulation. The former one refers to how valid the information is expresses , while the latter one refers to how confident the speaker appear to be in goods-and-service. The distribution of modal verbs are as Table 3:

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of modal verbs in Kennedy's Inaugural Speech**

Value	Modal verbs	Frequency	Total	Percentage
High	Must	1	1	2.9%
	Will	7		
Median	Would	2	14	40%
	Shall	5		
	Need	1		
Low	Dare	3	20	57.1%
	May	3		
	Can	13		
Total			35	100%

As is shown in the table we find that Kennedy are more inclined to use low and median modal verbs and they represent 40% and 57.1% respectively. While the high modal verb "must " exclusively appears one time and takes up 2.9%. The fact that Kennedy has a preference for the former two is that they are more euphemistic compared with "the commanding tone " must. In the group of median modal verbs, "will" appears most frequently, and

then “shall”, and “would” at last. The modal verb “will” indicates something that the new president is going to do. It is compatible with the speech occasion that Kennedy wants to impress the audience with his political insights and show his confidence to continue the legendary of the Great America. The word “shall” indicates he will lead American citizens and work with them together. We also notice that the highly frequency of the low modal verb “can” in Kennedy’s inaugural address. It means “be able to do sth” and it avoids the absolute argument. To some extent, it concerns his own opinions. Kennedy assures American could work it out and get through the cold war period.

i. In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course.

ii. My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

In sentence A, Kennedy encourages audience to strive for what our country want so that all the American citizens could enjoy the outcome brought by the success of this great country. Actually it indicates that his proposals are for people, for the country, not for his own political party. In the meantime he offers great honor is ahead of you if you are willing to accept my political policies.

In sentence B, Kennedy is the representative of Democratic Party, so the public would worry his fairness and even be critical of his initiatives. Thereupon he played the patriotic card so as to put aside their political differences and unite toward the common goal.

**3.1.2.3 Analysis of Personal Pronouns**

Subject is of great significance of information conveyance. And different personal pronouns used in Kennedy’s inaugural speech demonstrate the speaker’s different emotion and intention during the communication. We uses the search function in Office Word to number the times different person pronouns appear in the inaugural address given by Kennedy.

**Table 4**  
**Distribution of personal pronouns in Kennedy’s Inaugural Speech**

Participants	Personal pronouns	Frequency	Percentage	Total
First person	I	4	4.8%	8.4%
	my	3	3.6%	
	we	30	36.1%	75.9%
	our	21	25.3%	
us	12	14.5%		
Second person	you	7	8.4%	12%
	your	3	3.6%	
Third person	they	1	1.2%	3.6%
	their	2	2.4%	
Total		83	100%	100%

According to Table 4, we can see clearly first person pronouns rank the first(84.3%), second person pronouns

rank the second(12%), the third person rank the third (3.6%). It can be concluded that first and second person pronouns take up the largest percentage in that they are more frequently used by the addresser to interact with addressees. The first person pronouns can be divided into two parts, singular pronouns (I/my)and plural pronouns(we/our/us). The figures demonstrate that the majority is plural pronouns. The plural pronouns “we” could make the audience feel more closed and involved in so that the speaker will win their trust for their political initiatives. It is the same with the usage of second person pronouns. As a result the speech will become more persuasive and acceptable. The usage of I is to show up his future plan for the country. The appearance of them is to warn American some potential danger.

i. Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.

ii. I do not shrink from this responsibility -- I welcome it.

In sentence A, the social distance between the president Kennedy and the ordinary people is narrowed by means of the plural pronoun “us”. Kennedy is with his people to fight for the future of America, for the construction of this great country.

In sentence B, Kennedy is willing to take the responsibility of defending the freedom from the peril of the Soviet camp and he shows no fear to it. It is kind of showing person charm to the audience.

**3.1.3 Analysis from Textual Function**

**3.1.3.1 Analysis of Thematic System**

Halliday (2004) divides the thematic system into two subcategories: marked theme and unmarked theme. The criterion to distinguish these two is whether the consistency between the subject and the theme. If the theme and the subject are identical, then it’s marked theme. Instead it’s unmarked theme.

**Table 5**  
**Distribution of theme system in Kennedy’s inaugural address**

Types of themes	Number	Percentage
Marked Theme	40	76.9%
Unmarked Theme	12	23.1%
Total	52	100%

As is shown in the Table 5, the number of marked theme is more than three times as much as unmarked theme. The usage of marked theme will make audience understand the semantic information better for their theme and subject are identical. And those unmarked themes are for certain purposes like structure flexibility or emphasis.

**3.1.3.2 Analysis of cohesion system**

Halliday and Hasan (1976) defines cohesion as “the range of possibilities that exist for linking something with what has gone before”. They classify it into into seven types:

reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, reiteration, synonymy and hyponymy. According to the stylistic of political speech, we will choose reference, conjunction and reiteration to further study.

Reference refers to words and other words in the discourse. Reference deals with the semantic information to interpret the meaning of one word that is found in other place. (Caroll, 2006). Reference has three components: pronominal reference, demonstrative reference and comparative reference. Here are some examples.

- i. We dare not tempt them with weakness.
- ii. All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days.
- iii. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago.

In these sentences, "them" corresponds to the above text mentioned "those adversary", "this" corresponds to "a new world of law", "same" refers to "the same oath".

The use of conjunction will make the discourse more coherent and logical so that audience could grasp the key points of speech much easier. In inaugural speech, Kennedy uses several conjunctions such as because(cause and effect), and (coordination), now (time change), but(transition) and so on.

As for reiteration, it means the multiple occurrences of some language component. Here is the instance chose from the discourse:

Now the trumpet summons us again -- not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need -- not as a call to battle, though embattled we are -- but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out.

From above, we can find the reiteration of a sentence pattern "not as a call to, though..." and the word "year in" and "year out". Such kind of reiteration is important for both rhythm and communicative purposes. It could attract the attention and emphasize we are going to fight constantly till we win the battle. It reveals Kennedy strong confidence and determination.

## CONCLUSION

In the inaugural speech, it's very important to show the audience what kind of person you are and what you are going to do to achieve the American Dream. Because the tense political situation with the Soviet Camps, he need to comfort the audience to believe they are going to win the battle as long as we join together and follow his command. So we can see he uses a lot of material and mental processes to lead these people.

Kennedy is also very smart at paint his words by saying what we are doing is to secure the freedom in our own country, even in other countries. He is very good at mobilizing people. He didn't list the political plans in detail but draw a beautiful bright future ahead of listeners so that those listeners will support his ideas when those policies are applied. He also shift the focus of the two parties fight to a more intense fight, or more specifically, to the enemy that we both hate, the Soviet camps. And he uses a lot of conjunctions, reiteration to help listeners to better comprehend.

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