

## **Sentiment Analysis Of Trump's Weekly Addresses: Strengths And Weaknesses**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

This work is devoted to the study of the texts of weekly addresses to the nation as an example of direct communication between the political leader and people within the American political discourse and the study of the influential methods and techniques used by one of the ambiguous American presidents – Donald Trump. The paper examines the tactics of attracting attention in modern political discourse, which is a necessary condition for the success of a speech since the mass media have a great influence. Therefore, comparative, descriptive methods and semantic analysis are chosen as the leading methods of conducting this study, which allow us to present the formation of an assessment of the events and the main off-textual ideas most clearly.

The material under consideration is the president's weekly addresses to the American nation (the texts of the addresses have open access), dedicated to current problems. The publications with the highest number of views, according to the open data of the Internet, are subjected to the analysis.

The most important linguistic component of political discourse is the politically oriented vocabulary, its semantic features and cross-cultural differences. The lexical units in these texts are inextricably linked with the associative field presented in the foreign language environment. Based on the use of evaluative components of political texts, the conceptual ideas and their transformations in the political space have been identified, depending on the initial position and ideological prerogatives.

**Keywords:** sentiment analysis, political linguistics, political discourse, text analysis, Donald Trump's speech.

### **Introduction**

In our modern world and in a time of innovative technologies, political communication is becoming increasingly significant, because with the advent and development of the media and the Internet, politicians have the opportunity to appeal to a large audience and use this resource to fight for power. Meetings, assemblies and speeches are held with the participation

of politicians from different countries. Political discourse lies in the main focus of scientific studies carried out by foreign researchers [1, 2, 3], as well as by Russian ones [4, 5]. According to the researchers of political discourse [6, 7], it has a high degree of manipulateness. E. I. Falileyev believes that political discourse creates the language of politics and expresses in speech the means and features of the national language used by a politician during their public speeches [8]. It is a well-known fact that politicians use different strategies and tactics to implement their communicative intentions, which are particularly evident in politicians' statements which are, so to speak, "to the point" and "topically relevant", i.e. in situations where the speech is least prepared by speechwriters.

Professor Ten A. Van Dejk of the University of Amsterdam, considering the close relationship between ideology and culture, highlights the fact that ideology and culture are reproduced in the discourse [9]. The very concept of discourse appeared together with the concept of "discourse-analysis", at a time when all the attention of the scientists and researchers in the field of sociolinguistics and communications was focused on the "off-text", and not on the text itself. In other words, the researchers were more interested in the context field, and the social context in particular. In modern times, the discourse is very often correlated with the text. It should be noted that the question of this ratio is quite controversial and scientists still have not come to a consensus. Many linguists and philologists adhere to the text concept given by the Russian semiotician and philologist Yu. M. Lotman. He wrote that the text is a rather complex mechanism that carries a certain cipher, which has a certain meaning and personality traits of a person [10]. On the basis of this definition, linguistics can distinguish such a linguistic phenomenon as "discourse".

Defining the discourse, N. D. Arutyunova gives three perspectives for discussion [11]. The first case is when the discourse is considered as a complete text together with a set of non-linguistic aspects, including pragmatic, socio-cultural, psychological, and others. The second case is when the discourse can be considered as a text in a certain context. The last case is a situation where the discourse is considered as a speech, that is, as a planned social action, a component of human interaction and cognition.

The president's weekly address is a speech presented in a weekly address to the nation by head of state. The practice of "Weekly address of the President of the United States", also known as "Weekly (Radio) Address" or "Your Weekly Address" was first introduced in 1929 by the 32nd President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt. Regular addresses to the nation have been made since 1982: Ronald Reagan addressed his speeches every Saturday on the radio, George Bush and Bill Clinton maintained this tradition, recording the addresses with different frequency and length of speech (Clinton's speeches sometimes exceeded 10 minutes), George W. Bush was the first time to address the nation in 2 languages (English and Spanish) and to use new technologies (podcasts, i.e. audio files of radio programmes available for downloading), with the development of which Barack Obama and Donald Trump started posting their video addresses on cable news channels, the White House website and its official YouTube channel.

## **Materials and methods**

The subject of this study is the weekly addresses to the nation by the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump. Due to the large volume of the analyzed material, the paper examines the addresses in 2018, which are publicly available on the White House YouTube

channel [URL: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Xoqwsd15BQ&list=PLRJNAhZxtqH-MfozN\\_cNchyScPOBuhJrM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Xoqwsd15BQ&list=PLRJNAhZxtqH-MfozN_cNchyScPOBuhJrM)] [12]. It should be noted that during this period, there were 12 video addresses in total, 3 of which were congratulations on the occasion of Mother's Day, Catholic and Jewish Easter (Passover), as well as Martin Luther King's birthday. In addition, the difference between the publication dates of the video addresses can vary from one week (as supposed) to one month. These gaps in the addresses regularity can be explained by a general downward trend as the video dated June, 23 2018 is currently the last address of the American president to his nation. Thus, the immediate subject of analysis in this article is 9 video addresses by Trump, in which the head of state speaks about the problems of his country and nation.

The main method of analyzing the speeches by Donald Trump is critical discourse analysis and it is regarded the way it is presented in the works by Ten Van Dejk, Norman Fairclough [9, 13] and described by the team of authors in the paper "Comparative Study of Linguistic Features Used in the Inaugural Speeches of American Presidents" [14]. The main points of critical discursive analysis in our case are the understanding of spoken and written discourse as a form that conveys socio-political relations in their relationship with reality, while performing constitutive and organizing functions.

Based on the theoretical assumption of the mutual influence of discourse and reality in the course of the analysis, it seems important to explain the connections between linguistic means and concrete actions. It is worth mentioning that the researcher focuses on two aspects: the means used by the author to achieve their goal, which is to encourage the reader or listener to take active actions, as well as the purpose of these active actions [9]. In this sense, critical discourse analysis is aimed, first, at identifying linguistic manipulations that are used by the author to achieve their goals and, on the other hand, determining the position of the recipient in relation to the analyzed practice in order to achieve an objective attitude to reality.

This study attempts to answer the following questions: 1) What types of language were used in Donald Trump's weekly addresses? 2) How do these linguistic techniques reflect the author's ideas and ideology? 3) How useful are these linguistic techniques for achieving the built-in goals in the weekly address texts? 5) To what extent are the linguistic and pragmatic markers similar in the various speeches by Donald Trump?

## Results

The problems voiced by Donald Trump in his addresses largely echo the economic and migration difficulties of the United States, which the president stated during the election campaign. We believe that depending on the strength of the threat and/or the policy of his party, Donald Trump pays attention to the problems differently. Thus the head of state speaks about America's main economic rival, which is China, only in one address. It is noteworthy that there are no explicit accusations and warnings against the People's Republic of China from Donald Trump. The president does define China's economic policy as "China's unfair trade practices," still he also speaks of other countries whose actions have had a detrimental impact on the development of the American economy. At the same time, Trump puts the responsibility for the current situation not so much on the rivals, but on America itself (in the address, the president uses the pronoun "we") and the political figures who allowed this state of affairs: "We turned a blind eye while other nations targeted our industries and ransacked our factories"; "We financed the rise of other countries at the expense of our own middle-class people. Yet **our**

**leaders** in Washington did absolutely nothing. **They** allowed other countries to cheat, to break the rules, and to steal our jobs with impunity”.

It is important to note that in the latest sentences there is an opposition of "we – they", which demonstrates certain confrontation and conflict within the country itself. As follows from the sentences, "we" refers to the ordinary American people who are deprived of jobs, and "they" stands for the authorities of the country that contributed to unemployment. It is obvious that Donald Trump considers himself to belong to the first group, as he states further: “We will also no longer tolerate unfair and non-reciprocal trade practices-not just with China, but with anyone else." The desire to consolidate with the people, in our opinion, is one of the means of forming a certain psychological impact on the listener, the main purpose of which is to inspire confidence in the recipient. In any case, Trump’s identification with the nation fully corresponds to his campaign slogan ("Make America Great Again"): "Only by standing up for ourselves can we end abuse, restore our prosperity, and regain our economic independence. We will make America rich again, not just great."

The second problem of the American nation, according to Donald Trump's addresses, is the opioid crisis. Opioids are substances that have a structural similarity to morphine, which are characterized by strong analgesic and sedative effects and are widely used in medicine as powerful painkillers. The gravity of the problem of overdoses with opiates, heroin and fentanyl is evidenced not only by two video addresses by the president, but also by an individual page that used to be on the official website of the White House during Trump’s government. The opioid crisis or "the crisis next door", named so due to the frequency and territorial prevalence of overdose cases, is associated with abuse and subsequent addiction to sedatives and painkillers, which can be found in the first-aid kit of almost every US citizen. In one of his addresses, the president reminds about The National Prescription Drug Take Back Day and appeals to the compatriots to check their first-aid kits for expired, unnecessary drugs in order to put them in specially designated places and prevent their possible use. In his video address, Donald Trump also names two main reasons for the opioid crisis in the country, namely: the sale of drugs from someone else's leftover prescriptions and sanctuary cities. Despite the fact that the latter is mentioned in the president's address on the epidemic of opioid addiction, the sanctuary cities are in fact a reflection of the deep crisis of US domestic and immigration policy.

Based on Trump's weekly addresses, illegal immigration is the third and biggest problem of the American nation, to which the head of state devotes three separate messages (February 10, 2018; March 10, 2018; June 16, 2018) and indirectly touches upon in three others. The president sees the root of all evil in bad, ineffective, pathetic laws (“our laws are so weak, so sad and pathetic”) with “glaring loopholes” that require changes in federal legislation. In the first address concerning illegal immigration he states three priority areas of focus in terms of migration policy: “fully securing the border, ending chain migration and canceling the visa lottery”. However, the head of state faces violations of the federal laws by the sanctuary cities that prevent federal authorities from deporting illegal migrants.

In the second address, the president cites specific examples naming positions of the officials (mayor), cities (Oakland, New York, Denver) and states (California) that harbor criminal elements on their territory that pose not only a potential, but also a real threat to the American people. In this address, as in the following one, Donald Trump talks about the deeds of the criminal group M-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) translated from the slang "army of Salvadoran wandering ants", which includes immigrants from Latin America, guided by the motto "kill, rape, control". It is worth while mentioning that Donald Trump begins the video address telling

the outrages and terrible atrocities of the gang (organizing sex traffic, kidnapping, rape and murder of teenage girls in different states of the country) not with the familiar and usual phrase “My fellow Americans”, but with the mother’s words of one of the gang victims: “Every day at 5:23 I feel like she's going to come through that door, but I know she's not”. It is apparent that these words, as well as the names of the mother (Elizabeth Alvarado) and daughter (Nisa), make it possible to feel all the pain and horror of the situation and make it deeply personal for every citizen of the country, including the president himself.

In the addresses to the nation on the topic of illegal immigration, as in no other, Donald Trump’s determination of actions and firmness of beliefs can be traced. The head of state does not skimp on epithets in relation to illegal immigrants, calling them “violent offenders”, “dangerous criminals”, “vile savages” and at the end of his speech he describes them as animals: “MS-13 gang members are truly - and you've heard me say it, animals”.

In all his video addresses, D. Trump draws a clear line, defining countrymen and foreigners. It is noteworthy that in the addresses aimed at the ordinary people of his country and therefore, as we believe, communicated in simple language, Trump, when talking about immigrants, always uses the official word “aliens”, although in English there is another word that has an identical meaning, which is “foreigner”. We believe that Donald Trump resorts to the first one, as it has the connotation of something very different from what a person is used to, especially in a way that is difficult to [understand](#) or [accept](#) [URL: <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/alien>] [15] and this particular word is traditionally used when transmitting “native-alien dichotomy”.

As shown by the automatic analysis of one of the weekly messages of D. Trump (dated 23.06.2018), which was performed using an seo-analysis program at <https://advego.com/text/seo/>, the semantic core of the text included the words listed in descending frequency in Table 1 (Table 1. The first 10 words of the semantic core in the D. Trump's weekly speech from 23.06.2018.). The total number of words of the message, also calculated automatically by this program, is 356/ This number is taken as 100% in this table. Out of the total number, 10 independent words with the highest frequency of occurrence in D. Trump's speech from 23.06.2018 were selected.

**Table.1.** The first 10 words of the semantic core in the D. Trump's weekly speech from 23.06.2018

Phrase	Word Quantity	Frequency, %
can	9	2.53
democrat	9	2.53
illegal	6	1.69
border	5	1.40
our	5	1.40
that	5	1.40
country	4	1.12
family	4	1.12
alien	3	0.84
low	3	0.84

Among the frequency words and phrases are can, democrat and democrat votes, border,

our and our country, family, alien, which indicates the importance of uniting all supporters around a key topic - illegal migration.

Moreover, this opposition, but at a slightly different level, is also expressed by D. Trump's frequent use of the pronouns "we"/"they", which was mentioned above. The president refers to "them" as Democrats and his opponents, who do not support changes in the US migration policy and prevent the implementation of the laws in every possible way. Therefore, in the address dated March 10, 2018 Trump speaks about the mayor of Oakland (California), who violated the federal law, informing "criminal aliens" about the future decisive actions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, thus allowing illegal migrants to hide from the authorities. The president sums up his furious speech with the following words: "Yet California's leaders are in open defiance of federal law. They don't care about crime. They don't care about death and killings. They don't care about robberies. They don't care about the kind of things that you and I care about". This quote is illustrative not only of "we"/ "they" juxtaposition, but also of the opposing side. As you can see from the words above and below ("We have a great country, I want to keep it that way and you want me to keep in that way") D. Trump sees the solution to the problems in his consolidation with the people with whose support his policy will have a right to exist and will bring the desired results.

## **Discussion**

Speaking about the effectiveness of political discourse, it is impossible to avoid one of the most important elements of political speech, which is persuasiveness. As Rathmayr noted, politicians use certain symbols in their speech, and the success of their speech depends on how these symbols relate to the public consciousness [16]. A politician should be able to find the best way to address their audience, taking into account their opinions, beliefs, etc. [16, p. 211]. According to E. V. Budaev and A. P. Chudinov, there are a number of sources with which we can understand political discourse and political language. The main source of political language that provides a link to society is the mass media, including newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. Leaflets, parliamentary debates, public speeches, published documents, etc. [17, p. 43] may also constitute the sources of political institutional discourse.

Political discourse is considered specific because it has a number of features. In their speech, politicians use specific terms and concepts, which means that they use a professional lexicon, while general words and phrases used in a political context can have a completely different meaning.

Traditionally, the objects of linguistic analysis are the word and phrase. The word is the main structural and semantic unit of the language which serves to name objects and their properties, phenomena, and relations of reality. So does the phrase serve as a means of nominating objects, phenomena, processes, and qualities.

In linguistics, it is customary to speak of sentences as language models. In psycholinguistics, it is more common to talk about the statement that, as a unit of speech communication, is correlated with the situation and is focused on the participants of speech. The statement as a unit of speech communication takes into account the communicative situation, it sets out the position of the speaker, taking into account the knowledge and possible reaction of the interlocutor. It is quite obvious that we do not usually speak in separate words or in separate phrases; all native speakers speak in extended utterances exclusively and even

texts, and our speech is included in activities of a higher order than just speech communication (for the sake of communication). In itself, language signs manifest themselves only by being textually related, they can only make sense as related units when they form texts and convey their content. In other words, if we want to understand what a given word is and how it relates to its meaning, we must take into account that words in real communication are included in sentences, texts, and situations. At the same time, the semantics of words in the text (their meaning) can differ significantly from the semantics of isolated words, since only in the text does the word get its main meaning and conceptualization. Behind the interest in language signs and, accordingly, in the text, there is also an interest in the language personality and the image of the human world, since each text manifests a language personality that owns the language system [18, pp. 50-59].

The task of a politician, a political publicist, is broader than simply depicting the situation from a certain point of view. Firstly, they need to convince the audience that it is their point of view that is true, that it is their vision of problems and society that is adequate to reality, and that it is within the framework of this reality it is possible to solve these problems, and to solve them in the best way for the audience. They need to identify the problems that they put forward with the problems of the audience, or to ensure that the audience perceives the problems put forward as their own, it is necessary to prove to the audience the relevance of these problems. Secondly, they need to offer such a picture of the current moment and portray it in such a way that there are areas of common interest between the audience's vision of the situation and its presentation. The context of the situation in the presentation of the policy should be at least clear and, most importantly, close and adequate to the context in a way it is understood by the audience. Thirdly, the politician needs to prove that their proposed solution to the problems relevant to the audience is the best possible one. That this particular solution is most acceptable to the audience, so that the audience will perceive the proposed solution as their own. To do this, the author uses various systems of argumentation ranging from logical arguments to authoritative symbols exploitation, from emotional images to rhetorical repetitions, from intonation varieties to graphic highlights. The correct choice of accents (whether it should be on logical arguments or on authoritative symbols, and which ones exactly) depends on the skill of the author, on how fully they are aware of the audience, on how convinced of their rightness the author is etc [19].

Publicly speaking politicians tend to assume that their audience has a certain set of beliefs and ideas, that they support something, and that they oppose something. This knowledge forces the speakers to follow a certain pattern in their speech. Such a model begins with the designation of the reason for speech, which usually sounds like this: "I say it not because I want to, I say it because it is right". The politician also emphasizes that he or she is a representative of a political party or group, and the opinion expressed is correlated with the ideas and beliefs of that party or group. Speakers avoid talking about personal motives and intentions, emphasizing the importance of their speech for society and the importance of every citizen being responsible and thinking about the common good. When it comes to the interpretation of political discourse in general, the researchers note that one should not focus only on linguistic means, as in this case the idea and the true intention of political discourse will not be covered.

In order to determine the main characteristics of the American and British political discourse, it is necessary to consider the basic characteristics of the national character of Americans and Britons.

As regards the American character, the sociologist A. Inkeles writes that “Americans are very proud of their government and political institutions, they value independence, commitment, perseverance, initiative, optimism, audacity and pragmatism.” [20, p. 21]. A. E. Falileev believes that the main characteristic of the national and cultural specifics of the US political figures’ speeches is dynamism [8, p. 127], since so highly valued by Americans balance of power, revelation of the truth through doubt and exposure, idea of the benefits of innovation, change, growth, and openness to experimentation originate from the dynamism of the system. It is important for an American to win, as the winner enjoys life, and this is what an American strives for.

## **Conclusions**

Speaking of the effectiveness of the text (weekly addresses as well) impact, we cannot help mentioning the emotionality of the text, accomplished with stylistic devices. The speeches of politicians contain a large number of means of expression, because the purpose of their speeches is to convince the audience, to inspire them to do something. Politicians should be able to speak beautifully and influence their listeners. Any text can be made more emotional with the help of tropes. In the course of this study, it has been revealed that Donald Trump often uses epithets predominantly of negative connotations in order to support his idea of the opponents being inefficient and in order to win the electorate over by convincing them that ‘we’ (Donald Trump and the American nation he addresses to) can make America great again. The latter is another persuasive technique (identification with the audience) aimed at arising a sense of union, thus consolidating the nation and supporting its head of state.

As evidenced by the semantic and stylistic analysis of the weekly addresses, Donald Trump actively uses symbols available to most ordinary citizens in his speech, promotes the image of a man of affairs (not without some theatricality) who is able to cope with any problem. His speech is dynamic, sustained, well-structured, which confirms his mastery of the audience. However, it is more focused on the scale of the tasks, rather than on personal success and achievements, which is one of the basic concepts of the American lifestyle, and, therefore, the desired consolidation of forces according to the basic concept is in question.

## **Acknowledgments**

This paper has been supported by the Kazan Federal University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

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