Rassegna italiana di Linguistica Applicata
"LET US BE ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY": POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND RHETORIC IN THE CLASSROOM

Abstract

I discorsi politici rappresentano un esempio di materiale autentico che può essere utilizzato in una classe di lingua. Gli studenti hanno l'opportunità di acquisire consapevolezza delle strutture linguistiche in un discorso e, contemporaneamente, riflettere su temi controversi e crearsi una propria opinione su questioni politiche e sociali, contribuendo così alla propria formazione ed educazione all'uguaglianza e alla democrazia. Dal punto di vista prettamente linguistico, l'analisi di un discorso politico, attraverso l'uso di task guidati, fornisce agli studenti la capacità di decodificare le varie figure retoriche tese ad abbellire il testo e renderlo accattivante e persuasivo. Allo stesso tempo, gli studenti acquisiscono consapevolezza e conoscenza di un specifico genere testuale e ne interiorizzano le strutture lessico-grammaticali e pragmatiche.

There is a right and wrong side of history for the struggle for full equality of LGBT peoples. The arc of the universe is bending towards justice for LGBT peoples. Those people who maintain anti-LGBT positions are going to be caught behind the curve. And if history has taught us anything, those people who are so against gay people today will show up with their hats in their hands, repentant and asking for forgiveness for their sins. But why wait? Get on the right side of history – today.

1. Introduction

The introductory paragraph to this paper appears in the article LGBT Rights – Getting On The Right Side of History, in The
Policy speeches are vital and indicative of the nature and scope of political discourse and academic discourse. For example, reading and considering political discourse and academic discourse can be used in a number of ways to support a case or a point of view. However, there is also a need for a clear understanding of the academic discourse and the academic context. Using analytical methods, one may develop a deeper understanding of the issues and context in which the discourse takes place. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the basic and wider perspectives on academic discourse and political discourse.

The study of political discourse and academic discourse can be used to support a case or a point of view. However, there is also a need for a clear understanding of the issues and context in which the discourse takes place. For the purposes of this study, we will focus on the basic and wider perspectives on academic discourse and political discourse.

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4. Data and methodologies

The speech under scrutiny here is "Harmonization of Human Rights Day", delivered by the former American President Bill Clinton during an event in 2012. The concept of "Harmonization of Human Rights" is discussed in the speech, particularly in the context of how human rights are interconnected and should be addressed as such.

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(Giordano 2012). However, this perspective and approach go beyond the aims of the present paper, which focuses on giving students the opportunity to reflect on certain controversial issues while studying and analysing the language of authentic texts.

5. Overall organization of speeches

First of all, students should be made aware of the overall organization of speeches. In order to do this, attention ought to be focused on the various sections of a speech, highlighting the particular composition and organization that political speeches tend to have. Known as *dispositio* in Latin, it identifies the structure of the speech and explains the rhetorical devices put into practice in writing the speech. The *dispositio* consists of four parts:

1) *exordium* or *proemium*
2) *narratio*
3) *argumentatio*
4) *epilogus* or *peroratio* or *conclusio* (Mortara Garavelli 1988:61).

A simpler distinction, which best suits the purpose of this study, is that provided by Bollettieri Bosinelli (1986:108-115) and which includes

1) opening
2) body
3) epilogue.

The opening is the initial part of the speech, the preamble or opening remarks, which includes the Latin *captatio benevolentiae*, i.e. a particular strategy used by the politician to obtain the audience’s attention and favour, “to capture benevolence or ingratitude the audience” (Bollettieri Bosinelli 1986:108). The second part of the *dispositio*, or the body, is the central part of the speech, incorporating the *narratio* and the *argumentatio*, which are the most significant strategies used by politicians to illustrate their arguments. It is the part where a list of arguments can usually be found.

In the speech under examination here, after the Secretary of State runs through her introduction and greetings, she narrates the history of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in order to supply her audience with background knowledge and to provide scaffolding for the five issues she intends to deal with in the body of the speech, all forming part of her arguments concerning the question of human rights for LGBT people and other marginalized communities. The final part, or epilogue, includes the final perorations of the speech where the politician usually utters memorable expressions calling the audience to action. For the greatest effect to be achieved, the key points and key passages in the speech will have to be crucially and skillfully arranged.

After introducing the overall organization in political speeches, an initial task designed to engage students is to identify the paragraphs in which the various parts of Hillary Clinton’s speech are distributed. Different tasks can be devised depending on the students’ level of competence. For an intermediate level class, the teacher might decide to provide tags or headings for the various paragraphs and students then discover which paragraph or sequence of paragraphs correspond to those headings or topics being dealt with (Task 1). With more proficient classes, students themselves could be asked to provide tags or headings for each one of the paragraphs, discovering and classifying the several topics dealt with in the paragraphs.

**Task 1. Identify the paragraphs in which the various parts of the speech are distributed.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dispositio</th>
<th>Headings/topics</th>
<th>Paragraph (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>Introduction and salutation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation and history of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of the purpose of the speech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to the analysis of important issues related to the question of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LGBT people’s rights</td>
<td>6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>1st issue: some have suggested that gay rights and human rights are separate and distinct</td>
<td>9, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd issue: whether homosexuality arises from a particular part of the world</td>
<td>12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd issue: people cite religious or cultural values as a reason to violate or not to protect the human rights of LGBT citizens</td>
<td>15, 16, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th issue: the prejudices convincing us that homosexuality is a disease and can bring about crime</td>
<td>18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To move from one to another of the three major parts of a speech (i.e., opening, body, and epilogue), transition can be signalled through statements that summarize what has been said in the previous part and point the way to the next. Therefore, after identifying the various parts in the speech and the paragraphs devoted to the various topics dealt with, students can be engaged in a second task in which they are required to identify which sentences might represent an internal summary of previous topics or paragraph(s) and a transition to the following one.

**Task 2. Identify the internal summaries and transitions from one part to another in the speech.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>This weekend, we will celebrate Human Rights Day, the anniversary of one of the great accomplishments of the last century. (par. 1)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transition from par. 1 to par. 2, from Salutation to History of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In most cases, this progress was not easily won. People fought and organized and campaigned in public squares and private spaces to change not only laws, but hearts and minds. (par. 5)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Summary of History of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (par. 2, 3, 4, 5)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Today, I want to talk about the work we have left to do to protect one group of people whose human rights are still denied in too many parts of the world today. (par. 6)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rights to statement of purpose</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>So in that spirit, I want to talk about the difficult and important issues we must address together to reach a global consensus that recognizes the human rights of LGBT citizens everywhere. (par. 8)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transition from statement of purpose to analysis of the 5 issues related to LGBT people’s rights</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The first issue... (par. 9)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transition from one issue to the following one.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The second issue... (par. 12)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transition from the listing of issues to the invitation and request to support human rights</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The third... (par. 15)</strong></td>
<td><strong>I know that the thoughts I’ve shared today involve questions on which opinions are still evolving. (…) We are called once more to make real the words of the Universal Declaration. Let us answer that call. (par. 37)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The fourth issue... (par. 18)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Summary of previous topics, transition to elicitation of response and action.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A fifth and final question... (par. 24)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Task 2, students can be given either column A or column B information and they then fill in the blanks with the missing information. In other words, the teacher indicates the various internal summaries or transitions from one part to another, with students having to provide the sentences taken from the paragraphs of the speech. Alternatively, the teacher opts for providing the example sentences, and students will have to decide whether they represent an internal summary or a transition from one topic to another.

6. **Personal pronouns and their pragmatic function**

Bax (2011:169) underlines that “(d)iscourse analysts have focussed frequently on the way in which pronouns are used in subtle ways to denote or enact power relations and solidarity relations”. According to Wilson (1990:46) pronouns used in political discourse are primarily so-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Occurrence in the text:

Pronouns are most used in the speech and calculating their frequency of occurrence in the text will help the speaker distinguish the context and provide a summary of the content.

(1977:217) According to reference in the context, the speaker, the audience, and others are positioned in a specific role within the discourse, and pronouns are used to support this positioning. Pronouns are also used to identify and refer to specific individuals and groups within the text.

(1966) When looking at pronouns used by politicians, it is important to consider the context in which they are used. Pronouns can be used to indicate personal or non-personal pronouns and can also be used to indicate the number of pronouns used in the text.

For example, in a political speech, pronouns may be used to indicate the speaker's personal or non-personal position, as well as the number of pronouns used in the text.

In general, the use of pronouns in political speaking is important to understand, as it can provide insights into the speaker's personal or non-personal position, as well as the number of pronouns used in the text.
| 3rd person singular | he/she       | 2       |
|                     | him/her      | 0       |
|                     | himself/herself | 0   |
|                     | his/hers     | 0       |
| 3rd person plural   | They         | 37      |
|                     | Them         | 4       |
|                     | Themselves   | 2       |
|                     | theirs       | 0       |

Self-referencing: The 1st person singular forms ‘I/me/myself/mine’ and plural forms ‘we/us/ourselves/ours’

The first person singular forms ‘I/me/myself/mine’ indicate the clear personal involvement of the speaker. When leaders use this self-mention strategy in a speech, their aim is to strengthen the image they want to give of themselves as someone determined and resolute, capable of leading the country or a party, and fully able to tackle any political or social issues that arise. Nevertheless, the frequent use of ‘I/me/myself/mine’ can have negative implications when things go wrong, resulting in the loss of the speaker’s credibility and doubts concerning his/her reliability. In Task 4, students are asked to spot the various occurrences of the pronominal forms ‘I/me/myself/mine’ in the text.

Task 4. Self-referencing: Identify 1st person singular pronouns ‘I/me/myself/mine’ and their pragmatic use in the speech under scrutiny:

- I want to thank... (par. 1)
- Today I want to talk about... (par. 6)
- I am talking about gay, lesbian... I speak about this subject... (par. 7)
- Now, raising this issue, I know, is sensitive... (par. 8)
- So I come before you... I want to talk (par. 8)
- How would it feel if it were a crime to love the person I love? How would it feel to be discriminated against about myself that I cannot change? (par. 23)
- I ask you to consider this... I am not saying that (par. 28)
- I say supporting human rights... (par. 29)
- I am also pleased to announce... (par. 33)

- Many people including myself... (par. 34)
- And I quote... (par. 35)
- I know that the thoughts I’ve shared today involve questions... I come before you with great hope and confidence (par. 37)

After completing Task 4, students can be asked to consider the significance of certain results in their findings. For example, the findings reveal the use of the pronoun I to introduce certain types of hedging phrases or expressions such as “I am talking about”, “I speak about this subject”, “I ask you to consider this” before proceeding with more authoritative and resolute statements (that would sound too abrupt without a soft introduction). This might be indicative of Hillary R. Clinton’s desire to establish a constructive, sympathetic and equal relationship with her audience, rather than asserting the superiority and authority of her position. The expressions “I know” and “I want to talk about” humbly introduce controversial and sensitive topics such as those concerning LGBT community’s rights, and enable Hillary R. Clinton to seek support and sympathy from the audience in order to embark upon solving problems together. This is evident from the sentence “So I come here before you with respect, understanding, and humility” in the paragraph below:

Now, raising this issue, I know, is sensitive for many people and that the obstacles standing in the way of protecting the human rights of LGBT people rest on deeply held personal, political, cultural, and religious beliefs. So I come here before you with respect, understanding, and humility. Even though progress on this front is not easy, we cannot delay acting. So in that spirit, I want to talk about the difficult and important issues we must address together to reach a global consensus that recognizes the human rights of LGBT citizens everywhere. (par. 8)

The advantage of using the plural pronoun forms we/us/ourselves/ours is that responsibility and blame can be shared when something goes wrong or when a given policy is not working properly. First person plural pronouns are also used by politicians when they want to show that they are in touch with the citizens or with their electors, asking for their approval and appealing to their sense of solidarity in certain situations.

However, in political language the pronoun we can generate a variety of possible interpretations concerning who the intended referents might be. Its use in political language has been extensively investigated in the context of Critical Discourse Analysis and in particular by Fairclough and Wodak (1997:274), who distinguish between an inclusive we
(including the audience and the general population, *we human beings, we members of this society*) and an *exclusive we* (including the speaker but excluding the listener, i.e. *we who govern this country*). Students must be made aware of the fact that the referents of the pronoun we can change and accordingly it constitutes a key persuasive resource in political discourse. The identity of *we* is often vague and only a thorough and intensive reading of the speech can help them distinguish between the use of inclusive *we* and exclusive *we*, as described in Task 5.

**Task 5. Self-referencing: Identify 1st person plural pronouns *we/us/ourselves/ours*. Make a distinction between the “inclusive we” and the “exclusive we” and find out who the various referents are.**

**Inclusive we**

- **WE THE HUMAN POPULATION**
  - We will celebrate Human Rights Day... (par. 1)
  - we would prevent future atrocities... (par. 2)
  - what country we live in, who our leaders are, ... (par. 3)
  - we have left to do to protect... (par. 6)
  - we cannot delay acting... we must address together (par. 8)
  - We have come to recognize... (par. 9)
  - we understood that we were honoring... (par. 10)
  - No matter what we look like, where we come... (par. 11)
  - whether we know it, or whether we... (par. 12)
  - we came to learn that no practice... (par. 16)
  - to who we are as people... the bonds of love and family that we forge... (par. 17)
  - about how we make progress... (par. 18)
  - while we are each free to believe whatever we choose, we cannot do... (par. 19)
  - We need to ask ourselves... applies to all of us as we reflect... (par. 23)
  - how we do our part... we know the names of brave... we will never know... (par. 24)
  - when we see denials... when we do act, we send a powerful moral message (par. 26)
  - We know the road ahead... as we have devoted... (par. 34)
  - We are called once more to make real... the work we do today... we will travel it successfully together (par. 37)

- **WE AMERICANS**
  - So we, like all nations, have more work to do to protect human rights at home (par. 7)
  - ... we saw how it strengthened our social fabric in ways that... (par. 22)
  - We fought a brutal civil war over slavery (par. 36)

**Exclusive we**

- **WE WHO GOVERN (THIS COUNTRY)**
  - A step toward what we hope will be the creation of a special rapporteur... (par. 27)
  - In Washington, we have created a task force at the State Department... we will provide every embassy with a toolkit... we have created a program that offers... (par. 31)
  - we are launching a new Global Equality Fund... We have committed more than... we have hope that others will join us... (par. 33)

A sense of inclusiveness and solidarity is pursued in the following paragraphs where the *inclusive we* is utilized:

[...] It does not matter what country we live in, who our leaders are, or even who we are. Because we are human, we therefore have rights. And because we have rights, governments are bound to protect them. (par. 3)

[...] Even though progress on this front is not easy, we cannot delay acting. So in that spirit, I want to talk about the difficult and important issues we must address together to reach a global consensus that recognizes the human rights of LGBT citizens everywhere. (par. 8)

[...] No matter what we look like, where we come from, or who we are, we are all equally entitled to our human rights and dignity. (par. 11)

The Secretary of State employs a personal, informal tone here along with the *inclusive we* to create an immediate bond with the audience. Her intention is to convince them of her arguments by making them feel part of the general picture and of the common plan for having human rights of LGBT citizens recognized everywhere in the world.

Conversely, students will recognize the different use of *we*, an *exclusive we* this time, in the following paragraph where Hillary R. Clinton is listing the policies the Obama administration is undertaking as
part of its human rights policy and as a priority of American foreign policy. In this case, she utilizes the exclusive we to include herself and
the government but not the listeners/audience:

I am also pleased to announce that we are launching a new Global Equality Fund that will support the work of civil society organizations working
on these issues around the world. (...) We have committed more than $3 million to start this fund, and we have hope that others will join us in supporting it. (par. 33)

Other referencing: 3rd person plural pronoun 'they'

Students’ attention can then be focused on the use of the third person plural they, which “is often used in politics to define ‘the other’, the
political or military enemy, the opposite party in an electoral campaign, the opposition in a government, the guilty party to be blamed for some
reprehensible, culpable action” (Giordano 2012:98). It can also be used as a distancing strategy, when the speakers try to distance themselves
and the government they are representing from other purportedly blameworthy groups. This is not the case in the present speech. As will
be seen in Task 6, the pronoun they indicates a number of referents in the speech and students will be guided in the identification and classification
of these. As established in Task 3, there are 37 occurrences of the pronoun they: it is first used to refer to the delegates from six continents
who gathered together between 1947 and 1948 to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, subsequently ratified on December 10th,
1948. Later in the speech the pronoun they is used to refer to the invisible minority, the LGBT people who are victims of violence and abuse
the world over and who are experiencing the same level of discrimination that other marginalized groups (such as women and the racial or
religious minorities cited in the speech) are subjected to on a daily basis.

Task 6. Other Referencing: identify the various occurrences of the 3rd person plural pronoun they and find the referents in the speech.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The pronoun they refers to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- example (par. ?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pronoun they refers to: DELEGATES
- They discussed, they wrote, they revisited… they incorporated suggestions and revisions (par. 2)
- They also weren’t thinking about how it applied to indigenous people or children… (par. 9)
- The pronoun they refers to: LGBT people
- They are an invisible minority. They are arrested, beaten, terrorized… They are denied opportunities… forced to suppress or deny who they are… (par. 6)
- because they do not conform… when they are forced… because they are gay… (par. 11)
- they are all ages… they are doctors… they are our family… (par. 12)
- they can and they do… (commit crimes) and when they do they should be held accountable… (par. 28)
- the treatment they receive every day… the schools they attend… and offices where they work… (par. 29)

The pronoun they refers to: ABUSERS
- … that sends the message to those deniers and abusers that they won’t suffer any consequences for their actions, and so they carry on (par. 26)

The pronoun they refers to: MARGINALIZED GROUPS
- members of these groups… they share a common humanity… (par. 9)
- whether they are women, racial, or religious minorities… (par. 14)

1.1 The 2nd person pronoun ‘you’

As stated before, some paragraphs in the speech are intended as an invitation and exhortation to support respect for human rights. Hillary
R. Clinton directly addresses three categories of people, the leader of the countries “where people are jailed, beaten, or executed for being gay” (par. 28), the people of all nations and then the LGBT men and women worldwide. Therefore, the 2nd person plural pronoun you has three different referents to be found in the three subsequent paragraphs, i.e. 28, 29 and 30, as students will discover when engaged in Task 7.

Task 7. Is any other type of pronoun used in the speech? Are there any occurrences of the 2nd person pronoun you? What or who do they refer to?
7. Repetition and Thematic Parts

Repetition is one of the most common strategies in political discourse. It helps to reinforce the main points and make them more memorable. Politicians often repeat key phrases or slogans to emphasize their message. This technique is used in speeches, debates, and interviews to ensure that listeners remember the main ideas.

Thematic parts are another important strategy. These are sections of a speech that focus on a particular theme or issue. They provide a logical structure to the speech and help the audience understand the main arguments. Thematic parts can be used to introduce new ideas, provide evidence, and summarize the key points.

In conclusion, political speechwriters use a variety of strategies to make their speeches more effective. These include repetition, thematic parts, and other techniques such as metaphors and analogies. These strategies help to engage the audience and make the speech more memorable.
b) ADJECTIVES and ADJECTIVE-NOUN combinations
- in the political, economic and social lives (par. 5)
- all ages, all races, all faiths (par. 12)
- they are our family, our friends, and our neighbors (par. 12)
- for our people, our nations, and future generations (par. 37)

c) SYNTACTIC PARALLELISMS
- they discussed, they wrote, they revisited (par. 2)
- What we look like, where we come from, who we are (par. 11)

d) THREE-PHRASE LISTS
- the full measure of liberty, the full experience of dignity, the full benefits of humanity (par. 4)

e) Other examples of lists:

BINOMIALS
- honor and pleasure (par. 2)
- humanity and dignity (par. 2)
- suggestions and revisions (par. 2)
- a simple, powerful idea (par. 3)
- equality and dignity (par. 7)
- violence and harassment (par. 7)
- bullying and exclusion (par. 7)
- difficult and important issues (par. 8)
- their families and communities (par. 16)
- fears and concerns (par. 18)
- freedom of expression and freedom of belief (par. 19)
- tolerance and respect (par. 23)
- denials and abuses (par. 26)
- deniers and abusers (par. 26)
- isolated and vulnerable (par. 30)
- injustices and dangers (par. 30)
- brave and dedicated (par. 34)
- dialogues and debates (par. 34)
- personal and professional relationships (par. 34)
- intolerance and inequality (par. 36)
- great hope and confidence (par. 36)
- ...

CONTRASTIVE PAIRS

- public squares and private spaces (par. 5)

LONGER LISTS
- they are arrested, beaten, terrorized, even executed (par. 6)
- racial, religious, tribal or ethnic minority (par. 10)
- they are doctors and teachers, farmers and bankers, soldiers and athletes (par. 12)
- the rights of women, indigenous peoples, racial minorities, children, people with disabilities, immigrants, workers, and on and on (par. 36)

ANAPHORA and EPIPHORA
- it is a violation of human rights (par. 11)
- because they are gay... because they are gay... because they are gay (par. 11)
- Leadership, by definition, means being out in front of your people... It means standing up for the dignity of all your citizens... It also means ensuring that all citizens are treated as equals... (par. 28)

The first two examples of anaphora and epiphora (or epistrope) in Task 8 draw students attention to paragraph 11 in the speech, which is an outstanding example of rhetorical style, where the "litany" model is used (Giordano 2012:120-121) to list the acts of violence perpetrated against people because of their sexual orientation. The anaphoric structure "it is a violation of human rights" is repeated four times and the epiphora "because they are gay" is repeated three times giving poignant emphasis to Hillary R. Clinton's stance on this controversial issue expressed through didactic poetry, which is both convincing and easy-to-be-remembered:

It is violation of human rights when people are beaten or killed because of their sexual orientation, or because they do not conform to cultural norms about how men and women should look or behave. It is a violation of human rights when governments declare it illegal to be gay, or allow those who harm gay people to go unpunished. It is a violation of human rights when lesbian or transgressed women are subjected to so-called corrective rape, or forcibly subjected to hormone treatments, or when people are murdered after public calls for violence toward gays, or when they are forced to flee their nations and seek asylum in other lands to save their lives. And it is a violation of human rights when life-saving care is wi-
8 Political memories
and discipline (p. 11)

The process in politics begins with different semantic fields.

Political ideas and policies are born in the minds of politicians and
ideologists, who then develop and spread these ideas through media and
public events. These ideas are then adopted by the public, who
make decisions based on these ideas. These decisions can lead
to changes in policy and society.

In a political classroom, some students may view memory as a
powerful tool for understanding and remembering important
developments in history and politics. However, others may
view memory as a hindrance to progress and change.

The exact nature of political memory is complex and
multidimensional, and it is important to consider the various
factors that influence memory formation and recall. This
includes factors such as ideology, politics, and
sociocultural influences.
and progress. In order to reach the common destination, the difficulties and burdens must be borne together. There must be solidarity and unity, since hardships are to be expected even if there is a strong will to go through adversities collectively, as one, to achieve any given goals and objectives which are commonly considered worthwhile. Themes such as solidarity, union, participation and progress are frequently used in American political discourse along with the ideas of nation, government, party, community, and family. As Secretary of State Clinton says in paragraph 24 of the Remarks in Recognition of International Human Rights, "Acting alone, minorities can never achieve the majorities necessary for political change". It can therefore be seen that American political ideology is based on the traditional values of American society, i.e. hope, loyalty, responsibility and unity, as stated by the Founding Fathers in the American Constitution. In particular, the themes of family and future constitute "cohesive chains" in American political rhetoric and are associated with such concepts as love of country, love of God, security, peace, mutual respect, compassion, togetherness, opportunity and the American dream (Bollettieri Bosinelli 1986:124). As Hillary R. Clinton underlines in this particular speech:

For many of us, religious belief and practice is a vital source of meaning and identity, and fundamental to who we are as people. And likewise, for most of us, the bonds of love and family that we forge are also vital sources of meaning and identity. And caring for others is an expression of what it means to be fully human. It is because the human experience is universal that human rights are universal and cut across all religions and cultures. (par. 17)

A further semantic field from which metaphors are often drawn is that of war and conflict. In general, sport, war and fighting involve a physical contest of some sort, and politics itself is often conceived as confrontational, antagonistic and aggressive. Both sport and war involve fields and battlefields, weapons, strategies and front lines, winners and losers, enemies, opponents and allies. Nevertheless, politics can also be envisaged as a defensive struggle for certain social values such as change, justice, freedom and equal rights for which both personal sacrifice and collective efforts are fundamental. Violent practices against marginalized groups, in addition to prejudices, misconceptions and stereotypes are troublesome and fearsome enemies that hinder progress worldwide.

The above considerations can help lead to an improved understanding of the significance of metaphors in political discourse and to a recognition of the type of metaphors encountered in speeches such as this. Students should thus find it easier to spot words and expressions in the text which help them decode abstract notions and concepts made more concrete through the use of figurative language. In Task 9 students are engaged in the discovery of certain types of metaphors, such as silence, journeys, barriers, war, good versus evil, which represent the most frequently and productively used metaphors in American political speeches.

Task 9. Identify the several kind of metaphorical expressions in the speech.

Metaphors of SILENCE (INCLUSION/EXCLUSION)
- They are denied opportunities to work and learn (...), and forced to suppress or deny who they are to protect themselves from harm (par. 6)
- silencing of voices and views that would strengthen communities (par. 14)
- for as long as LGBT people are kept in shadows (par. 15)
- so when any part of humanity is sidelined, the rest of us cannot sit on the sidelines (par. 25)

Metaphors of the JOURNEY
- Step by step... (par. 4)
- History teaches us about how we make progress towards rights for all (par. 18)
- willing to walk a mile in someone else's shoes (par. 23)
- a step toward what we hope will be the creation of a special rapporteur (par. 27)
- We know the road ahead will not be easy. A great deal of work lies before us. (par. 34)
- the march towards equality and justice has continued (par. 36)
- No matter how long the road ahead we will travel it successfully together (par. 36)

Metaphors of BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES
- barriers that once prevented people from enjoying the full measure of liberty (par. 4)
- individuals whose lives were once narrowed by injustices (par. 5)
- obstacles standing in the way of protecting (par. 8)
- Every time a barrier to progress has fallen, it has taken a cooperative effort from those on both sides of the barrier (par. 25)

**Metaphors of CONFLICT (FIGHT/WAR/SPORT/COMPETITION)**
- People fought and organized and campaigned (par. 5)
- Even though progress on this front is not easy, we cannot delay acting (par. 8)
- We came to learn that no practice or tradition trumps the human rights that belong to all of us (par. 16)
- In the fight for women’s rights... The fight for racial equality... Combating Islamophobia or anti-Semitism... And the same is true with this struggle for equality (par. 23)
- The story of the United States is the story of a nation that has repeatedly grappled with intolerance and inequality... We fought a brutal civil war over slavery. People from coast to coast joined in campaigns... (par. 36)

**Metaphors of POSITIVE VS NEGATIVE, GOOD VS EVIL**
- Those who advocate for expanding the circle of human rights were and are on the right side of history, and history honors them. Those who tried to constrict human rights were wrong, and history reflects that as well (par. 36)

As the results of Task 9 clearly show, it is social goals in general and the achievement of human rights for all that are the final destination of the common journey. The goals laid down by the Secretary of State are worthwhile ones and in inviting all to pursue them she stirs confidence and raises self-esteem in the listeners. The barriers and obstacles which for centuries have impeded and prevented all people from enjoying a full measure of liberty and democracy have to be broken down. Collective action is indispensable because

[…] when we see denials and abuses of human rights and fail to act, that sends the message to those deniers and abusers that they won’t suffer any consequences for their actions, and so they carry on. But when we do act, we send a powerful moral message. (par. 26)

Finally, students’ attention should be directed to the closing para-

...opinion will converge once again with the truth, the immutable truth, that all persons are created free and equal in dignity and rights. We are called once more to make real the words of the Universal Declaration. Let us answer that call. Let us be on the right side of history, for our people, our nations and future generations, whose lives will be shaped by the work we do today. (par. 37)

8. Conclusions

The present study has endeavored to show one of the many ways in which a political speech can be exploited in the context of a language classroom. Setting a number of possible teaching objectives, students are presented with a speech which clearly represents a sample of authentic material and are guided in how to exploit its various advantages as learning opportunities. First of all, not only does the hands-on discovery approach promote learning and understanding but genre-awareness is also fostered in a learner-centred environment. A text such as this can be analysed for its linguistic and rhetorical features once students are in possession of a few simple analytical tools through which they can work on tasks by themselves, guided and actively monitored by the teacher, who thus becomes not only a language consultant but also a research organiser, helping students to “look behind the scenes”.

As previously underlined, speeches are written to be spoken. Therefore, many other factors could be considered in a classroom context. These include characteristics such as a low or high pitch in the speaker’s voice, facial expressions, head movements, eye contact and gestures. The fact that these factors represent important contributions to the overall quality and impact of the speech is indisputable. However, this paper only partially comments on these features since it is believed that they would deserve an exhaustive and thorough investigation which goes beyond the aims of the present study. Since language and rhetoric are powerful weapons, it is an added bonus that students gain some knowledge of how they might express their own ideology through the study of meaningful and lexically rich texts, that contain captivating
rhythm, fascinating figurative language, and that aim to prompt and urge people to take social action. It is indeed a fortunate by-product that language lessons can often turn out to be beneficial to learners’ overall education, not just to their linguistic competence and communicative proficiency.

In point of fact, the speech chosen here provides students with an opportunity to deal with a sensitive and controversial issue, as human rights for the LGBT community certainly is. Through the analysis of this speech, learners are given an overview of the following most common questions and concerns related to the issue of gay people:

a) the unjust distinction between gay rights and human rights;
b) the supposed geographical origin of homosexuality which makes us think it is just “other people’s/nations’ problem”;
c) the religious and cultural values which are often wrongly adduced as an excuse to violate rights;
d) the prejudices convincing us that homosexuality is a disease and can bring about crime;
e) the continued denial of rights to minorities who, left alone, will never be able to achieve political and social change.

Students are therefore guided through the deconstruction of wrongful notions and misconceptions and can be enlightened by a balanced, considerate and expert interpretation of questions designed to help them think through and form their own personal opinions on the issue. Moreover, the linguistic and rhetorical analysis of such a political speech will, in addition, raise students’ awareness and consciousness of political and social issues. This in turn will encourage them to develop their civic responsibility as citizens, instilling them with the conviction that by participating in such battles, they will be supporting and upholding human rights the world over.

**Primary source**

_Hillary Rodham Clinton’s speech_


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**Bibliography**


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