

FLOUTING THE MAXIMS OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF JOE BIDEN'S INAUGURAL SPEECH

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Abstract

Speakers are required to follow certain conversational maxims to successfully relate meanings during conversational exchanges. However, some speakers violate these maxims for different reasons. This study investigates President Joe Biden's 46th inaugural speech to first, identify instances where conversation maxims were flouted and second, determine the dominant maxims that were flouted. Applying insights from Grice's (1975) conversation maxims, the study employs a qualitative and descriptive approach in examining eight (8) utterances purposively selected from the speech. The findings revealed that the conversation maxims flouted were those of quantity, relation, and manner. The most common flouted maxims were those of quantity and manner. The data contained no instances of flouting the maxim of quality. The study submits that speech writers or presenters do not always follow Grice's conversational maxims, which causes them to be uncooperative in instances where cooperation is required.

Keywords: Gricean maxims, political discourse, (un)cooperativeness, violation

1. Introduction

Communication can be “perceived as the pursuit of symbolic profit that interlocutors achieve through the use of language” (Edem and Aluya, 2019: 91). It “involves the synchronized efforts of interlocutors” (Aluya and Kofoworola, 2020: 117) and it is a dynamic and internal personal process which serves as the basis for our existence in life. We construct meaning by sharing our views and ideas with other people through the use of language (Aluya, 2023). Humans have developed languages to satisfy their communication needs (Ayasreh and Razali, 2018). For any speech event to occur, there must be a speaker and a listener. Speech contains various levels and shades of meaning, therefore effective communication needs cooperation between the speaker and listener to express and interpret each other's messages. However, what a speaker says may not be the same as what they mean (Cutting, 2008). This notion was proposed in Grice's theory, which avers that a listener or hearer can derive several levels of meaning from a speaker which can be explicit or implicit (Thomas, 2014). If both the speaker and the listener do not understand what is being said, the

communication will undoubtedly fail. To avoid communication failures, we may use the cooperative principles suggested by Grice (1975) and further extended by other famous linguists (e.g., Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995; Yule, 1996). This study, then, focuses on Joe Biden's 46th inaugural speech to identify specific instances where Grice's conversation maxims were flouted.

2. Statement of the Problem

Theoretical insights such as Multimodality (e.g., Sari and Sumiati 2023), Speech Acts (e.g., Ahmed and Amir 2021, Yusanti et al., 2022, Sari and Sumiati 2023) and Rhetoric (e.g., Nurkhamidah et al., 2021, Mohammed et al., 2022, and Al-khawaldeh et al., 2023) have been applied in pragmatic studies on Joe Biden's 46th inaugural speech. However, Biden's 46th inaugural speech has rarely been examined employing theoretical insights such as Grice's conversation maxims.

3. Objective of the study

To this purpose, this study will investigate Joe Biden's 46th inaugural speech through the lens of Grice's conversation maxims. The objectives are to:

- a. identify instances where conversation maxims were flouted; and
- b. determine the dominant maxims that were flouted.

4. Review of Related Literature

Since becoming the 46th President of the United States in January 2021, President Joe Biden's inaugural speech has been evaluated from several perspectives. For example, Ahmed and Amir (2021) used Austin and Searle's speech act theory to analyze Biden's inauguration speech. Using a qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study identifies the direct and indirect speech acts in the speech. The findings showed that the speech makes extensive use of directive and representative speech acts.

Triana and Zulaiha (2021) examined the relationship between language and political situation in Biden's inaugural speech. The study sought to understand the political events surrounding this speech. To that purpose, it attempted to identify the context of what Biden stated in his state speech, focusing on five critical factors employed by interlocutors in communication. To achieve this goal, the study used a narrative design combined with a qualitative method to investigate these components in the speech. The data analysis demonstrated that the president communicated his messages directly to both American citizens and his political opponents. The speech included aspects such as addressee, contextual situation, utterance intention, speech act, and linguistic act.

Nurkhamidah et al. (2021) investigated the rhetorical techniques in Joe Biden's inaugural speech. The objective was to identify the rhetorical appeals in President Joe Biden's inaugural address as the 46th President of the United States. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and insights from Aristotelian rhetorical theory, the study investigated utterances from the speech to identify the rhetorical tactics (ethos, pathos, and logos) employed. The findings revealed that pathos accounted for 55% of the inaugural speech, followed by ethos 37% and logos 8%. Biden effectively used these rhetorical techniques to engage and establish trust with the American people.

Mohammed et al. (2022) analyzed Biden's use of pragmatic rhetoric in political language. The study looked at the pragmatic devices utilized in the speech as well as their functions. The data revealed that Biden used pronominal reference, metaphor, repetition, and antithesis in his speech to successfully persuade the audience.

Applying insights from Searle's speech act theory, Yusanti et al. (2022) examined Biden's inaugural speech in order to determine the utterances of particularized speech acts and illocutionary functions in the speech. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the analysis revealed three categories of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. The illocutionary act was broken down into five categories: assertive (42%), directive (18%), commissive (29%), expressive (9%), and declaration (2%). The assertive or representative was the most prevalent type of illocutionary act, and the promising function was the most dominant type of illocutionary function utilized in the speech.

Atusaadah and Zuindra (2022) focused on the illocutionary acts in Joe Biden's inaugural speech. The purpose of the study was to identify the various illocutionary acts and their meanings in the speech. This was done in order to identify the most common types of illocutionary acts that were employed in the speech. Extracts from the inaugural speech were critically analyzed utilizing Searle's Speech Act Theory in conjunction with the descriptive qualitative design. The data analysis indicated five categories of illocutionary acts: declarative, directive, expressive, assertive, and commissive. Assertive illocutionary acts, which include stating, proclaiming, reporting, asserting, claiming, telling, informing, assuring, complaining, and concluding, were the most common in the inaugural speech.

Al-khawaldeh et al. (2023) studied the main linguistic strategies used in President Biden's inauguration speech by applying insights from Fairclough's CDA framework to utterances purposively selected from the speech. The analysis showed that Biden addressed critical issues through the use of various persuasive strategies, such as creativity, metaphor, contrast,

indirectness, reference, and intertextuality. The study concluded that the effective use of linguistic and rhetorical devices is important in constructing meanings in the world.

The contributions of the foregoing literature are plausible and relevant to the present study because they offer us insights into the quality and depth of research that have been conducted on the 46th inaugural speech of President Joe Biden. The point of convergence between the reviewed works and the current one is that they are all pragmatically inclined and examined similar data. However, the point of divergence is hinged on the theoretical insight employed. While most of the reviewed studies employed theoretical insights from speech act, multimodality, rhetorical theory and critical discourse analysis, the present study will employ Grice's conversation maxims.

5. Theoretical Framework

Paul Grice started developing the theory of Cooperative Principle (henceforth, CP) in the 1960's and was expanded in 1975 to demonstrate how a conversation can proceed smoothly provided that participants adhere to its rules. Grice outlines the principles of CP as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage in which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Yule 1996: 37). According to Levinson (1983:101), "Grice's theory is essentially about how people use language. Grice's suggestion is that there is a set of over-arching assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation." Grice identifies these kinds of rules as four basic maxims of conversation or general principles underlying the efficient cooperative use of language, which jointly express a general.

These four conversational maxims, namely, quantity, quality, relation, and manner were introduced by Grice. Quantity requires participants to provide only as much information as is necessary (for the current purpose of the exchange) and refrain from providing more information than is necessary. Quality requires participants to refrain from saying things they don't have sufficient evidence to support or believe to be false. Relation requires participants

to make sure their conversation is pertinent. Manner requires participants to be succinct and orderly in their conversation while avoiding obscurity and ambiguity of expression.

Non-observance of the maxims refers to any situation where the maxims are not observed, followed, or obeyed. There are five ways that people disregard a maxim. They are as follows: disobeying a maxim, breaking a maxim, encroaching upon a maxim, choosing not to follow a maxim, and suspending a maxim (Thomas, 1995: 64). The term "conversational implicature" refers to the circumstance in which the addresser disregards a maxim and, without intending to mislead or deceive, wishes to draw the hearer's attention to the intended meaning (Thomas, 1995: 65).

Violating a maxim occurs when individuals lie, conceal facts, and save face in order to satisfy or persuade the hearer. In doing so, the speaker risks misleading the hearer (Thomas, 1995: 72). Infringing a maxim is a sort of non-observance that may occur due to non-linguistic circumstances such as anxiousness, drunkenness, excitement, cognitive disability, or inability to speak clearly. This is not done with the purpose of generating an implicature or a new notion. In other words, the speaker does not do it to get the listener to infer a message (Thomas, 1995: 74). When someone chooses not to produce false implicature and does not look uncooperative, they are opting out of a maxim. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Thomas (1995), the speaker's rationale for "opting out" is that providing the necessary information could harm a third party. Suspend is the final category of optimum non-observance. It occurs when a speaker stops talking or making a comment because it is "specific to particular events" or "culture-specific" (Thomas, 1995: 76-77). The current study examines Biden's 46th inauguration speech using Grice's conversation maxims. The aim is to identify the several ways that the speech violated the conversational maxims.

6. Methodology

The speech given by US President Joe Biden upon assumption of office as the 46th President of the United States in January 2021 serves as the study's main source of data. Purposively selected

portions of the speech are examined for occasions in which the conversation's maxims were disobeyed. The methodology used in this study is qualitative in nature. Grice's conversation maxims were applied to the obtained extracts in order to analyze them. The investigation followed a methodical process that involved first identifying the relevant extracts that were indicative of the conversation maxims not being followed, and then analyzing and discussing how the selected extracts violated the conversation maxims.

7. Data Analysis

The data selected for this study was subjected to critical analysis in this section in order to determine instances where Grice's conversational maxims were flouted. The following sample texts from the speech are used for the discussion:

Extract 1: Through a crucible of the ages, America has been tested anew and America has risen to the challenge.

President Joe Biden addresses a vast crowd of Americans at his inauguration as the 46th President of the United States. It is vital to note that the audience is an important aspect in any speech event; hence, speech writers and presenters should conduct audience analysis to determine how to effectively address the audience's demands. The American citizens are made up of the educated and illiterates, the rich and poor, high, middle and low class, as well as those who are knowledgeable about the history of the American nation and those who are not. In Biden's speech, one finds instances where the conversational maxims were flouted. For instance, two conversational maxims were flouted in extract one. The first is maxim of manner that requires the content of messages to be brief, orderly and devoid of ambiguity and obscurity. Though Biden's utterance above is brief and orderly, it is characterised by ambiguity and obscurity. Ambiguity and obscurity in the above utterance are exemplified in the expressions, "America has been tested anew" and "America has risen to the challenge". These expressions are ambiguous because they are open to more than one interpretation. Also, they are obscured because they do not explicitly state what Biden meant by America has been tested and America

has risen to the challenge. For instance, one might want to ask the test which America has gone through or challenge which America has risen to? Let's assume that America has gone through many tests, then the question will be which of these tests is Biden alluding to? From these questions, it can be seen that Biden was not explicit in his utterances. As regard the second which is flouting maxim of quantity, the president fails to provide adequate information about how America has been tested and the challenge which America has risen to. These are required information necessary to help the addressee in understanding the test and challenge being referred to by the president.

Extract 2: As does President Carter, who I spoke to last night but who cannot be with us today, but whom we salute for his lifetime of service.

An inaugural speech of this kind provides a newly elected president with the first opportunity to take the spotlight and present his goals, plans, policies, and vision for the nation and the rest of the world. In the above extract, President Biden alludes to his visit to a former President of the United States. Considering the nature of this kind of speech and the purpose for which it is set out to achieve, one wonders the relevance of Biden's visit to President Carter in his inaugural address. The question that arises here is that is it really necessary for Biden to bring up the subject of his visit to President Carter in his speech considering the purposes of an inaugural speech? From the foregoing, it can be argued that the above statement flouted the maxims of relation and quantity. As regard flouting the maxim of relation, the president ought not to mentioned his visit to a former president in first place considering that such visit has got no nexus with the purposes (that is, his goals, policies and visions for the nation) of the speech. However, even if the visit is important and ought to be mentioned, the president failed to provide information pointing to the significance of the visit in his speech thereby flouting the maxim of quantity.

Extract 3: But the American story depends not on one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us.

As mentioned earlier, the American nation

comprises of two types of citizens: those who are knowledgeable about the nation's historical past and those who are not. This is the more reason why the president should allude to phenomena or issues that every citizen can grasp or best still provide adequate information that can help all citizens irrespective of whether they possess the knowledge of the nation's historical past or not to understand his message. A close scrutiny of extract three indicates the flouting of maxims of manner and quantity. By employing the nominal phrase, "The American story", the president flouted the maxim of manner that requires the content of conversation to be devoid of ambiguity and obscurity. This nominal phrase can be argued to be ambiguous because it has multiple interpretations. Also, it can be said to be obscured because it does not explicitly state what the president meant by "the American story" considering the fact that not all Americans will understand this expression. Similarly, the statement flouted the maxim of quantity because the president used the nominal phrase "the American story" without providing the required information that would have assisted the audience in comprehending what he meant by the American story and the exact story being alluded to.

Extract 4: Much to repair. Much to restore. Much to heal. Much to build Much to gain.

In extract four, Biden speaks about the American nation and the need of his administration to repair, restore, heal, build and gain. The question that arises from these utterances is that what are the specific aspects in the American nation that Biden's administration plans to repair, restore, heal and built? By uttering the above statement, the president flouted the maxim of quantity in that he fails to provide the required information regarding the specific aspects of the American nation which his presidency plans to repair, restore, heal and build. Again, it can be equally argued that these utterances flouted the maxim of manner because they fail to explicitly state what the president meant by the ambiguous and obscured expressions, "much to repair, much to restore, much to healed, much to build and much to gain".

Extract 5: I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new.

The statement in extract five flouted the maxims of manner and quantity. In connection with the maxim of manner, the underlined expressions can be argued to be ambiguous. This is because there are many factors that can divide the citizens of a nation. However, in this conversation, the president failed to explicitly state what these forces are leaving the audience to decode the possible interpretation of the ambiguous expressions. In similar vein, the utterances equally disobeyed the maxim of quantity because the required information that would have assisted the audience in understanding the forces that divide the American nation was omitted from the utterance.

Extract 6: The battle is perennial. Victory is never assured.

In extract six, the President alludes to the battle confronting the American nation noting that the possibility of victory is slim. It is an undisputed fact that America has faced, is still facing and will continue to face many battles. The questions that arise here are what does Biden mean by battle and which specific battle is he alluding to? Biden does not observe the maxims of manner and quantity in this utterance. He flouted the maxim of quantity by not providing the required information that would have assisted the audience in drawing attention to the battle being referred to. Similarly, the utterances flouted the maxim of manner due to their inability to explicitly identify the particular battle or victory being alluded to. Thus, both lexical phrases, "battle" and "victory" are ambiguous and opened to multiple interpretations by the audience.

Extract 7: And, we must reject the culture in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured.

Extract seven alludes to the kind of culture which the President desires all American citizens to desist from. Though he alludes to the culture in which facts are manufactured or manipulated, he fails to provide additional details that will help the audience to understand the kind of facts being

alluded to. Again, Biden flouted the maxim of manner in this conversation when he said "...facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured. The questions that should be asked here is that what are the facts that can be manipulated and manufactured is Biden referring to? It is obvious that these expressions are not explicit and as such the audience may find it difficult to decode the exact message which communicated by Joe Biden.

Extract 8: There is truth and there are lies. Lies told for power and for profit.

Two conversation maxims flouted in extract eight are maxims of quantity and manner. The first maxim requires President Biden to make his contribution as informative as is required and not make the contribution more informative than is required. Here, Biden flouted this maxim by providing less information regarding the subject of discourse. Due to less information provided, it is difficult to decode the message related in the utterance. Also, Biden choice of the lexical expressions "there is truth" and "there are lies" exemplify an instance of ambiguity in his expressions owing to the fact that the expressions do not explicitly state what he meant by truth and

lies.

8. Conclusion

The goal of this study was to analyze President Joe Biden's inauguration speech to identify instances where the conversation maxims were broken and determine the most common conversation maxims that were broken. The data analysis revealed that Biden's speech clearly demonstrated nonobservance of the maxims of quantity, relation, and manner. No evidence of disregarding the quality maxim was present. The primary maxims violated in the discourse were those of quantity and manner. The president's failure to provide appropriate information regarding his discourse subject, as well as his use of ambiguous and obscured lexical expressions, result in the violation of these maxims. Politicians use the maxims of quantity and manner to conceal specific facts from their audience. As a result, they use lexical terms or expressions that they may not want their audience to understand. The study submits that politicians do not always follow Grice's conversational maxims, which causes them to be uncooperative in instances where cooperation is required.

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