

Give Us The Ballot: An Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis Of Martin Luther King's Speech

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Abstract

The paper uses Systemic Functional Linguistics as the theoretical framework which aims to investigate into language from a qualitative and quantitative approaches. The aim of this paper is to discover how interpersonal metafunction serves in the speech in terms of Mood, modality, and personal pronouns. The analysis indicates that Martin Luther King uses speech for providing more information by the dominant use of declarative clauses. He uses imperative Mood in his speech to motivate his audience to work together for their common cause. Martin Luther king uses modal verb "will". He uses it as a wish with future indicator. Martin Luther King uses first person plural pronouns because he does not want to part himself from his audience. This research is both qualitative and quantitative. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a comprehensive framework for analysing language that focuses on the functional aspects of language use within a social context. It explores how language functions to convey meaning and fulfil social roles, emphasizing the interplay between language form, meaning, and context. SFL views language as a resource for expressing various social meanings and accomplishing communicative purposes, rather than just a set of grammatical rules or structures

Keywords: *Interpersonal metafunction, Mood, modality, personal pronouns.*

Introduction

The Metafunction of a speech represents the way the addresser and the audience interact, the use of language to establish and maintain relations with them, to influence their behaviour, to express our own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs. It mainly concerns the roles of addresser and audience, Mood and modality. When it comes to the roles of addresser and audience, the fundamental purposes in any exchange are giving or demanding information and goods and services. The usual labels for these functions are statement, question, offer and command. The function of statement is closely associated with particular grammatical structure, that is, the declarative clauses; question is related to interrogative clauses; and command is associated with imperative clauses. The ordering of subject and finite (two elements of the Mood system of the clause) in the clause plays an indispensable role in signalling speech roles in that it can show whether the clause is indicative or imperative.

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It is important to notice that in the speech-making process both speaker and audience are of significant consideration that is who is speaking to whom in which medium. Speeches are analysed by the masses from different perspectives. Some are interested in the form of the speeches and others focus on the content and meaning. These speeches have been analysed by different people using different lenses. Critical discourse analysts adopt rather different approaches for the analysis of the speech. They are interested most in the ways and means politicians manipulate the language to attain their purpose. They interact with the language and give their meanings to the sentences. Halliday (2009) provides that there are two directions to approach a text firstly by focusing on the text as an object in its own and secondly by focusing on the text as an instrument to revealing something else. He further says that text can perform two functions. It can be viewed as an object focusing on who has been addressed and what it does. The text can function as an instrument also by focusing on what it reveals. No doubt both perspectives complement each other. To understand the meaning of the text in this perspective, Halliday (2009) has introduced the interpersonal meaning of the text among the three metafunctions of the language. The inherent idea stipulates that it is through interpersonal metafunction that users of the language define their position in society and use clauses as exchange.

Analysing Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Give Us the Ballot" speech through a systemic functional linguistic lens involves examining how language functions to convey meaning and achieve particular rhetorical effects. This includes looking at the grammatical structures, lexical choices, and rhetorical devices used to persuade and inspire the audience towards the Civil Rights cause.

Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King Jr. Was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1929. As a Baptist-minister and a civil rights activist, he is considered the greatest advocate of the civil rights movement that aimed at the elimination of racism in the world in general and the US in particular. Thus, his name has a seismic impact on race relations in the United States even today. He started the freedom movement in the middle of the 1950s. Through his activism and inspirational speeches, he played a pivotal role in ending the legal segregation of African-American citizens in the United States, as well as the creation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He was assassinated in April 1968 the very next day he made his memorable speech- I have been to The Mountaintop. He was considered as the most influential and inspirational African-American leader in history.

Martin Luther King was a political activist and he has delivered many speeches in his career. His speeches are well constructed and are very influential. He was a kind of inspiration for the people who were suppressed by the brutality of the rulers. He was the hope of millions of people. His speeches infused a revived hope in the oppressed and still act like a torch for the sufferers of justice. Though in his career, he delivered many speeches and "Give Us The Ballot" is one of the speeches he delivered.

This speech is reckoned as a famous speech worldwide and it is recommended to the learners for the art of speech making. The content of the speech is the voice of every person who is suffering from the stroke of injustice in any part of the world.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

The language of the speech has an important persuasive role in achieving the purpose of what the speech has been intended for. The study of language for its context is what linguists call as discourse analysis. There are different approaches to critically analyse discourse. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a popular approach to analyse discourse with a specific locus on its functional meaning. Young and Harrison (2004) state it as a useful orientation to carry out CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis). SFL, according to Butt et al (2003, 5), view language as evolved for three major purposes:

1. To talk about what is happening, what will happen and what has happened
2. To interact and/ or to express a point of view
3. To turn the output of the previous two functions into a coherent whole.

Field, Tenor, and Mode

Halliday (1978) has defined three major categories for the context of situation: field, tenor, and mode.

Field refers to the topic of the text and it tells what the text is about. Tenor however provides information about the producer and receiver of the text, who/ what kind of person produced the text, and for whom. Finally, mode defines the text further and analyses whether it was a written or spoken text. The further analysis of the wording of the text encodes three types of meanings. These are ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

Three Metafunctions suggested by Halliday

1. Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction is concerned with the experience of the things around. How language is manipulated to experience things around us involving the human senses to make a mental picture of reality. Ideational meanings are about phenomena. It considers things whether living or non- living, happenings, and the circumstances which revolve around them. Ideational meanings are derived from classifying the text into three categories, participants, processes, and circumstances. This metafunction helps in determining the field of the discourse.

2. Interpersonal Metafunction

Interpersonal metafunction expresses a speaker's attitudes and judgments. Its function is to enabling of exchanging roles: statement, questions, offer, and commands. The interpersonal relationship between the writer and the recipient "involves a choice by the speaker to impart or to offer some information and thereby positions the listener to be the recipient of that information (White, 2000, p.7). Thomson (2004) explains the interpersonal metafiction as "We use language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relations with them, to influence their behaviour, to express our viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs" (p.30). Butt et al (2003) complement the aforementioned statement by proposing the view that the dominant interactive distinction while language use is concerned with what meaning is transacted or information, goods & services being exchanged. Another dimension to this may be seen in the interaction that is taking place, I.e., what is being demanded and given. All such functions are carried out through wordings of the lexico- grammatical level. Interpersonal meaning is the interaction between speaker and listener or reader and writer. Halliday (2002) defines that interpersonal metafiction comprehends text and comprises three components, the speaker/ writer, social distance, and relative social status. The first one analyses the attitude and the language of the speaker. The second one measures how close the speaker is with the audience and the last one relates the audience and the speaker in terms of knowledge and power.

3. Textual Metafunction

Textual metafunction has been defined by Thomson as "In using language, we organize our message in ways that indicate how they fit in the other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing" (Thomson, 2004,300). In textual metafunction, the clause is considered as a message. The textual analysis of the discourse is done by dividing the text into two parts I.e. Theme and Rheme. The theme is closely associated with the main topic of the clause.

Literature Review

Yang (2017) also analysed Barack Obama's inaugural address through interpersonal metafunction analysis. The findings of the study suggest that declarative clauses and plural personal pronouns help to create a relation between the audience.

Noor (2015) has analysed Nelson Mandela's inauguration speech through interpersonal analysis. The analysis shows that the political purposes of Mandela's speech were achieved.

Noor et al (2015) also did an interpersonal Mood analysis of the last address delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They also worked on religious identities constructed through language. The analysis concludes that SFL is useful in understanding the interpersonal relations of the participants. The analysis signifies that the content of the address was universal. It was not confined to the Muslims. It was valid for all people of any generation and all ages.

Koussouhon and Dossoumou (2015) did analysis from critical discourse and a womanist perspective. The mood and modality choices show power and hierarchy relations among the characters and the interpersonal description and critical discussion can properly work together.

Ayoola and Olusanya (2013) studied political advertisements with the help of SFL. However, they find no direct relation of interpersonal meaning with the language structure of the advertisements.

Kamalu and Tamunobelega (2013) studied identities and ideologies constructed in a religious text with the help of interpersonal metafiction.

Moji (2011) analyses the editorials' language with the help of SFL.

Ye (2010) examined Barack Obama's victory speech through interpersonal Mood analysis.

Post (2008) finds SFL a useful tool when he analysed the two different aspects i.e. stylistics and communicative of the same subject matter.

O' Halloran (2008) combines the interpersonal metafunction with semiotics to understand the meaning. He finds SFL as a significant tool in the analysis of language with its visual orientation.

SFL has been widely used as a research tool to analyse the discourse. Various studies have shown that can be used in different domains of life. Banks (2002) also finds SFL a useful tool to analyse the text which was a corpus based study.

Martinez (2001) studied objectivity in a text with the help of SFL tools.

Several scholars assess the enduring significance of King's speech in contemporary discourse on democracy and social justice. Williams (2021) argues that King's emphasis on the ballot as a tool for justice resonates with ongoing debates over voting rights and political participation. Conversely, Davis (2018) suggests that while King's message remains relevant, systemic barriers to voting persist, necessitating continued advocacy and activism.

King's use of persuasive rhetoric is a central focus of many analyses. Johnson (2020) examines King's employment of biblical allusions and moral appeals to galvanize support for voting rights. Similarly,

Scholars such as Jones (2018) and Smith (2019) contextualize King's speech within the broader struggle for voting rights in the United States. They highlight the pervasive racial discrimination and voter suppression tactics faced by African Americans in the Jim Crow South, underscoring the urgency of King's call for political empowerment.

Brown (2017) explores the rhetorical power of King's repetition of the phrase "Give us the ballot," emphasizing its emotive impact on the audience.

Textual metafunctions are observed in the speech's cohesive structure and rhetorical devices, such as repetition and parallelism, which enhance its persuasive impact and facilitate audience engagement (Knott & Sanders, 2009). This speech has not been analysed through interpersonal metafunction analysis. This study fills the gap to analyse it through interpersonal metafunction analysis.

In his speech, King strategically employs ideational metafunctions to convey his message of equality and justice, utilizing powerful metaphors and imagery to evoke emotions and inspire action (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

Methodology/ Theoretical Framework

Both types of analyses are required for this purpose, I.e. qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. Quantitative analysis is important here in determining what sort of Mood, modal verbs or pronouns are used more. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis provides insight into why they have been used more and what effects are created through them. A passage is excerpted from the speech "Give Us The Ballot" that Dr. King delivered on May 17, 1957. This passage is analysed through interpersonal metafunction. This passage is the main source of data collection. Books and research articles are secondary sources of data collection.

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is a robust theoretical framework that analyses language as a system for making meaning. It explores how language functions in different contexts and how linguistic choices reflect and shape social structures and relationships. SFL emphasizes the interplay between language form, meaning, and context, making it a versatile tool for studying language in various contexts, from everyday conversation to academic discourse.

According to Halliday's systemic functional linguistics framework, the interpersonal metafunction focuses on how language is used to enact social relationships and interact with others (Halliday, 1973). One notable metafunction analysis is conducted by Halliday (1985), who examines the speech through the lens of systemic functional linguistics. According to Halliday, language serves three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

Findings

In Martin Luther King's Give Us the Ballot speech, the interpersonal metafunction was evident through his use of language to connect with and engage the audience. King established a sense of unity by addressing the crowd directly, employing inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our," fostering a shared commitment to civil rights. The speech's interpersonal metafunction emphasized the call to collective action, reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility in the struggle for equality. The interpersonal metafunction involved his engagement with the audience, emphasis on shared values and urge for collective action for civil rights. King employed inclusive language, addressed common concerns, and called for solidarity in the pursuit of voting rights. Through powerful rhetoric and appeals to shared values, King established a sense of unity and solidarity, fostering a connection that goes beyond the words themselves. Through interpersonal metafunction, he engaged with the audience, emphasized unity and shared goals for civil rights, encouraged collective action, and inspired a sense of justice and moral obligation.

Analysis and Discussion

The interpersonal metafunction helps understand the way the addresser and the audience interact, the relation created between them, and also the effect of their behaviour. The mood, modality, personal pronouns are helpful tools in the analysis of the speech.

Mood

When a speaker interacts with the audience he/ she assigns a role for the audience and themselves. This is usually a “give and take” relation. When information has been given by the speaker, it is expected to be received by the listeners. Similarly, if the addresser is demanding something then the role of the audience will be expected to give. Whatever has been provided will become the commodity. This commodity can be goods or information. These roles and commodity together make four speech functions, statement, offer, command, and question (Halliday, 2000).

Basic Speech Roles

Role/ Commodity

Giving or Demanding

Goods & Services

Offer or command

Information

Statement or Question

Declarative clauses point out the statements; interrogative clauses reflect the questions while imperative clauses represent the command. All of these functions are related to the grammatical structure. Mood comprises the subject and finite. The place of the subject and finite in a clause determines the speech function, which eventually helps in identifying the role and identity (Eggs & Slade, 1997). In Luther's speech, the analysis of the subject and finite that 11 clauses adopt declarative Mood, and 7 clauses consist of imperative Mood and 0 clauses have an interrogative Mood.

Frequency of Mood Types

Mood Type Occurrence

Declarative 11

Imperative 7

The figures indicate that a major portion of the speech clauses comprises declarative clauses. Declarative clauses have a great importance in speech. The addresser wants to give information to his listeners through declarative clauses. The figures indicate that the second major portion of the speech clauses comprises imperative Mood clauses. Imperative Mood clauses are important features of speech. Imperative Mood clauses convey an order or command. The addresser commands. However, this command is different from the routine commands. As Halliday (1970) has defined that there are two types of command, one is to command others to do something and the second is to appeal the audience to work together for some cause. The latter is usually a humble request from the speaker's side. It has been noticed that this kind of imperative clauses is usually found in political speeches.

Negative Polarity

Another linguistic feature of Luther's speech is the use of negative polarity. Eggs (2004) pointed out that the finite also consists of the semantic feature of polarity since to make something arguable it has to be either positive or negative. The following are some selected lines in which negative polarity has been used by the speaker.

We will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights.

We will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti- lynching law.

Who will not sign a" Southern Manifesto” because of their devotion to the manifesto of justice.

Who have left not only the tang of the human, but the glow of the Divine.

The context of the above lines shows that the speaker is using negative polarity where he wants his audience to stand up for the right to vote. He is giving them the strength so they can speak up for the justice they deserve. He provides them the strength to strongly condemn the injustice against them in American society.

Mood Ellipses

Mood eclipses show that the speaker does not want to repeat the subject again and again because the subject remains unchanged or the subject is understood by the situation. The second possible reason for the Mood eclipses is that the addresser want to put stress on the action and not on the doer of the action. Luther in his speech used Mood eclipses where he wants the audience to focus on what they have to do now.

All types of conniving methods are still being used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters.

The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic traditions.

Give us the ballot.

Modality

Modality is the speaker’s judgement of the probability or obligation. Thompson (2000) believes that modality consists of modalization and modulation. Modalization is the speaker’s intention towards the validity of the proposition. This validity could be attained by adding a probability in the claim. Probability is shown through the use of modal verbs. On the other hand, modulation is the obligation and inclination of the speaker. It shows the confidence of the speaker on the information he or she is conveying. Mastery of the appropriate expressions of modality enables the writer or speaker to address the intended audience with skill and exhibit a professional interpersonal competence (Hyland , 1998,440).

Modals

Modals Occurrence

Will 7

The most frequent modal used is “will”. “Will” can convey two meanings. It can refer to the future happenings and it can also convey a strong desire for something. Throughout the speech, the modal verb “will” carries dual meaning. It is used as a wish together with the future indicator. Luther was visualizing the right to vote with open eyes. So, he is hopeful that one day this will happen in America.

We will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights.

We will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti-lynching law.

We will transform the salient misdeeds of blood-thirsty mobs into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens.

We will fill our legislative halls with men of good will, and send to the sacred halls of Congressmen who will not sign a "Southern Manifesto" .

We will place judges on the benches of the south who will do justly and love mercy.

We will place at the head of the southern states governors who have felt not only the tang of human but the glow of the Divine.

We will quietly and non-violently, without rancor or bitterness, implement the Supreme Court's decision of May 17, 1954.

Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are also considered as carrying interpersonal meaning apart from Mood and modality. The personal pronouns have the interpersonal function in discourse (Li, 2004). Different pronouns have different effects on the listener. There are three different types of personal pronouns. The first person pronouns include "I, we, me, my, us and our", the second person pronouns include "you and your" and the third person pronouns include "he, she, they, it, his, him, her, them, their and its".

Personal Pronouns Used in Luther's Speech

1st person	2nd Person	3rd Person
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We (8)	0	0
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Our (4)		
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Us (7)		
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First Person Pronouns

The most frequent pronouns used in the speech are first person pronouns. It is interesting to note that the plural form of the first person pronouns has the highest frequency. The speaker makes a bond between him and the audience. He does not part himself from them. He shows that we are together for a common cause and that is right to vote for all black people. Similarly, he also uses "our and us" to show the listener that they are on the same plain. The speaker does not use the first person pronoun "I". In Luther's speech it occurs 0 time. It seems that the absence of the pronoun "I" shows the absence of dominance of the speaker over the audience because "I" separates the speaker from the audience.

Third Person Pronouns

Third person pronouns show the absence of the person in traditional grammar but it also conveys interpersonal meaning. The speaker does not use third person pronoun because the people who are present is his strength and concern. He does not give importance to those who are absent.

Conclusion

Positive declarative clauses dominate Martin Luther King's speech; imperative clauses are in the second position; "will" turns up frequently as modal verbal operator to carry on the modality in the speech; the first personal pronouns turn up mostly in King's speech. Positive declarative clauses are recommended to convey as many as possible messages to the audience and convince the audience with fact; appropriate application of imperative clauses are useful in making persuasion and suggestion. Modal verbal operators show the addresser's firm determination to finish the task.

Another interpretation of the interpersonal analysis shows that the speech is successful one because it incorporates higher frequency of declarative Mood which helps in making a relation with the audience and the audience can relate to the speaker. Imperative

Mood helps in involving the audience and encourages them to work together for a better future. Moreover, the frequent use of first person pronouns demonstrate that the addresser is the representative of the audience, very much concerned with them, and wants to make a good relation with them. The modal verb "will" has a higher frequency in the speech which signifies that the speaker is hopeful that the society will change its mind-set soon and in the future, they will witness a new America. This speech can further be analysed through the analysis of other metafunctions. This speech can further be analysed through stylistic analysis.

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Appendix

Give Us The Ballot

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The following passages are chosen for Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis:

But, even more, all types of conniving methods are still being used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters. The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic traditions. And so our most urgent request to the president of the United States and every member of Congress is to give us the right to vote.

Give us the ballot, and we will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights.

Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti- lynching law; we will be the power of our vote write the law on the statute books of the South and bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence.

Give us the ballot , and we will fill our legislative halls with men of goodwill and send to the sacred halls of Congressmen who will not sign a “ Southern Manifesto ” because of their devotion to the manifesto of justice.

Give us the ballot, and we will place judges on the benches of the south who will do justly and love mercy, and we will place at the head of the southern states governors who have felt not only the tang of the human, but the glow of the Divine.

Give us the ballot, and we will quietly and non-violently, without rancor or bitterness, implement the Supreme court's decision of May seventeenth, 1954.