

Discourse History Approach of Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream

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Abstract

Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream, as a great speech against racial discrimination, has had a significant social impact in history. This study, in light of nomination and predication strategies in a discourse-historical approach, based on a corpus-assisted analysis, investigates this speech, reveal the historical significant of its speech, and provide new research perspectives and methods for the subsequent speech document analysis.

Keywords

Discourse-Historical Approach; I Have a Dream; Discursive Strategy.

1. Introduction

I Have a Dream, one of the greatest speeches in American history, is a commemorative speech delivered by the Nobel Peace Prize winner, the famous black civil rights movement leader in the 1960s, in Lincoln Memorial, Washington on August 28, 1963. In this 1,700-word political speech, Martin Luther King denounced the tragic situation of black Americans, and persuaded black-brothers to keep a calm mind, control their actions, unite all forces that can be united for the final victory. Martin's speech opened a new era of the legal civil rights movement, a milestone in black American history and a turning point in the American civil rights movement. The ideas expounded in the speech have an indelible historical influence on the future American human rights legislation and the struggle of people of color in other countries in the world. For such a popular speech, many people have studied it from the rhetoric, style and other aspects, and this paper will discuss the language effect contained in Ruth Wodak's discourse historical analysis method, and re-examine its historical significance and textual significance.

2. Theoretical Framework

Critical discourse analysis, which began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, widely applies stylistic analysis techniques, which are traditionally aimed at literary discourse, to the analysis of non-literary discourse, with special emphasis on the complex interaction between language/discourse and social structure (Xin Bin, 2004:64). Critical discourse analysis aims to explore the reflection of inequalities in society in discourse and to explore ways to understand rights and ideology through textual analysis (Martin, 2000). The obvious, or implicit, discrimination, power and control relations in the discourse constitute an important part of the critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001). The discourse-historical approach proposed by the Austrian critical discourse analyst Ruth Wodak is one of the main schools of critical discourse analysis. In the process of discourse interpretation, DHA regards history as a discourse structure, integrates the social and political field background and historical resources embedded in discourse events, advocates observing the potential power dynamics and scope from three aspects of topic, discursive strategy and linguistic mean, and analyzing discourse (Wodak 2009:38; Reisigl & Wodak 2016:31). The discourse topic is the key discussion problem of the discourse subject. Strategy generally refers to a clear, intentional plan for practice for

special social, political, psychological, or other purposes (van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Wodak et al., 2009). Discourse strategy is the application way of language system, which is reflected in different levels of language structure. It may be unconscious or natural in the process of discourse, or it may be conscious and planned (Zhang Rui, Chang Hongning, 2021:32). In the discourse-historical approach method that Ruth advocates, she defines discourse (spoken and written language) as a social practice (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In order to achieve a specific purpose, speakers often use specific discourse strategies to carry out specific image construction and serve the discourse power group. Therefore, discourse strategy analysis is one of the main parts of discourse historical approach. In the discourse-historical approach, researchers usually analyze five basic discourse strategies: nomination strategy, predication strategy, argumentation strategy, perspectivation framing or discourse representation strategy, and intensifying / mitigation strategy. Discourse historical approach focuses on the political field, and organically combines the macro context analysis, discourse strategy and micro language means of discourse analysis (Reisigl & Wodak, 2014), which provides an effective theoretical framework for political discourse analysis. This paper will start from the nomination and predication strategy, analyze Martin Luther King's famous speech *I Have a Dream*, analyze and study how to use the discourse strategy reached a call for black people to unite and ask the government to change the situation of black people in this speech.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Corpus

This study uses Martin Luther King's famous speech *I Have a Dream* as the research corpus. In this speech, the views are clear and logical. The speaker used various rhetorical devices, such as parallelism, metaphor and contrast, to enhance the literary and artistic appeal of the speech. The prominent purpose of his political speaking is usually to invoke the people so as to seek their support and fulfill his aim of spreading the spirit of freedom and equality, educating people, communicating with his audiences. Therefore, many scholars have shown great interest in this speech, and many researchers have studied it from various perspectives of style and rhetoric. This paper will analyze the language strategies by using the discourse history approach.

3.2. Study Methods and Steps

In this study, I use the corpus-assisted methods such as indexing and extended context, using the corpus software AntConc3.4.4 and the text software KH Coder. The index can provide the word frequency of the retrieval word in the target corpus and present the top of the word context below (Baker, 2006). When needed, research can extend the indexed rows to whole sentences, whole paragraphs and even whole text, namely extended context. The word co-occurrence network of KH Coder text data software provides a visual means for this research. Connecting the frequently co-occurrence words in a straight line to form a word co-occurrence network map, which can intuitively display the characters, organizations, concepts in the text and reveal the potential connection between these hot words (Mao Wenwei, 2019). This study uses the self-reference word high-frequency co-occurrence network graph to analyze the content of the relevant reference word.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Topic

As a world-famous speech, the topic of *I Have a Dream* should also be known by everyone, this is an important speech delivered by Martin Luther king, in Washington, DC, facing 250000 people, to call on civil rights and freedom for still live under quarantine and shackles and chains,

material poverty, spiritual humiliation, although living in his home, but like an exile lack of home and security of black. The speaker reminds the American government that civil rights and freedoms are legitimate black rights granted by the Constitution, which is justice, reasonable and legal. Because of this, civil rights groups organized this grand march to “cash this check” and improve the situation of black people. Therefore, most of the keywords in this paper focus on freedom, black people, injustice, dreams, nation, etc. This study will be analyze and study from these keywords.

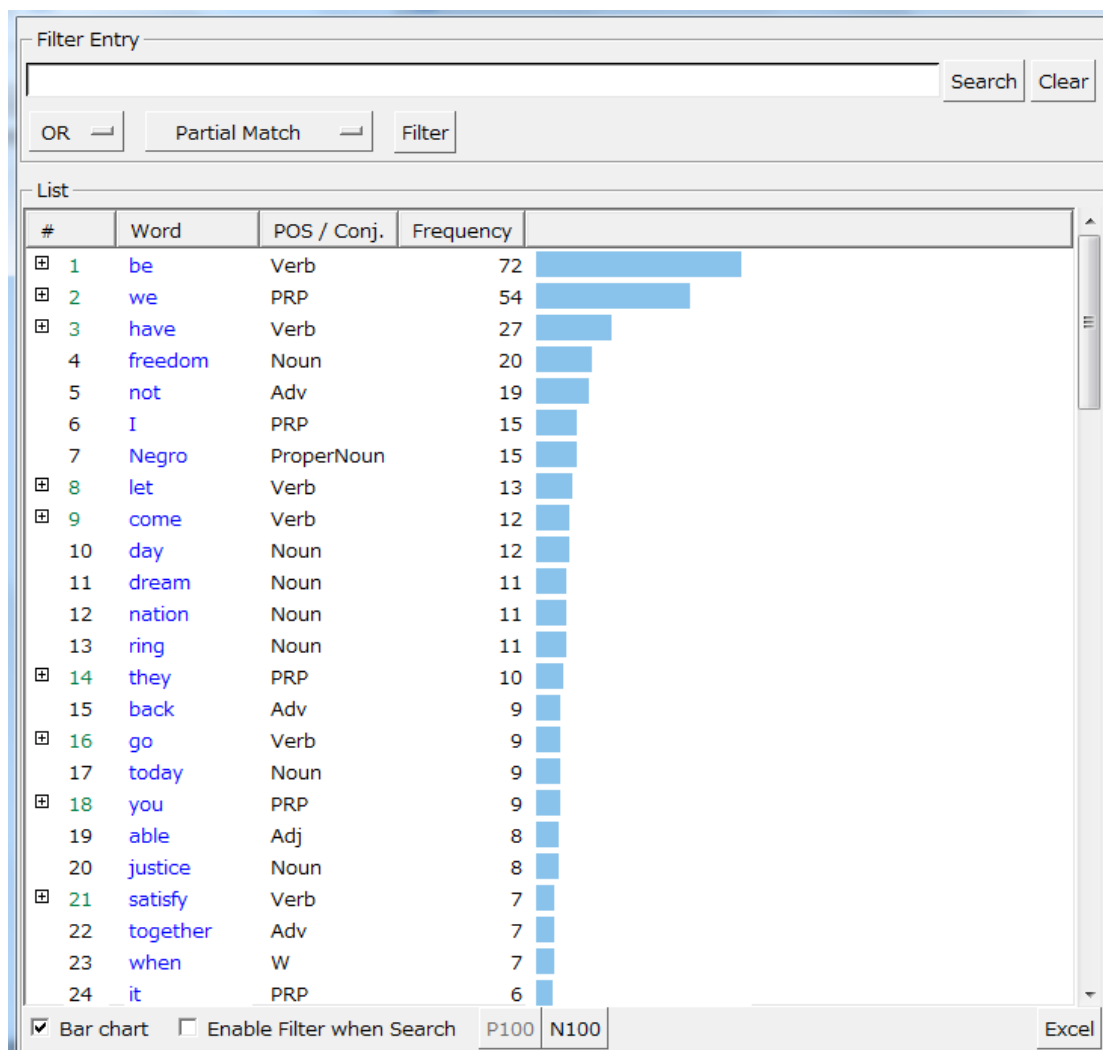


Figure 1. “I Have a Dream” theme keyword frequency

4.2. Discourse Strategy

4.2.1. Nomination Strategy

Nomination strategy in discourse-historical approach refers to the social activists, events, phenomenon in the discourse how to be referred to by language, through the method of member classification to someone belongs to their own or each other, and also can through metaphor, synecdoche and personification to achieve the purpose of building “in-groups” and “out-groups” ((Zhang Rui, Chang Hongning, 2021:33). One of the main tasks of this speech is to elaborate on the cruel facts of black life at that time, arouse the empathy and understanding of the masses, and persuade the government to honor the freedom and civil rights granted to blacks by the Constitution. So this study choose the subject of the self reference as the research object, generated by AntConc tool of high frequency list, according to Price formula calculate high frequency word threshold then determine the self reference high frequency words in the

text, the calculation formula: $M = 0.749\sqrt{N_{max}}$, where M is high frequency word threshold, N_{max} means the highest frequency of keywords, when a word frequency is greater than or equal to M to determine the word for high frequency word (Liu Yishan、 Wang Yulin、 Li Mingxin, 2017). In this study, considering the feasibility of text analysis, I selected the most high frequency keyword is freedom, the frequency is 20, that is, $N_{max}=20$, the high frequency word threshold M is $0.749\sqrt{20}=3.34$, rounded integer is 3, so if the word frequency is greater than or equal to 3, the word is determined as a high frequency word.

Through the co-occurrence network data statistical function of KH Coder, the subject high-frequency word co-occurrence network is obtained respectively, as shown in Figure 2. Display the hot content of each reference word by constructing a word co-occurrence network.

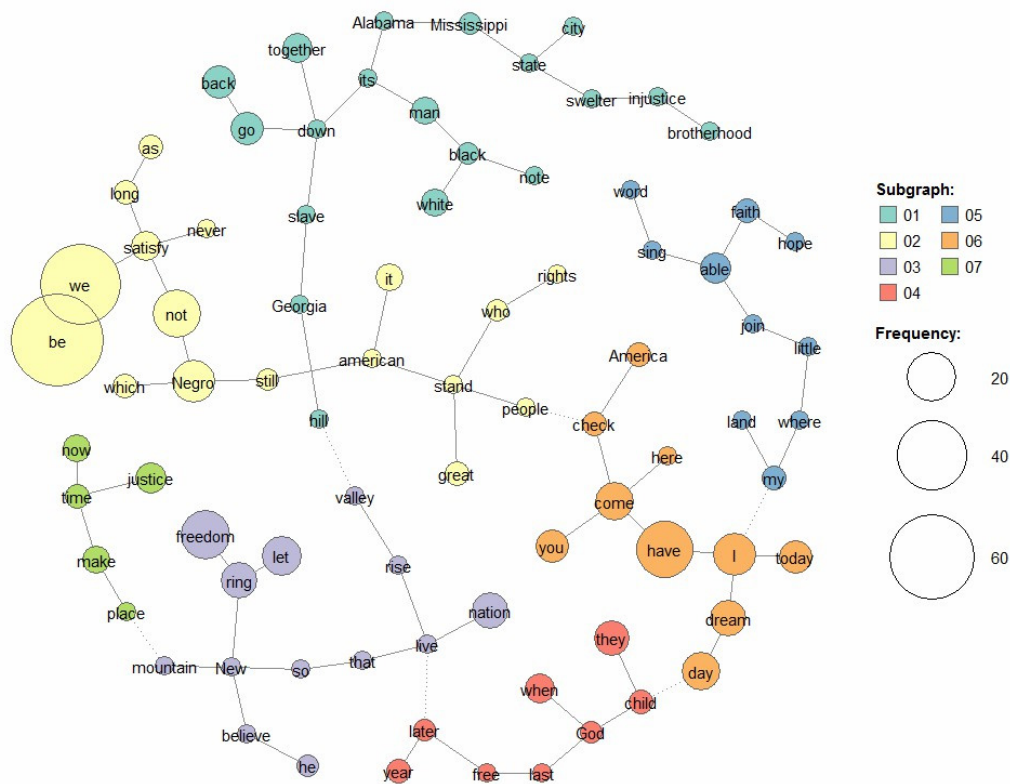


Figure 2. "I Have a Dream" theme vocabulary Co-occurrence network diagram

From the above map, we can see that the three high-frequency words are we (33 times), I (15 times), and Negro (15 times). Combining the results of the KH Coder co-occurrence network and the analysis of its extended context in AntConc, we found that in the text (see Figure 2), the main words of frequent co-occurrence with we, I and Negro are have, dream, come, check, satisfy, etc. A large number of verbs expressing action in the speech is used to call on the masses to act and urge the government to take action to protect black people.

we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check.

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice:

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations.

I have a dream....

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

"Negro" in the United States is considered to contain obvious discriminatory meaning, and the speaker is quoted the word vividly reveals the blacks still struggle at the bottom of society, live in poor life, without good education, cannot enter all levels of high-level institutions, cannot participate in vote and elections, not like white people enjoy personality freedom and freedom of activity. At the same time, the speaker always stressed "we", no longer deliberately distinguish white and black, "we" has internal significance, emphasizing that freedom and equality are the common desire of all Americans regardless of skin color. The use of "we" is to expose the unfair treatment of legal citizens; to emphasize the failure of the current government; to "cash our checks"; to stress that all Americans have constitutional equal rights regardless of gender and color. At the end of the speech, the speaker used six similar sentences "I dream one day" to express his desire for freedom and equality in poetic language and parallel sentences, expressing his most passionate dream as a black man. He called for racial equality, personal dignity and brotherhood to arrive soon! He called for freedom and equality to be achieved everywhere in America!

4.2.2. Predication Strategy

Predication strategy refers to the language mode that gives characteristics and attributes to social actors, objects, phenomena, events and processes. Language implementation forms include: positive or negative evaluative language, explicit predicate verbs or nouns, adjectives, etc. (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). This study mainly analyzes modal verbs. On the one hand, the three thematic keywords generated by AntConc show that the modal verbs with positive or negative evaluation words is the most prominent; on the other hand, modal verbs are one of the main carriers of modal meaning, which can express the "evaluation" or "attitude" (Fowler, 1991), involving the judgment on the success and effectiveness of their speech proposition, the obligation in the command, or the personal will expressed in the proposal (Lijie、Zhong Yongping, 2002). Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) divides modal verbs into three levels: high level: must, ought to, need, have to, and be to; medium level: will, would, shall, and should; and low level: may, might, can, and could.

According to statistic, in this speech, a large number of modal verbs. In terms of use frequency, high frequency modal verbs are used 46 times, including must (8), will (27), would (2), shall (5), can (4), "must" and "will" are used most frequently, accounting for 76%. This study focuses on the use of "must" and "will".

The high level modal verb "must" indicates obligation and necessity, indicating the speaker's high commitment to the content. In this speech the "must" is repeated to show the speaker's attitude and firm determination to the content of the appeal.

But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

Hoey (1997) states that when the subject is "I" or "we" connected with the "must", the liability or obligation appears to be self-imposed. Here, the speaker remind fellow blacks to pay

attention to the way and tactics of the struggle. Martin Luther King was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, and advocated a peaceful struggle for legitimate rights and opposed “violence”. He insists that “do not hold of hostility and hatred to satisfy the desire for freedom”, but should fight hatred with the spirit of tolerance, patience and fraternity. On different occasions, he repeatedly said that the struggle of blacks must not appear violence, “we will take law and order as the highest criterion to guide our action”, the Christian thought of fraternity should be a guide to action, “ although we are treated unfairly, to our white brothers, but should stop hate.” And the large amount of use of the “must”, the speaker appealed to the masses, imposing obligations on himself, promising to take a peaceful way to fight for rights.

The use of “will” is frequency the highest in this text, “will” expressed two modal meanings: willingness and possibility in this study. Willingness refers to the extent to which the speaker is willing to provide services or goods (Thompson, 2004), the upcoming arrangement of action, related to the inner will of the actor.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

In the above paragraphs, the speaker fully expressed his inner will that blacks would, one day, gain freedom and civil rights, racial equality, personal dignity and brotherhood, and the equal rights claimed by the Constitution would be realized in any corner of the United States. Through parallel sentences, King kept expressed his will to push the desire for freedom and equality to the climax of the speech, and highlights the importance of the speech.

5. Conclusion

This paper using digital tools to analysis the famous speech *I Have a Dream* delivered by Martin Luther King and emotional verbs with quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis, explore the historical purpose of the speech and the language phenomenon involved in the speech, reveals why the important position of this speech, not only on the social impact at that time, but also promoted the civil rights movement, and forced the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964. At the same time, this paper also provides a new research perspective and research methods innovation for the research of speech text.

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