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## COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN POLITICAL SPEECHES BY JOSEPH BIDEN ON COVID-19

Анотація. Статтю присвячено дослідженню комунікативних стратегій у політичних промовах Джозефа Байдена про *COVID-19* за період з січня 2020 року по квітень 2021 року. Предметом дослідження виступає сучасний політичний дискурс англомовних політиків США. Метою роботи є комунікативні стратегії та тактики, якими користуються англомовні політики США у своїх політичних промовах про *COVID-19*, а також лінгвістичні засоби, які сприяють їх реалізації.

Ключові слова: комунікативна стратегія, комунікативна тактика, тактика інформації та інтерпретації, літературні засоби, метафора.

**Summary.** *The article is devoted to the study of communicative strategies found in political speeches by Joseph Biden on COVID-19 for the period from January 2020 until April 2021. The total duration of speeches is 2,5 hours. Materials for the analysis were selected from NBC News, REV Speech-to-Text-Services, Rolling Stone Political News, ABC News, The New York Times, and USA Today. The subject of the study is the modern political discourse of English-speaking politicians of the USA. The objective of the work is communicative strategies and tactics exploited by English-speaking politicians of the USA during their political speeches on COVID-19, as well as language tools adopted for their implementation in the political arena. The practical value of the research lies in possibility of the usage of its results in the educational process, namely during lectures and practical courses in communicative linguistics, discourse analysis, cultural linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic pragmatics. Furthermore, newly-distinguished communicative strategies and tactics can be applied in further research on communication strategies and tactics. The*

*research results prove that Joseph Biden shows a distinct preference in argumentative strategy while speaking about COVID-19. Besides, Joseph Biden does not employ manipulative and underestimation communicative strategies as his speeches can be regarded as accurate, informative and relevant ones. The proposed comprehensive approach to the analysis of communicative strategies and tactics may serve as a basis for describing political speeches on the same topic by other politicians.*

**Keywords** *communicative strategy, communicative tactics, tactics of information and interpretation, literary devices, metaphor.*

Joseph Biden, the current president of the USA, is popularly known due to his restrained manner of behaviour and clear style of speaking. What is more, his political speeches contain accurate and up-to-date information relevant to the general topic of a particular talk. On the other hand, Mr. Biden tends to invent his own phrases and make use of them in the form of clichés during a good many speeches related to COVID-19. Apart from that, he takes advantage of various literary devices which assist him in creating the overall picture of the situation with coronavirus in America. Nonetheless, the results of our linguistic investigation unveil some other peculiarities which make speeches of the 46th president of the USA so characteristic of him and, meanwhile, formidable in terms of language studies.

First of all, Joseph Biden can be considered to be a committed supporter of the repetition practice since he puts it to work quite often during his political speeches and briefings connected with COVID-19. In the majority of cases, it serves as a means of implementation of two main purposes, namely saying over words and phrases to recollect the next part of the talk and stressing some preeminent information. Thus, we propose distinguishing a separate communicative strategy of repetition (utilized 15 times) and breaking it down into tactics of iteration (5 times) and tactics of amplification (10 times). The following quotations exemplify our assumption:

1. “I offered as salient prayer, and silent prayer, it was both salient and silent” [6] – repetition strategy, tactics of iteration.
2. “And it doesn’t require there to be an absolute winner. It says the apparent winner. The apparent winner” [2] – repetition strategy, tactics

of iteration.

3. “No national shutdown. No national shutdown, because every region, every area, every community can be different” [1] – repetition strategy, tactics of amplification.

4. “Five things we’ll do in an attempt to turn things around. Five things, to turn frustration into motivation. Five things, to help us meet our goal of 100 million shots by the end of our first 100 days in office” [10] – repetition strategy, tactics of amplification.

As for literary devices found in Biden’s speeches on the pandemic, his beloved metaphor “dark winter”, which can be detected in 4 out of 15 analyzed speeches, is worth mentioning, for instance, “Truthfully, we remain in a very dark winter” [10]. We reckon that this metaphor performs the function of notifying the American society that the state of affairs with COVID-19 is not one of the most favourable to them. Another vivid metaphor is “We remain in the teeth of this pandemic” [4], which emphasizes one more time present hardships. One more beautiful example of a metaphor is “Between sundown and dusk, let us shine the lights in the darkness” [81], which is meant to give the American people hope that everything is going to be fine again someday. Along with that, there is a stunning metaphor “I’m going to move heaven and earth to get us going in the right direction” [9], which Mr. Biden turns to account to highlight his efforts to combat coronavirus. Additionally, there is a few cases of personification which compare coronavirus to a real person that terrorizes the USA, such as “We’re in a war with this virus” [10], “Once in a century virus has decimated our economy and it’s still wrecking havoc on our economy today” [7], and “It’s been 343 days since the virus that has ravaged our nation tragically claimed its first life” [8]. Except from that, there is a metonymy, namely “North, South, East, and West” [2], which presupposes people living there and not parts of the country.

Besides, we pay attention to the fact that Joseph Biden’s speeches possess several occasions of antithesis, one of the most obvious examples of which is “A president can make a market climb or cause it to fall, can send people to war, can bring peace” [2]. Undoubtedly, the speaker attempts to play with contrasts in order to make that quote stand out among other citations. Another special stylistic device is pleonasm “the honest truth” [6] needed to underline that Biden does not lie and

remains candid with his audience. Finally, there are several distinct similes, including likening nurses to angels [81] and doctors to heroes [2], phrases, such as “The story of this vaccination campaign is like the story of everything hard and new America does” [5], “We’re going to work like the devil with state and local leaders on mask mandates” [2], “I’ll take responsibility because it is, this is like going to war” [2], all of which are intended to publicize some of the difficulties connected with COVID-19 and point out the crucial role of those citizens who take active part in the fight against it.

Furthermore, we would like to spotlight that Joseph Biden prefers addressing to his audience as “folks”, which he brings into play 46 times in his political speeches about COVID-19. Yet, in his speeches this word is viewed as a collective noun referring to some common group of people without naming anyone exactly. For example, “...we support the states with the resources they’ll need to get to the folks who have been often overlooked or ignored...” [1], “America is built by the working folks and middle class” [3], “And I was in constant contact with all the local officials, governors, city, county, all folks, including the various unions you all belong to and the skills that you all possess” [2].

After all, it should be accentuated that the current president of the USA frequently denies that his speeches and appeals have anything to do with politics, saying that it is a conscious act of patriotism. The most apparent cases are the following:

1. “It’s not a political statement. It’s a patriotic duty” [1].
2. “As part of the 100 day challenge I’m going to be asking the American people to wear a mask for the first 100 days of my administration. It’s not a political statement, it’s a patriotic duty” [9].

In the same way, Mr. Biden opposes any political involvement in the sphere of science as he is convinced that it should be completely independent. Further, scientists should take into account only scientific data proven by experiments, “We’re going to make sure they work free from political interference. That they make decisions strictly based on science and healthcare alone. Science and health alone, not what the political consequences are” [6].

Conversely, Joseph Biden is likely to ask himself various questions during his political speeches and answer them afterwards.

Notwithstanding, some of those questions can be regarded as rhetorical ones since they lack any kind of response on his or anyone's part. For instance, "How are we going to do it? In what coordinated way can it be done? We discussed a number of critical ways we can work together and unify around a national approach to controlling COVID-19" [1] (a usual question) and "How many of you out there don't have enough food to eat? How many of you out there are worrying whether you can pay next month's rent or pay your mortgage?" [4] (a rhetorical question).

In addition, Mr. Biden is in the habit of drawing on his personal experience, in particular, he recurrently mentions his father and mother, his departed son, and his family in general in order to show his deep understanding of the circumstances faced by Americans. To illustrate this statement, there is one quotation, "My dad. Me and my siblings, I was the oldest, I probably the only one that really fully understood it early on, was he said, "Joey, a job's about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about your place in the community. It's about being able to look your kids, your family, your friends in the eye..." [3].

In terms of communicative strategies, Joseph Biden strongly favours information and interpretation strategy which he adopts 63 times and which is actualized through tactics of recognizing the existence of the problem (30 times), tactics of identifying ways to solve the problem (25 times), explanatory tactics (4 times), commenting tactics (1 time), and tactics of considering information from a new angle (3 times). To our way of thinking, the aforementioned communicative strategy is so peculiar to the current president of the USA due to the fact that most of his political speeches encompass detailed plans of actions on how to handle the pandemic and support every stratum of the American society, including the minorities which are also introduced in some of his speeches.

In respect of tactics of recognizing the existence of the problem, it can be observed in operation with the help of the negative particle "not", nouns "failure" and "slow down", and the phrase "it's going to take some time". Thus, in many cases Mr. Biden admits that there are still multifarious issues which should be solved as quickly as possible. To typify, there are a couple of phrases, such as "We don't have access

to all the information” [1], “We didn’t do the things that had to be done” [3], “It’s not getting better” [6], etc. As we can see, all the sentences are primarily negative with a stress on the spheres that should be improved.

Reasonably, tactics of recognizing the existence of the problem is typically followed by tactics of identifying ways to solve the problem, which shows Biden’s desire not just to name some obstacles, but also to delineate methods of their overcoming. The characteristic features of this tactics are enumeration (the first thing, the second thing, etc., or firstly, secondly, etc., number one, etc.) and the phrase “we’re going to...”. In the matter of exemplification, there are the next quotes:

1. “We’re going to provide cities, states, schools, businesses with federal guidance on operating” [2].

2. “First, we will immediately work with States to open up vaccinations to more priority groups” [10].

Explanatory tactics, in its turn, encloses some reference to the past events and their link to the future actions. The exemplary phrases are “I explained how...” [8] and “I’ve said in the past...” [4]. In a similar way, we would like to put accent on tactics of considering information from a new angle because of its unique phrasing, “There’s a significant rise in spousal abuse. There’s a significant rise in suicides. It’s all real” [2]. Although it may appear irrelevant to some, it makes sense perfectly as Joseph Biden views a few matters divergently struggling to resolve them, too.

Consecutively, argumentative strategy is the second most widely used communicative strategy (44 times) which is expressed by tactics of reasonable assessments (16 times), tactics of contrastive analysis (2 times), tactics of pointing to the future (7 times), and illustration tactics (19 times). Without a doubt, Joseph Biden provides a lot of statistical and empirical data in his political speeches, which causes the prevalence of this strategy. We are inclined to give emphasis to the illustration tactics presented by phrases “for example”, “for instance” and identifying various occasions applicable for a particular remark in his speeches both from his personal life and life of other people:

1. “We know that’s the case, for example, in black, Latino, and Native American communities” [8].

2. “Gerald Bon and Corey Hamilton are both DC firefighters. I said to Corey that old expression, God made man, then he made a few

firefighters. Thank God we have them. And Linda Bussey is a manager of a Safeway grocery store in Bethesda. Victoria Ledgerwood Rivera, who is a local school counselor. And Elizabeth Calloway, who is a registered nurse who administered these shots” [5].

Henceforth, tactics of reasonable assessments can be outlined by numerical phrases, such as in “We have to actually get vaccinations into the arms of 330 million Americans” [1] or in “We’re likely to lose up to total of 400,000 lives, another 150,000 lives” [1]. As a matter of fact, tactics of pointing to the future is mainly described by means of various forms of future tense, including “be going to” and Future Simple. Howbeit, it should be noted that this tactics is not a groundless statement about the future, it is rather a well-founded forecast of the events:

1. “Our economy is poised to come back and come alive and I can see a return to normalcy in the next year. I also see incredible opportunities for our nation in the years ahead in job creation, clean energy, racial equality, and much more” [9].

2. “The cases will continue to mount” [6].

The third most universal communicative strategy is strategy of forming the emotional mood of the addressee (27 times) defined by tactics of unity (18 times), tactics of appealing to the emotions of the addressee (2 times), and tactics of taking into account a set of moral values of the addressee (7 times). It seems that Joseph Biden is fully aware of the feelings of the American people and, consequently, ‘plays on their heartstrings’, so to speak. It is noticeable that tactics of unity customarily calls for the unification of the nation as it will be impossible to combat coronavirus if people do not act together and support each other. Accordingly, Biden’s selection of words and phrases meets this goal:

1. “It’s important to do that as a nation. We must also act though, not just remember” [6].

2. “We’ve never failed when we stood together, and if there’s ever a time we need to stand together it’s now” [4].

We reckon that tactics of taking into account a set of moral values should also be dwelled upon since Biden takes advantage of it every time when he brings up the challenges currently faced by the minorities. Correspondingly, the choice of phrases consists of expressions “the

black and the white” [2] and “Latino, Native American communities” [9]. For example, “It’s a critical piece to account for a tragic reality of the disproportionate impact this virus has had on black, Latinos, and Native American people, who are being infected about four times the rate of white Americans” [8].

Another essential peculiarity of political speeches on COVID-19 by Joseph is the recurrent usage of the performative verb ‘promise’, namely in the clause “I promise”, which has been applied by him 23 times. Therefore, we can state that agitation strategy, comprised of tactics of promises (21 times) and tactics of appeals (2 times), is the fourth most distinguished communicative strategy implemented 23 times. For instance, “I promise you we will” [9] or “I’ve watched a lot of presidents in my career. I’ll make mistakes, but I promise you I’ll acknowledge them when I make them as well as I’ll take responsibility” [2].

On the contrary, Joseph Biden’s least brought to bear communicative strategy is self-defence strategy found only 4 times in his speeches and displayed only by two of the possible three tactics, namely tactics of justification – 1 time and tactics of criticizing the opponent’s position – 3 times. In our view, there is no need for the current president of the USA to implement this strategy since his speeches are generally believed to be quite coherent and unambiguous. Some of the cases are the following:

1. “Everybody asks that question every single time I stand here. It was a hypothetical question. The answer was I would follow the science. I am not going to shut down the economy, period. I’m going to shut down the virus” [1] – tactics of justification.

2. “As you made clear earlier this month, the Trump administrations policy of holding back close to half the supply of the vaccines available did not make sense” [8] – tactics of criticizing the opponent’s position.

By the same token, Joseph Biden does not rely on the manipulative strategy which cannot be detected in his political speeches on coronavirus at all. Hence, we surmise that his addresses can be perceived as transparent ones with no occurrences of falsification of facts, exaggerations, shifts of emphasis or any other methods of linguistic manipulation of information. Additionally, Mr. Biden’s speeches contain no cases of underestimation strategy.



In conclusion, Joseph Biden can be deemed as a straightforward politician whose political speeches embody factual reports on the current state of affairs with COVID-19 in the USA. In general, he concentrates all of his efforts on making the American society aware of the existing problems and taking some concrete actions to solve them immediately. Although he occasionally resorts to commonly accepted language clichés and his own hackneyed phrases, they are not numerous and do not really affect the overall tone of his talks. Furthermore, the current president of the USA combines plentiful examples and statistical matters in order to illustrate his statements in the best way possible. Thus, we imagine Joseph Biden's response to the coronavirus to be appropriate and rapid with no misrepresentation of any of the available evidence. To summarize, Joseph Biden used the following communicative strategies and tactics in his political speeches on COVID-19: information and interpretation strategy (tactics of recognizing the existence of the problem, considering information from a new angle, identifying ways to solve the problem, explanatory and commenting tactics), argumentative strategy (tactics of reasonable assessments, contrastive analysis, pointing to the future, and illustration tactics), self-presentation strategy (tactics of solidarity and emphasizing positive information), strategy of discrediting and attacking (tactics of accusation), self-defence strategy (tactics of justification and criticizing the opponent's position), strategy of forming the emotional mood of the addressee (tactics of unity, appealing to the emotions of the addressee, and taking into account a set of moral values of the addressee), agitation strategy (tactics of promises and appeals), and repetition strategy (tactics of iteration and amplification).

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