

A Semantic Analysis of Affective Meaning in Joe Biden's Inauguration Speech
Dr. Ahmed Manea Hoshan,
Department of English, College of Arts, University of Basrah
ahmed.hoshan@uobasrah.edu.iq

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate and explore the use(s) of affective (emotive) meaning in Joe Biden's inauguration speech. Affective meaning refers to the speaker's personal emotions and attitudes towards certain topics/issues, and to the ways a speaker of a language conveys his/her message(s) to the audience to influence them for or against specific objects. In this study, the data are extracted and analysed following Leech's 'seven types of meaning' (1981), with the aim of focusing on the ways President Joe Biden uses to convey the affective meaning. The study concludes that Biden uses certain words and expressions that are positive and/or negative in their meanings in order to convey his message(s) to his audience smoothly or efficiently.

Keywords: (semantics, Leech's seven types of meaning (1981), affective (emotive) meaning).

تحليل دلالي للمعنى الإفصاحي في خطاب جو بايدن الرئاسي

المدرس الدكتور: أحمد مانع حوشان
قسم اللغة الإنكليزية/ كلية الآداب/ جامعة البصرة

المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استقصاء استخدامات المعنى الإفصاحي (العاطفي) في الخطاب الرئاسي لجو بايدن. يشير المعنى التأثيري الى العواطف والمواقف الشخصية للمتكلم اتجاه مواضيع وقضايا معينة، والى الطرق التي ينقل المتكلم بواسطتها رسائله الى جمهوره ومستمعيه، ليؤثر فيهم وليستميلهم نحو قبول أو رفض مواضيع معينة. وفي هذه الدراسة، تم جمع البيانات وتحليلها باتباع نموذج ليج "سبعة أنواع من المعنى" (١٩٨١) بقصد التركيز على أطرق ألتى بواسطتها يضمن ألتىيس بايدن ألتى المعنى الإفصاحي. وقد استنتجت الدراسة أن بايدن يستخدم كلمات و عبارات معينة، إيجابية أو سلبية بمعانيها، لكي يوصل رسائله لجمهوره بسلاسة أو فعالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (علم ألدلالة، سبعة أنواع من ألتى المعنى لليج (١٩٨١)، المعنى الإفصاحي (العاطفي)).

1. Introduction

Semantics is the study of meaning; it attempts to explore the linguistic meaning of words, phrases, and sentences (Osgood et al. 1957; Palmer, 1975; Hurford, 1983; Lyons, 1996, 2002; Saeed, 2009). Osgood (1962) and Osgood et al. (1975) postulate that the affective meanings of words have dimensions across world cultures. Leech (1981) proposes that there are seven types of meaning. These are the conceptual, connotative, social, reflected, collocative, thematic, and affective meaning. Affective meaning, as one of the seven types of meaning, which is the focus of the present study, refers to the speaker's attitude about what is being said. The current study demonstrates the use and application of Leech's affective meaning in the inauguration speech of the US President, Joe Biden 2021, with the aim that it makes a clear account of its exemplification and representation, and the way(s) by which President Biden conveys his message(s) to his audience, and his attitudes and personal feelings and emotions implied in his inauguration speech.

1.1 The Problem of the Study

Language is a tool for achieving certain purposes and communication. Speakers of a language have certain ways of expressing their personal feelings, emotions, and attitudes to convey their messages in order to convince their audience on specific objects and issues, whether positively or negatively.

1.2 The Aim of the Study

This study aims at exploring the ways Joe Biden uses in expressing his personal emotions and attitudes towards some important objects and issues that matter to the US citizens. It attempts to show, analyse, and clarify the ways Biden exposes

affective meaning in his inauguration presidential speech as the 46th president of the US.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

The study shows the possible linguistic semantic utilization of words, phrases, and expressions that can be used in exploring the latent semantic meanings Biden employs in conveying his messages to the audience. It also sheds some light on semantic topics, meaning and its types, and the ways they can be manifested in certain areas.

1.4 The Procedure and Method of the Study

The research follows a qualitative analysis approach that is concerned with analysing the data extracted from Joe Biden's inauguration speech, 2021. The data are numbered with some explanation that shows the instances where affective meaning is used, expressed, and/or indicated.

1.5 The Limits of the Study

The current research is limited to analysing the affective meaning in Joe Biden's inauguration speech 2021, following Leech's '**Seven Types of Meaning**' (1981).

1.6 Research Questions

The study raises the following research questions:

1. What are the mechanisms President Joe Biden employs to express the affective meaning in his inauguration speech?
2. How does Biden express his emotions and attitudes to convey his message(s) and influence his audience?

2. Literature Review

Sianipar et al. (2016) explored the affective meaning in Indonesian words and expressions on the level of gender variation. Their study was conducted in comparison with American English and Spanish native speakers in relation to cultural norms. They found out there were significant differences between male and female Indonesian speakers in the use of certain words in specific situations. Moreover, they concluded that Indonesian speakers use affective meaning in a relatively different manner than American and Spanish speakers do. They ascribed these discrepancies due to the cultural differences among the speakers of those languages.

Hikmah (2019) studied the applications of affective meaning in the speech of Marianna Pascal, where she found that she used certain words and phrases to show the negative and positive attitudes to influence the audience.

Izuongere and Roshan (2020) conducted a study on the manifestations of affective meaning in some African languages, with special focus on indigenous Nigerian languages. They contended that affective meaning vary culturally from one culture to another according to the social and cultural norms and values of those cultures, and that African cultures encode affective meaning in certain forms which differ from other world cultures.

Wulandari (2021) investigated the affective meaning in the speech of Donald Trump titled, "Save America", following Leech's approach of 'seven types of meaning'. He examined the utterances which indicated the affective meaning. He concluded that Trump used negative attitudes against the US media, accusing them of being dishonest and untrustworthy for "faking the news and misleading" the public opinion.

3. Leech's Seven Types of Meaning

Leech (1981) theorized that there exist seven types of meaning in language. These meanings will be investigated briefly in this section in order to show their indications and manifestations, as far as *affective meaning* is concerned, which is the target of the study, it will be discussed with some detail at the end of the other types. These seven meanings include the following:

3.1 Conceptual Meaning

According to Leech (1981: 9), conceptual meaning is regarded as the main element in linguistic communication; it is also known as cognitive or denotative meaning. Leech opinionates that conceptual meaning should be subsumed within the principles of "*contractiveness* and *structure*", as a similar classification in phonological terms. When it comes to *contractiveness*, Leech gives an example of the words "woman" and "boy", where *woman* can be classified as + HUMAN, - MALE, + ADULT, while *boy* can be classified as +HUMEN, + MALE, - ADULT.

As far as *structure* is concerned, Leech proposes that smaller linguistic units build up larger ones. This refers to the organizational syntactic structure where the components of a sentence are structured from its immediate constituents to its ultimate ones. Leech states that both the contrastive and the constituent structure constitute how language is "organized" in terms of syntagmatic and paradigmatic principles or relations (Leech, 1981: 11).

3.2 Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning refers to the "communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its

purely conceptual content" (Leech, 1981: 12). In this regard, Leech compares connotative meaning with conceptual meaning in terms of reference and its referent. He argues that the concept of reference "overlaps with conceptual meaning". Leech elaborates that if the word "woman" can have the features of +HUMEN, + FEMALE, + ADULT, so these attributes must have these features or characteristics in the real world where they are used or belong to as a "criterion of the correct use of the word" in question. Moreover, Leech adds that the use of this word can have other psychological and social implications other than the physical ones in certain contexts. This depends on many views and circumstances and they are liable to vary according to certain factors from one society to another, take for example the image of women in terms of skills like cooking, gentleness, sensitivity, and the like. Comparatively, Leech notes that connotative meaning, unlike conceptual meaning, is "open-ended" and not limited as is the case with conceptual meaning (Leech, 1981: 13).

3.3 Social Meaning

Leech links social meaning with the social circumstances engulfing the speaker in certain situations. This includes the social status, geographical dimensions pertaining to dialects and the relationship between the speaker and the hearer and their attitudes. Leech, in this regard, quotes a previous study conducted by Crystal and Davy (1969: 66), who classified the socio-stylistic variations which vary according a number of factors, which are:

- 1) Dialect (The language of a geographical region or social class)
- 2) Time (e.g. The language of the 18th century)
- 3) Province (Language of law, science, advertising, etc.)
- 4) Status (Polite, colloquial, slang, etc.)

5) Modality (Language of memoranda, lectures, jokes, etc.)

6) Singularity (The style of Dickens, Hemingway, etc.)

Leech states that social status comprises an important aspect in social meaning, and that stylistic variations has a lot to do with social meaning. Moreover, he suggests that true synonymy is relatively rare or "does not exist". Significantly, he proposes that social meaning encompasses "illocutionary force", where an utterance can be understood to be a request, assertion, apology, or threat, according to the contexts where it is used, as in: "I haven't got a knife" (Leech, 1981: 15).

3.4 Reflected Meaning

Reflected meaning is that meaning which is associated with the "multiple conceptual meaning" a word, phrase or expression evoke in certain contexts. This occurs when "one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense".

Leech gives two examples of the way reflected meaning can influence our attitudes or conceptions of certain expressions. These examples refer "*The Comforter*" and "*The Holy Ghost*". Despite the fact that these two terms are associated with the third element in the Holy Trinity, these two expressions have specific semantic discrepancies. Consequently, Leech views *The Comforter* as something "warm and comforting" while *The Holy Ghost* is "awesome". Leech stresses that reflected meaning is more present in poetry and taboo words, terms, and expressions (Leech, 1981: 16).

3.5 Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning is composed of "the associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words which tend to occur in its environment". It is much associated with words that

collocate together in certain contexts to form what is known to be collocations. Words like "handsome" and "pretty" are examples of this relationship that exists between words such as "boy" and "girl" to form "handsome boy" and "pretty girl". In addition, Leech emphasises that verbs such as "Tremble/quiver, wander/stroll" can be other representatives of collocative meaning, i.e. words that co-occur in certain contexts to form what he calls "quasi synonyms" (Leech,1981: 17).

3.6 Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning facilitates the understanding of the meaning of the message sent by the writer/speaker. It centres around the message sent by the writer/speaker to his/her audience and the way they convey it. Leech states that the "organization of the message includes "ordering, focus, and emphasis", and thematic meaning is simply "a matter of choice" of the possible syntactic or grammatical constructions that are possible to be alternatives. Leech gives the active and passive constructions as an example of these possible choices a speaker can use in communicating his/her message to his/her audience (Leech,1981: 19).

3.7 Affective Meaning

Language is a tool for conveying the speaker's emotions and personal feelings to his/her audience. It can express what someone feels about a certain or a specific topic and reflects his/her attitudes towards it. Leech calls this type of meaning "affective meaning", and he states that it is often conveyed through the conceptual or the connotative content of the words used" (Leech,1981: 15). As an example of affective meaning, Leech mentions the following sentence:

"You're a vicious tyrant and a villainous reprobate, and I hate you for it!"

In the above sentence, the speaker expresses his/her negative emotions or feelings to his/her listener, this reflects what the concept of "affective meaning" entails. Moreover, affective meaning can be conveyed through certain stylistic ways according to the situation(s). In other words, the example, "Will you belt up?" can be used in a situation where someone speaks in a loud voice and you ask him/her to be quiet in the form of request. Thus, the following can be used as a "stylistically" polite way.

4. The Analysis of Affective Meaning in Biden's Inauguration Speech

This section is a practical application of Leech's *affective meaning* to the data under investigation, i.e. Biden's inauguration speech to the American audience. It focuses on the most relevant and representative data that convey Biden's personal feelings and attitudes towards the objects that matter to the US citizens.

Excerpt 1

"Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy."

In the above excerpt, Biden expresses the affective meaning through his personal feelings that his victory in the elections is not that of a personal value as a person, but of a whole victory of an entire country. In this regard, Biden tries to communicate his message to his audience by stating that democracy has been gained and achieved at his hands. The message reflects his attitudes towards the whole 'cause' of the nation, so to speak.

Excerpt 2

"We have learned again that democracy is precious. Democracy is fragile. And at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed."

Stressing the object of democracy again, the affective meaning in the above excerpt is represented in the way Biden envisages his personal view of democracy, confirming that it is precious as well as fragile at the same time. This reflects Biden's personal conception of the incidents that occurred during the rule of his predecessor, Trump, arguing that his winning the election has retrieved 'democracy' to the country.

Excerpt 3

"We come together as one nation, under God, indivisible, to carry out the peaceful transfer of power as we have for more than two centuries."

Biden tries to convey the affective meaning in the above excerpt by touching upon the patriotic collective feeling that the US is a unified country where the transfer of power is done in a smooth and peaceful way. He also draws upon the idea that the US is a unified nation, addressing his audience that unity is a very significant element in the American tradition, and that they should remain united.

Excerpt 4

"Few periods in our nation's history have been more challenging or difficult than the one we're in now. A once-in-a-century virus silently stalks the country. It's taken as many lives in one year as America lost in all of World War II."

What is significant to be realised in the above excerpt is that the affective meaning is indicated in the way Biden reminds his audience of the fatal risks the US is experiencing due to the spread of the corona virus. He asserts that the virus is reaping many souls more than those spared in the second world war. This testifies his personal feelings and attitudes of calamity overwhelming the nation's safety.

Excerpt 5

"Millions of jobs have been lost. Hundreds of thousands of businesses closed. A cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making moves us. The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer."

In the excerpt mentioned above, Biden embodies the affective meaning by stating that the US suffered a lot in Trump's period, where the country witnessed loss of jobs and businesses. In addition, his attitude towards the hectic period the US went through concerning racial discrimination is challenging. Biden in this contexts plays upon his audience "emotive" or emotional feelings - the murder of George Floyd is an example. He promises his audience that justice will prevail soon.

Excerpt 6

"Uniting to fight the common foes we face: Anger, resentment, hatred, extremism, lawlessness, violence, disease, joblessness, hopelessness."

Biden shows the affective meaning in the above excerpt by stressing his personal feelings and attitude towards the above-mentioned issues, where he conceives them to be significant and essential for Americans. For him, these issues constitute the

challenging and most important issues in the American life that need to be careful about in his new task as a US president. He calls upon his audience to be united in order to be able to defeat those afore-mentioned issues.

Excerpt 7

"Politics need not be a raging fire destroying everything in its path. Every disagreement doesn't have to be a cause for total war."

Biden's affective meaning in the above excerpt is exemplified in his satisfaction that people should not be a source of controversy or dissidence, for it can ruin the nation's unity and lead to chaos, turmoil, unitability and unpleasant consequences and endanger the community social peace and security.

Excerpt 8

"And, we must reject a culture in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured."

The affective meaning in the above excerpt is depicted through Biden's "tricky style" of hinting at his predecessor's way of dealing with facts. Biden tries to draw the audience attention to the way facts can be faked or fabricated for achieving certain political purposes.

Excerpt 9

"My fellow Americans, we have to be different than this. America has to be better than this. And, I believe America is better than this."

Again, in the above-mentioned excerpt, Biden believes that the US should refrain from the former practices that were prevailing

in the past periods. He is calling upon the American citizens to have a peaceful culture of accepting others, where his emotive or affective meaning has a fluent way to achieve his aim.

Excerpt 10

"To all those who supported our campaign I am humbled by the faith you have placed in us. To all those who did not support us, let me say this: Hear me out as we move forward. Take a measure of me and my heart. And if you still disagree, so be it."

Looking thoroughly into the above excerpt, it can be realised that Biden tries to convey/communicate the affective meaning by expressing his personal feelings of gratitude to his audience. He is very much indebted and grateful to them for electing him as President. Moreover, he addresses his "foes" telling them that they should understand him very well as a person. This is implied with some sort of challenge, as in "And if you still disagree, so be it."

Excerpt 11

"The right to dissent peaceably, within the guardrails of our Republic, is perhaps our nation's greatest strength."

The affective meaning in the above excerpt is conveyed when Biden stresses that one of main points of strength the US has is the peaceful way of dissenting under the limits of the US constitution. He believes that this dissent is one of the advantages of keeping the US strong and powerful.

Excerpt 12

"Yet hear me clearly: Disagreement must not lead to disunion. And I pledge this to you: I will be a President for all Americans."

Using the phrase 'Disagreement must not lead to disunion', the affective meaning is represented in Biden's statement that disagreement among Americans should not be a pretext for dissidence, and that he will be a president for all American citizens. This is an example of the way Biden flushes his audience with meanings that can be discerned from his manipulation of the word "all" as a president who does not differentiate between his citizens, whether they are his pros or foes.

Excerpt 13

"What are the common objects we love that define us as Americans? I think I know. Opportunity, security. Liberty, dignity, respect, honor, and, yes, the truth."

Attempting to cherish the common sets, patterns, and norms of American life, Biden in the above excerpt opines that there are agreed-upon concepts shared by all Americans which identify their identity and nationality. These are indisputable issues commemorated by the whole nation. These objects, he contends, are what unite the citizens. Comparatively, he passes this message that contains his personal attitudes and feelings to convey the latent affective/emotive meaning(s) his message is loaded with.

Excerpt 14

"Recent weeks and months have taught us a painful lesson. There is truth and there are lies. Lies told for power and for profit."

As far as the affective meaning is concerned, Biden in the above excerpt addresses his audience telling them about the misuse of power to deceive and delude the public American opinion by fabricating the truths and telling lies. The above excerpt mentioned above exemplifies clearly what Biden thinks of the

'crooked' policies of Trump's administration. This is a strong confirmation of the negative views against his foe which indicate bluntly Biden's dissatisfaction, criticism, and disapproval of such acts such as lies and dishonesty that are exploited to gain power and profit.

Excerpt 15

"And each of us has a duty and responsibility, as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders - leaders who have pledged to honor our Constitution and protect our nation - to defend the truth and to defeat the lies."

Similarly, the affective meaning Biden tries to communicate, convey, and share is represented in the very message he delivers to his audience, i.e. the mutual/reciprocal responsibility of telling the truth and being committed to it in order to defeat what he states to be "lies that distort and defame the US values". In this regard, Biden expresses his negative points of view of the misconduct of his foe, Donald Trump.

Excerpt 16

"I understand that many Americans view the future with some fear and trepidation. I understand they worry about their jobs, about taking care of their families, about what comes next. I get it."

The above excerpt exemplifies the affective meaning Biden attempts to communicate to the audience. In this context, Biden touches upon the very sensitive and influential areas/concerns in the daily American life. The importance of having jobs, securing family needs, and ensuring the future is what worries the US citizens. Biden is so careful about choosing the objects that

interest and concern the audience; issues that matter to all Americans.

Excerpt 17

"We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts. If we show a little tolerance and humility. If we're willing to stand in the other person's shoes just for a moment."

What is worthy of mentioning in the above excerpt is that the affective meaning is indicated by Biden's attempt to convince his audience by telling them that they should collaborate with each other, and show lenience, tolerance, solidarity, and modesty. According to him, humanity can achieve peace if they come to accept each other and do away with hatred, grudge, envy, pride, arrogance, cruelty, and the like. These aforementioned topics are loaded with emotions and personal attitudes to the audience, who are expected to share the same attitudes evoked by Biden.

Excerpt 18

"Because here is the thing about life: There is no accounting for what fate will deal you."

It can be perceived that in the above excerpt, the feelings towards the coming future are indicated by Biden's attitudes of the unguaranteed coming days or future. Biden conveys his message smoothly, warning his audience of what might be called "untrusted days" in the life of US citizens, as life is liable to change and there is nothing that can be guaranteed.

Excerpt 19

"There are other days when we're called on to lend one. That is how we must be with one another. And, if we are this way, our country will be stronger, more prosperous, more ready for the future."

It can be noted that Biden, again, in the above excerpt expresses his personal attitudes to his audience in a way that reflects insistence on the object of solidarity as the main point in American life through which the nation and the people can stay safe, strong, rich, and ready to face the future ups and downs. He calls upon the audience shared knowledge and background of being unified in the face of challenges and dangers.

Excerpt 20

"We are entering what may well be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus. We must set aside the politics and finally face this pandemic as one nation."

It can be realised that Biden, in the above excerpt, conveys his emotive or affective meaning by stressing that the US is facing the most horrible and fatal wave of the covid-19. He stresses that the entire nation should put their disputes aside and be prepared and ready to face the fatal disease together.

Excerpt 21

"So here is my message to those beyond our borders: America has been tested and we have come out stronger for it."

The excerpt mentioned above shows a message Biden wants to convey to the world: that is the US confronted a deadly pandemic, but it was able to "defeat" it and became stronger than

before. This 'assertion' reflects his personal emotions, feelings, and attitudes towards the hectic period of the pandemic, i.e. the corona virus or covid-19.

Excerpt 22

"We will be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress, and security."

It is worth mentioning that, in the above excerpt, Biden assures his audience that the US will remain a trust-worthy "ally" for achieving "peace, progress, and security" for the "friendly" partners in the world. Biden here conveys his message to the audience by stressing the personal schematic or stereotyped attitude of the US as a super power in the world. His message indicates his personal feelings and attitudes to what his audience believe to be "true" about the image of the US as "sponsor" of peace-calming/keeping country in the world, which is an example of affective meaning.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The following section is a brief summary of the main findings/conclusions of the current study. It also offers some recommendations for further future works/studies.

5.1 Conclusions

Affective (emotive) meaning expresses the speaker's personal emotions, feelings and attitudes to the audience about certain topics. The current study has investigated the uses and applications of affective meaning in President Joe Biden's inauguration speech. It analysed and demonstrated the different ways, forms, and mechanisms by which Biden influences the audience to convey and express his personal feelings, emotions,

views, and attitudes towards a variety of objects that matter to the US citizens so as to attract their attention and influence them. The study concludes that Biden uses positive and negative words to refer to what he thinks to be the case, and how it should be. Most of his negative attitudes are directed against his predecessor, Donald Trump. Moreover, the study shows that Biden touches upon certain objects that matter to his audience to get their interest, support, and/or "sympathy".

5.2 Recommendations

The researcher would like to recommend that the current study can be conducted on other speeches to get a better understanding of *affective meaning*. In addition, further future work can be done on investigating the other six types of meaning in order to have a clear interpretation/explication of Leech's seven types of meaning. This may help researchers and students of linguistics have a clear-cut view on the concept of meaning, which is the core of linguistic interest.

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