

Promoting gender equality: a textual meta function analysis of Hilary Clinton's selected speech

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Article soumis, le 26/09/2024 et accepté, le 23/12/2024

Réf : AUM11-0208

Abstract : This paper is about the systemic functional linguistic analysis of Hilary Clinton's remarks while First Lady to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Plenary Session in Beijing, China. Particularly, it focuses on the grammar of textual meaning (Theme) so as to identify the main carriers, actors, sensers, etc. prioritized in Hilary's message. To achieve this goal, the paper uses both qualitative and quantitative linguistic data or the mixed method. In fact, the discourse is divided up into linguistic units referred to as clauses in which the different Theme types are identified and thoroughly counted. The results reveal that Hilary has basically put the accent on *women, abuses and violations, freedom, conference, both women and men* on the one hand, and on the other hand, the First Lady has prioritized some relevant circumstances and judgements. It is via such thematic choices that she tries to promote gender equality by highlighting crucial facts or injustice that prevent women from fulfilling themselves in a male dominated world.

Keywords: Systemic functional linguistics, Hilary Clinton's remarks, China, gender equality, injustice.

Promouvoir l'égalité des sexes : une analyse de métafonction textuelle d'un discours choisi d'Hillary Clinton

Résumé : Ce travail de recherche porte sur l'analyse linguistique systémique fonctionnelle du discours d'Hilary Clinton en tant que Première Dame à la Conférence Mondiale de Nations sur la femme, pendant la plénière à Beijing en Chine. En particulier, il met l'accent sur la grammaire de la signification textuelle afin d'identifier les principaux attributaires, penseurs, acteurs, etc. priorités dans le message d'Hilary. Les données linguistiques qualitatives et quantitatives sont utilisés pour atteindre cet objectif. En fait, le discours est divisé en unités linguistiques appelées propositions dans lesquelles les différents types de Thèmes sont identifiés et méticuleusement comptés. Les résultats ont révélé qu'Hilary a essentiellement mis l'accent sur des éléments thématiques tels que la femme, les abus et les violations, les femmes et les hommes d'une part, et d'autre part elle a priorisé quelques

circonstances et jugements pertinents. C'est à travers un tel choix thématique qu'elle essaie de promouvoir l'égalité de genre en mettant en exergue les faits ou injustice marquante qui empêche la femme de s'épanouir dans un monde dominé par les hommes.

Mots clés : *Linguistique systémique fonctionnelle, le discours d'Hilary Clinton, Chine, égalité de genre, injustice.*

Introduction

The main argument behind feminist thoughts is that women have always been given a secondary status by masculine dominated social discourse almost throughout the world. They have always been subordinated to a position where they have no means to claim their rights (Raina, 2020). Put simply, they are culturally assigned debasing roles, and therefore they suffer from all kinds of injustice. This includes deprivation and marginalization of all sorts (girls are rarely schooled while boys are sent to school), lack of access by women to productive resources, limited decision-making power (Gambiza, 2013). The religious and educational systems contribute in reinforcing the negative beliefs and practices towards women. This is what prompts women from different social, cultural and political backgrounds to take actions so as to promote women's rights. This can take the form of novels, conferences, discourses or speeches through which women deconstruct the patriarchal ideology, patriarchy being defined by Facio (2013) as:

a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic and political organization or structuring of society produced by the gradual institutionalization of sex-based political relations created, maintained and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles.

In fact, institutions play a determining role in constructing the patriarchal system in that they interconnect to strengthen the structures of domination of men over women or other forms of domination based on real or perceived differences based on skin color, ethnicity, religious beliefs, etc. This paper Analyzes Hilary

Clinton's discourse to figure out the message aimed at achieving equality by redefining the principles behind the patriarchal system, on the basis of the hypothesis that the thematic choices can reveal the main issues related to gender equality.

Hilary's discourses have been given great scientific attention surely owing to her commitment to combat injustice towards the female gender. Analyzing her speech from a critical discourse analysis perspective, Quyen (2022) contends that the speech is an effective tool for Hillary Clinton to voice her feminist ideology or thoughts; she is sympathetic with women around the world and stresses the important role of women in the home as well as in society. Language is therefore used to construct new ideas or deconstruct some bad experiences related to women's image. Moreover, AlQahtani (2017) emphasizes Hilary's use of the first-person plural pronoun and concludes that she actively exploits the referential flexibility of this linguistic item in her campaign speeches so as to construct and negotiate her identities while strategically enhancing her political power and/or protecting her threatened negative face in different face-threatening situations; and that she actively exploits self-affiliation to acquire, neutralize or challenge power in her campaign texts. Finally, Kanwal and García (2019) use the critical discourse analysis theory to clarify the link between language and power, arguing that as a presidential candidate, Hilary utilized the fight and family frames for the modification of the boundaries of American presidency with respect to gender. Put another way, language is an important tool to change cultural and political habits. This work stresses the textual metafunction level of language use so as to highlight Hilary Clinton's feminist thoughts aimed at promoting gender equality, focusing notably on language as message.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Clause as Message

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), the term clause refers to a linguistic unit with a multifunctional construct consisting

of three metafunctional lines of meanings: a message or a quantum of information, an exchange or a transaction between speaker and listener, and a representation of some process in ongoing human experience. Here the clause is analyzed as message, which corresponds to the textual meaning or the textual metafunction. It is actually about the thematic structure of the clause. In all languages, a clause has some kind of organization whereby it fits in with, and contributes to the flow of text. Thus, a distinct status is assigned to each part of it. In English the clause is divided into two parts: Theme and Rheme. The Theme is the component which functions as the point of departure of the message whereas the Rheme is the remainder of the message or the part in which the Theme is developed (Eggs, 1994).

The Theme of a clause is made up of just one structural item represented by just one unit: one nominal group, adverbial group or prepositional phrase. Systemicists distinguish three types of Themes:

- a topical Theme is the component of the clause which has a Transitivity function such as actor, behavior, sensor, carrier, circumstantial elements (place, time, etc);
- Interpersonal Theme is the component of the message to which a Mood value can be ascribed: finite (in interrogative mood) and adjuncts (vocative, mood, comment, polarity);
- Finally, a Textual Theme is the part of the clause which has a cohesive role such as continuity adjuncts and conjunctive adjuncts.

Moreover, Theme Markedness and Unmarkedness are crucial for the analysis of language as message. An unmarked Theme is characterized as a “typical” or “usual” Theme whereas a marked Theme signifies simply “atypical” or “unusual”. In other words, an unmarked Theme is a Theme which corresponds to the Mood elements such as Subject, Finite, Predicator, WH elements; whereas a marked Theme is an element of the clause which is equivalent to

any other constituents from the Mood system, for example a circumstantial element.

1.2. Methods

This work adopts the mixed research method which consists in collecting and analyzing data, integrating the findings and drawing inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single paper (Doyle, Brady & Byrne, 2009; Creswell, 2015). Thus, the text under analysis is divided up into analyzable units referred to as clauses. These are meticulously ascribed figures and the different types of Themes are identified and counted. The interpretation of the findings is carried out using both qualitative and quantitative linguistic data so as to minimize the limitations of the two methods.

2. Results

2.1. Quantitative Theme Analysis of the Text

The occurrence of the different Theme types is synthesized in table 1 below.

Table 1: Theme types occurrence in the speech

Number	Theme	Textual	Interpersonal	Topical
1	<u>I</u>	-	-	+
2	<u>This</u>	-	-	+
3	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
4	<u>Our goals for this Conference, to strengthen families and societies by empowering women to take greater control over their own destinies,</u>	-	-	+
5	<u>unless all</u>	+	-	+

	<u>governments - here and around the world</u>			
6	<u>The international community</u>		-	+
7	<u>that both women and men are</u>	+	-	+
8	<u>They</u>	-	-	+
9	<u>No one</u>	-	-	+
10	<u>TRAGICALLY, women</u>	-	+	+
11	<u>whose human rights</u>	+	-	+
12	<u>Even in the late 20th century</u>	+	-	+
13	<u>Women and children</u>	-	-	+
14	<u>When women</u>	+	-	+
15	<u>They</u>	-	-	+
16	<u>I</u>	-	-	+
17	<u>That</u>	-	-	+
18	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
19	<u>That</u>	-	-	+
20	<u>These abuses</u>	-	-	+
21	<u>because, for too long,</u>	+	-	+
22	<u>Even today</u>	+	-	+
23	<u>Who</u>	-	-	+
24	<u>The voices of this conference</u>	-	-	+
25	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
26	<u>Wen babies</u>	+	-	+
27	<u>or their spines</u>	+	-	+
28	<u>SIMPLY because they</u>	+	+	+

29	<u>It</u>		-	+
30	<u>When women and girls</u>	+	-	+
31	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
32	<u>When women</u>	+	-	+
33	<u>because their marriage dowries</u>	+	-	+
34	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
35	<u>when individual women</u>	+	-	+
36	<u>and when thousands of women</u>	+	-	+
37	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
38	<u>When a leading cause of death worldwide among women ages 14 to 44</u>	+	-	+
39	<u>They</u>	-	-	+
40	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
41	<u>when women</u>	+	-	+
42	<u>and that</u>	+	-	+
43	<u>If there</u>	+	-	+
44	<u>That</u>	-	-	+
45	<u>that human rights</u>	+	-	+
46	<u>and women's rights</u>	+	-	+
47	<u>Let us</u>	-	-	+
48	<u>that among those rights</u>	+	-	+
49	<u>Women</u>	-	-	+
50	<u>if we</u>	+	-	+
51	<u>Let me</u>	-	-	+
52	<u>Freedom</u>	-	-	+
53	<u>It</u>	-	-	+

54	<u>Who</u>	-	-	+
55	<u>It</u>	-	-	+
56	<u>Now</u>	-	-	+
57	<u>if we</u>	+	-	+
58	<u>We</u>		-	+
59	<u>As long as discrimination and inequities</u>	+	-	+
60	<u>as long as girls and women</u>	+	-	+
62	<u>the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world</u>	-	-	+
63	<u>Let this Conference</u>	-	-	+
64	<u>so that we</u>	+	-	+
65	<u>in which every woman</u>	+	-	+
66	<u>every boy and girl</u>	-	-	+
67	<u>and every family</u>	+	-	+
68	<u>God's blessings</u>	-	-	+
69	<u>Thank</u>	-	-	+
Total		29	03	69
Percentage		42.02%	04.34%	100%

As it can be inferred from table 1 above, the text contains 69 clauses. Given that each clause must have one topical Theme, there are therefore 69 topical Themes in the text. This means that actors, carriers, tokens, sensers, circumstances are prioritized. Moreover, the analysis reveals that textual Themes are used 29/69, corresponding to 42.02% and meaning that the speech is profoundly written and adopted to its context.

Table 2 emphasizes the distribution of topical Themes in the speech.

Topical Themes	Number	Total	Percentage
Women	10, 13, 14, 15, 21, 26, 27, 28, 30, 32, 35, 36, 39, 41, 49, 60, 65	17	24.63%
Abuse/violation	20, 25, 29, 31, 34, 37, 38, 40, 42, 59	10	14.49%
Rights/Freedom	11, 43, 44, 45, 48, 52, 53, 55	08	11.60%%
Miscellaneous Topical Themes	19, 27, 33, 61, 67, 68, 69	07	10.14%
We	47, 50, 57, 58, 63, 64	06	08.69%
Conference	2, 3, 4, 24, 62	05	07.24%
Circums. of time and place	12, 17, 18, 22, 56	05	07.24%
Both women/Men	7, 8, 9, 66	04	05.80%
I (Hilary)	1, 16, 51	03	04.34%
<u>Goverments/International Community</u>	5, 6	02	02.89%
People	23, 54	02	02.89%
Total		69	100%

Table 2: Topical Themes distribution

Table 2 shows that *women* are the most used as topical Themes; they are thematized 17/69 times, that is, 24.63%, followed by *abuse* and *violation*, which occur 10/69 as Theme (14.49%) and rights and freedom which are used 8/69 times as Theme (11.60%). Some miscellaneous items are also used 7/69 times (10.14%) in thematic position. *We* is prioritized 6/69 times (8.69%) while *conferences* and *circumstances of time and place* occur almost at the same percentage, that is, 5/69 (7.24%) times

each. Both women and men crop up 4/69 times (5.80%) as Theme, whereas Hilary herself happens only 3/69 times (4.34%) in thematic position. The government and the community are rarely thematized. Thus, the above statistics give an exact idea about the preoccupations, the message, feelings related to women's rights issues described in the speech. The occurrence of marked Themes is detailed in table 3 below.

Table 3: Occurrence of marked Themes in the speech

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
Marked	12, 22, 48, 56	04	05.80%
Unmarked		65	94.20
Total		69	100.00%

Table 3 reveals that there are only 4/69 marked Themes in the speech, corresponding to 5.80%; thus, the rest of the Themes (65/69, representing 94.20%) are unmarked. This implies that the speech does not much emphasize circumstantial elements. The thematized circumstances are *even in the late 20th century, even today among those rights, now it is time*. However, it can be argued that these are used to clarify some important points regarding gender equality.

- **Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings**

The thematic organization of clauses gives an exact idea about the development of the text as a message. The analysis has clearly shown what is prioritized in the speech. The overall thematic description of Hilary's speech unveils that topical Themes are most used in thematic position, each clause necessarily containing a topical Theme. Consequently, there are 69/69 (100%) topical Themes, which equals the number of clauses in the speech. But the text contains 29/69 textual Themes, that is, 42.02%. These include extension (addition or variation) items such *unless, even, and* in clauses (12, 22, 36, 42, 46, 63, 67). The addition elements have contributed in developing or listing important facts about human

rights exemplified in clauses such as *and women's rights are human rights; and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will; and when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war*. Cohesion is also achieved through enhancement via spatio-temporal and causal-conditional conjunctions such as *when, because, if*, etc. in clauses (14, 20, 28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 41). These items have served to insist on happenings and doings which need urgent reaction and actions: *when women are denied the right to plan their own families; when a leading cause of death worldwide among women ages 14 to 44 is the violence; when women and girls are sold into the slavery of prostitution, etc.*

These facts are qualified as abuses which appear in Thematic position, for example in clauses: *These abuses have continued because, for too long, the history of women has been a history of silence. Even today, there are those who are trying to silence our words* (20, 21, 22, 23, 24).

The statistics about the distribution of topical Themes among carriers, actors and sensers show that *women* are used 17/69 times in thematic position (24.63%), followed by *abuse and violation*, which happens 10/69 times as Theme (14.49%) and *rights and freedom* which are used 8/69 times as Theme (11.60%). This is exemplified in such clauses as *women are doused with gasoline, set on fire and burned to death; individual women are raped in their own communities; Women must enjoy the right to participate fully in the social and political lives of their countries* (32, 35, 49). Actually, women are carriers of negatives epithets which need to be corrected or denounced. It can be rightly stated that, here, discourse is used to raise leaders' awareness and call for actions. However, beyond actions, it is about rights; hence the thematization of freedom and right in clauses: *and women's rights are human rights. Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely - and the right to be heard* (46, 47, 48).

These are traditional beliefs which justify injustice and all forms of abuses against women; therefore, the best way to combat this is to implement fundamental human rights everywhere. This means for example that the guilty of abuses against women must appear in court. It is only through such actions that women's freedom can become a reality: *Freedom means the right of people to assemble, organize, and debate openly. It means respecting the views of those who may disagree with the views of their governments. It means not taking citizens away from their loved ones and jailing them, mistreating them, or denying them their freedom or dignity because of the peaceful expression of their ideas and opinions (52, 53, 54, 55).* The conference is, according to Hilary, a kind of freedom. She is actually describing American ideology or democracy which, she thinks rightly or wrongly, must be applied all over the world. To some extent it is true that certain facts justify her beliefs. From the African perspective, nonetheless, it is not acceptable for instance that a girl decides to marry another girl. Put simply, in the African context freedom does not involve gay marriage. The conference is used 5/69 times (7.24%) in thematic position, for example in clauses:

Our goals for this Conference, to strengthen families and societies by empowering women to take greater control over their own destinies, cannot be fully achieved unless all governments - here and around the world - accept their responsibility to protect and promote internationally recognized human rights (4, 5).

Two interpersonal Themes have been identified in the speech. These are actualized through items such as *Tragically, simply* (10, 28), used to express some judgements regarding how social construction can take dangerous forms or result in tragedies. Women are not condemned because of some deviations or bad actions, but simply because they are born women. The thematization of circumstantial elements (through Theme markedness) highlights some circumstances of time and place which clarify the outs and the ins. Instances of such clarifications are *in the late 20th century, today, now, among those rights* in clauses (12, 22, 48, 56). In fact, it is absurd that women are denied fundamental

rights today or now in the late 20th century. Thus, urgent actions are needed.

Conclusion

Hilary Clinton's remarks while First Lady to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Plenary Session in Beijing, is a short but very deep discourse on women's plights. The discourse has been carefully analyzed on the basis of the systemic functional linguistics theory, emphasizing notably the grammar of textual meaning: Theme. Hilary has focused her message on women, *abuse and violation, freedom, conference, both women and men*, which are the main carriers, actors and sensers at the center of her arguments to implements women's rights. She has also used some evidences expressed through circumstantial elements (Theme markedness), which can be equated to warnings against some dangerous practices directed at women. The thematization of interpersonal items has emphasized the First Lady's disapproval of the unhuman treatments of women by men in general. Women's rights must be adapted and contextualized, and they should take account of the essential aspirations to freedom. Such discourses are useful in that they promote gender quality by helping to raise leaders' awareness about injustice against women.

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