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THE RHETORIC OF HETEROGLOSSIA IN CLINTON'S 1993 INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Kevin T. Jones

During the 1992 Presidential election, Bill Clinton campaigned as the "people's candidate." The Clinton campaign emphasized the fact that he was not born into money as many politicians are. The Arkansas Governor had earned everything he achieved through education, hard work, and the pursuit of the American dream. He jogged daily and stopped by McDonald's for coffee just like other average Americans. In a *New York Times* editorial, Dirk Johnson (1993) presented the sentiments of many Americans with the words of Jan McCullough who stated "With Bush, you could look at him and see that here was a man who has always had money. He didn't know what it's like to live on \$1500.00 a month. But Bill Clinton has a different kind of background, and I think he understands people like me" (A13).

However, on January 20, 1993, William Clinton no longer stood before the American public as a presidential candidate. He now stood before the world as the President of the United States. As a result, Clinton's "people's candidate" rhetoric of the campaign trail would not suffice. He would have to become "all things to all people." The President would still have to speak for, and remain loyal to, the common people who elected him to the White House, but at the same time he must also speak for all of America - the rich and the poor - and also speak as a peer with other world leaders. Clinton's audience was now extremely diverse. Cornfield (1987) notes that "Presidents must satisfy the often dichotomized expectations of mass and elite audiences" (p. 462). Clinton's exigence is two fold. In the inaugural address, the President has to reaffirm to supporters that even though he is now in the White House, he will not abandon the common masses and will forever remain their candidate. Simultaneously, however, Clinton's speech has to include all of the pomp and circumstance expected by millions of television viewers around the world. The new president had to prove that he was cut from the character mold which the office he now held demanded. Clinton's dialogue must unite all the expectations of the occasion.

To understand how Clinton accomplished this task, the dialogic tools of Mikhail Bakhtin are extremely helpful. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, meaning roughly the dialectic voices present in language, serves as an excellent methodology for examining President Clinton's rhetoric and its effect.

Heteroglossia

For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is essentially the co-existence of dialects in language.¹ HopKins (1989) notes that for Bakhtin, "The notion of heteroglossia is central to understanding how an utterance can and must communicate meaning and values" (p. 201). This meaning and value of language are created by two opposing forces - centrifugal and centripetal. While centrifugal forces create change, centripetal forces create consistency. While centripetal forces create a "unitary language" found in social groups or professions and are closed to outside meanings, centrifugal forces create the uninterpreted process of decentralization and disunification (271).² Since most language changes with each individual and in every situation, human discourse is subject to engage centrifugal force, which creates heteroglossia.

Heteroglossia can be catalogued into various groups. Among them are "social dialects, languages of authorities, languages of generations and age groups, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day - even of the hour, and oratory." In particular, Bakhtin notes that "each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphasis" (262-263). From the stratification of these categories, or heteroglossia, meaning emerges. HopKins (1989) notes that "Every utterance, indeed every word, affects and is affected by all the language strata against which it is always juxtaposed, with which it is always in dialogue. For Bakhtin, this juxtaposition, this interaction of strata in dialogue with one another, not any single utterance, is the source of meaning" (p. 201). As language is juxtaposed and meaning created, each word affects and is affected by every other word. HopKins further notes that "Bakhtin is especially interested in the 'ideologemes' that constitute language, the fact that all language embodies value systems. One of the effects of heteroglossia is that when various dialects - social, political, historical, individual - come together, in dialogue with one another, each dialect is forced to expose its embedded values. In this meeting of dialects, not merely the surface strata of the words but the subtext of values and attitude assert this nature, establish their meanings, become clear in the 'intersection'" (p. 208).

One method of identifying heteroglossia is through character zones. In a character zone, "The speech of another is introduced into the author's discourse in 'concealed form,' that is, without any of the 'formal' markers usually accompanying such speech" (303). The speech style does not belong to the speaker, but is masked in order to create the illusion that the person speaking is the person being mimicked. When this happens, the speaker is said to be in the borrowed speaker's "zone."

An additional concept of Bakhtin's is the notion of chronotopes which involves literally a "time-space" relationship. Michael Holquist³ defines

a chronotope as "A unit of analysis for studying texts that according to the nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented. The distinctiveness of this concept as opposed to most other uses of time and space in literary analysis lies in the fact that neither category is privileged; they are utterly interdependent" (p. 425). Various events or activities by the nature of their existence demand or require certain words, languages, or speeches.

The notion of refraction is an additional valuable concept of Bakhtin. Holquist notes that "The prose writer's intentions are of necessity 'refracted' at various angles through already claimed territory...Every word is like a ray of light on a trajectory to both an object and a receiver. Both paths are strewn with previous claims that slow up, distort, refract the intention of the word" (p. 432) In order for a person to accomplish a desired narrative, she may have to engage in words or language which are refracted - or from another character.

Inaugural as Performance

Cheatham (1975) notes that "A Presidential inaugural address is founded in tradition rather than in law" (p. 192). The United States Constitution does not require the President to deliver a speech on Inauguration Day. The President is only required to take a thirty-five word oath. As a result, researchers such as Commager (1949) argue that "the inaugural address itself is but a product of custom and tradition" (p. 11). The inaugural as a tradition has created several identifiable patterns and themes in inaugural addresses.⁴ As a result, the tradition has become a valuable ritual in American culture. Finkelstein (1981) notes that "Rituals are commonly accepted by anthropologists to have significant functional value in society" (p. 53). The value of the inaugural is that it serves as a source of reification for the American public (Hart 1982). The candidate becomes the President by the performance of a ritual which requires certain behavior and discourse. This functional view of rhetoric is consistent with Fisher's (1970) concept of rhetoric of affirmation and reaffirmation. Fisher notes that "Rhetorical discourse is advisory; it says how one should think, feel and act in a given case where certainty cannot be achieved" (p. 131). Because of the ritual of inaugural, all rhetoric must fulfill the appropriate role whether or not the communicator is comfortable with her required role. Fisher (1980) argues that "Social political roles are made through rhetorical performance...from involvement in such communications, one not only perceives what behaviors are required by a role, one also constructs the norms by which the enactment of a role can be evaluated" (p. 123).

For an individual such as Clinton, who campaigned as "the people's" candidate, the inaugural address would require a high degree of refraction. The chronotope of the inaugural demands a distinct time-space

relationship with certain behaviors required for all of the roles and specific language use required as well. Bakhtin argues that a day such as the inaugural "has its own vocabulary, its own emphasis" (p. 263). Clinton must perform the expected role of the day - that of acting and speaking as the President of the United States without sacrificing his "people's" Inaugural Address image.

Fisher (1980) identifies the challenge confronting Clinton when he argues "A president must not only be of us, by us, and for us, a president must also be perceived as above us - not so far...nor so close that we cannot identify. There must be a certain distance between the president and the people, a distance that is marked by mutual esteem, respect, and admiration" (p. 125). In order to "become all things to all people" Clinton has to speak as a representative of both the common and the elite.

In order to accomplish this task, the President intermingled several different "Persona Zones"⁵ throughout his speech. The term "Persona Zone" is created to identify Clinton's rhetoric because it best describes the different characters, or personas, which Clinton represents in his speech. Bakhtin's character zones identify stretches of narrative discourse that are "dual-voiced" which Clinton does not do in his speech. Instead, the President is "multi-voiced," speaking in ideological forms which are uncharacteristic of his speaking style. Clinton's "Persona Zones" serve as the centrifugal force in his language to create change and create heteroglossia. There are three "Persona Zones" which can be identified in the inaugural address.

Zone One: The "People's Candidate"

In his inaugural address, President Clinton could not forget Inaugural Address the common people whom he had worked so hard to identify with during his campaign and who elected him into office. This nurtured relationship had become essential for the President's ethos. Fisher (1980) notes the value of the type of relationship Clinton had developed by stating "the key to the ethos of Presidents is their conception of their relationship to the people, for in this conception lies their image of themselves" (p. 123-124). In order to maintain his ethos and his relationship with the people, Clinton must engage in a high degree of refraction. As a candidate, representing the "voice" of the people was easy. As President, however, Clinton is no longer a common person, but must still maintain a common "voice" in order to maintain his ethos.

In his inaugural address, President Clinton effectively maintains his common voice by speaking of issues and using language familiar to the common person. More importantly, Clinton also speaks directly to the members of his generation - the Baby-boomers.

The President speaks⁶ of "A new generation raised in the shadows of the cold war [who] assumes new responsibilities..." He notes that in order "...to renew America...we must do what no generation has had to

do before..." Current issues are confronted when Clinton speaks of "...the world AIDS crises...", "Today, as an old order passes, the new world is more free...communism has collapsed...", and "The brave Americans serving our nation today in the Persian Gulf and Somalia...", Most of these references are connected to issues which are indigenous to the baby boomer generation which constitute a majority of "average" Americans today. By addressing these issues, Clinton is connecting with "the people."

Clinton's campaign themes are present throughout the speech. The President revives numerous campaign pledges when he states, "But when most people are working harder for less, when others cannot work at all, when the cost of health care devastates families and threatens to bankrupt our enterprises great and small, when the fear of crime robs law abiding citizens of their freedom, and when millions of poor children cannot even imagine the lives we are calling them to lead, we have not made change our friend." Clinton's campaign cries of "service to country" are directly referred to when the President declares "My fellow Americans, you, too, must play your part in our renewal...I challenge a new generation of young Americans to a sense of service." Clinton further identifies with "the people" by stating "Let us resolve to reform politics so that power and privilege no longer shout down the voice of the people." This post-modern ideology calls for the continued loss of center. The subaltern voice is encouraged to continue to fight and rise above the system. The President engages in a rhetorical style which directly targets the common person.

Clinton's persona zone reflects the category Bakhtin refers to as "Languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even the hour," and "Languages of generations and age groups." The President spoke with an awareness of current concerns and as a person who is in touch with the people. This strategy allows Clinton to maintain his ties with "the people."

The success of Clinton's common person "voice" is evidenced in responses from the general public. In a *New York Times* editorial, Dirk Johnson (1993) notes Clinton's relationship with people by providing comments from individuals such as 24-year-old graphic designer Ann Frensley, who "beamed at the prospect of a new President 'who speaks the language of my generation. It feels like history is being made - like we're entering a new era'" (p. A13). In the same editorial, 47-year-old housing developer Arlen Hersherberger exclaims "Now I'm looking at a President who was in college with me, who was talking about the same things I was. It's like we're in charge now. It really is exciting" (p. A13). Columnist Thomas Friedman (1993) states of the new presidency that "It is a passing of power to the post-World War II generation" (A1), and

"It now gives way to a forty-something crowd who were born into politics during the idealistic, prosperous era of John F. Kennedy, but forged their identities singing along with Bob Dylan throughout the troublesome seasons of Vietnam, Watergate, and acid rain" (p. A14). When commenting on the inaugural address, Friedman further notes that "It was typical of the New Age political style that helped him [Clinton] win the highest office in the land" (p. A1). Many average Americans seem to feel a sort of kindred spirit with Clinton and will obviously expect him to reinforce this spirit whenever he speaks.

Zone Two: Mythic Heroes

Clinton could not identify with the masses and ignore the elite members of society in his address. The President must fulfill all of the requirements of his role in the inaugural including the need to identify himself as a stately President with all of the tradition and history that accompanies the office. Through the rhetorical act of the inauguration, Bill Clinton, common man from Arkansas, is able to become the President of the United States. Instantly, he holds the highest office in the country and becomes a world power figure. Medhurst (1977) explains the importance of this transformation by noting "that when probing the nature of the inauguration it is essential to realize that the entire ceremony is a rite of passage. As such, the initiation is the means by which a complete change in the novice's ontological status is realized" (p. 275). What was in essence profane moments earlier, becomes essentially sacred through the speech act. As Eliade (1959) notes "rites of initiation always present a cosmogonic valence" (p. 187). Medhurst develops Eliade's argument by explaining that "the cosmology of inauguration day...presents an entire world view replete with sacred events [Balls, parades], sacred shrines [Jefferson and Lincoln memorial, the White House], and sacred personages [President-Elect, Chief Justice]. All of these elements are symbolic in the sense that they represent people, places, or actions that are inextricably tied up with the birth of the nation" (p. 275). All of these elements work together to create a cosmogonic myth which turns the occasion into a sacred event and the President-Elect into a sacred person. Medhurst further notes that "one way in which the myth is reintegrated is by the recitation of the deeds or words of the mythic heroes. The great heroes of the Republic such as Washington, Jefferson, and Madison are continually reborn by virtue of their rhetorical reanimation" (p. 275).

The development of the cosmogonic myth contributes to the chronotope of the inaugural. By renewing the memories of the great heroes, the myth transcends time and space. Warner (1961) notes that "the maintenance of the identity of the dead is partly dependent on placing them in living time and space" (p. 163). The inaugural narrative must recognize this time-space relationship.

In his inaugural address, Clinton spoke in the persona zone of the mythic heroes by making several references during the speech to various famous and significant political figures from the past. When he refers to these individuals, Clinton makes little effort to distinguish whether the words he is speaking reflect his ideology or the ideology of the famous person. Clinton introduces, as Bakhtin argues, the "speech of another in concealed form." There are no markers to create a distinction. Bakhtin calls this a "double accented, double-styled hybrid construction" (304). In a hybrid construction zone, the utterance is grammatically created to imply a single speaker, when it actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two languages.

Early in the speech, Clinton makes a specific reference to George Washington as having taking the same oath that he had just taken. Clinton attempts to cover the reference by using the information as a way to compare the use of media in Washington's day (How slowly it traveled) and the use of media today (How fast it travels). The media transportation reference could have been made without introducing the narrative of George Washington having taken the same oath that Clinton just took. The reference not only revives George Washington as a hero, but identifies Clinton as being on par with Washington who remains quite heroic in American politics.

Later in the speech, Clinton borrows ideology from Thomas Jefferson. He states that "Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our nation we would need dramatic change from time to time." The President refers to Jefferson's name, but does not state whether or not he is directly quoting Jefferson. While the rhetoric is not reflective of Clinton's, the ideas are attributed to him without credit being given to Jefferson. Clinton is able to "claim" authority from Jefferson's ideology.

Shortly after the Jefferson statement, Clinton refers to the founders of the United States. Clinton places himself in the company of important people without ever indicating if the ideology belongs to him or if he is just reporting other people.

The President further extends the persona zone when he states "Let us resolve to make our government a place for what Franklin Roosevelt called bold, persistent experimentation, a government for our tomorrows, not our yesterdays." Clinton absorbs Roosevelt's rhetorical style without directly quoting Roosevelt. The boundary lines of ideological ownership are unclear.

By using Bakhtin's category of "Language of the authorities," Clinton not only revives the cosmogonic myth, but creates a "Mythic Heroes" persona zone. Clinton is able to place himself in respectable company. However, in so doing, he creates a persona which is contrary to his "people's candidate" image. Not all of the people with whom he associates

himself are common people. Washington, Jefferson, and the Founders are all wealthy elites. Washington was not even elected president by popular vote, he was selected by elite peers. Clinton places himself in a character zone of people who do not jog or stop at McDonald's for breakfast. This persona is an elitist, a ruler, a person who is focusing on governing and controlling. This new character is the type of person that most people around the world expect to see as President of the United States.

Clinton's association with the mythic heroes does not go unnoticed by the public. In a *New York Times* editorial, William Safire (1993) argues that one of the strengths of Clinton's address is the theme and that "He wanted to get the point across of a nation born again, subtly evoking Lincoln at Gettysburg, and the new man drove it home" (p. A25). Safire comments further on the historic resonance of the speech and notes that "He watered down Jefferson's relish for revolution as a taste for 'dramatic change', but his peroration's 'Let us begin' echoed John Kennedy's phrase, and his hopeful 'call to service' echoed Wilson's great inaugural peroration 'men's hopes call upon us.' The too brief FDR quotation - 'bold, persistent experimentation' - missed the moxie of the 1932 passage" (p. A25).

Despite the alleged success or failure of the references, it is essential that Clinton speaks in the persona zone of past great leaders. By reviving the cosmogonic myth through echoes of the discourse of past heroes, Clinton distinguishes himself as more than just a representative of "the people." Clinton is also an elite, a member of the group of people who are American role models. Fisher (1980) notes the importance of associating with this standard "In the matter of the Presidency, Abraham Lincoln serves as a role model for many citizens...as a principle standard by which citizens assess presidents. Others might choose Washington, Jefferson, or Kennedy" (p. 123). Clinton, ironically, revived all four of these mythic heroes in his inaugural address.

Zone Three: Eloquent Speakers

The President does more than just identify himself with the heroes of the past. Clinton also proves that he deserves the right to be associated with these past respected leaders by proving that he is cut from the same character mold as they are. He does this by speaking and acting in a presidential style. This style needs to be sophisticated and refined and must not reflect simple campaign rhetoric. A more sophisticated style of speaking is achieved with a greater dependence upon abstract language.

Finkelstein (1981) argues that in inaugural addresses, Presidents tend to have "a significantly higher generic use of figurative language, including metaphor and simile, reflecting a more highly abstract style. Metaphor...expresses meaning by implied or explicit comparison, not by

literal definition" (p. 57). Since an inaugural address must represent so many audiences - from the masses to the elite - the use of abstract language is vital. Finkelstein explains that "abstraction level is important because a more highly abstract style is open to a greater subjective interpretation by an audience" (p. 56). The use of abstract language, such as a metaphor, allows the reference to be "all things to all people." Any individual can attach whatever symbolism to the metaphor he wishes. Hayakawa (1978) defines this use of abstract language as "the relating of linguistic symbology to real things and happenings" (p. 168). Osborn (1967) elaborates upon the symbolic value of metaphor by noting that a metaphor can "permit a more precise focusing upon whatever values and motives are salient in society at a given time" (p. 126). A President can find no better place to engage in symbolic metaphor as a guide to shape the values of the country than in an inaugural address. President Clinton makes the most of his opportunity.

Clinton's inaugural address is built upon a metaphorical theme. In the beginning of the speech, Clinton incorporates a metaphor of the seasons into the text. The President states, "This ceremony is held in the depth of winter, but by the words we speak...we force the spring. A spring is reborn...." Osborn (1967) notes that in metaphor selection, "The cycle of the seasons is an aristocratic source, which provides specialized symbols for subjects at higher levels of abstraction for the consideration of sophisticated audiences" (p. 124). Clinton's choice of metaphor pays homage to a more sophisticated, elite audience.

A winter-spring metaphor has numerous meanings. Chronologically the ceremony is taking place in January - the dead of winter. Winter is often used poetically to symbolize death and spring often symbolizes birth. The Bush administration is dying while the new Clinton administration is being born. Obviously, merely speaking words cannot literally force the spring. But by taking the oath of office and presenting the inaugural address, the new administration has been born, thus the spring has arrived. Additionally, the spring metaphor represents the inauguration process as a whole. Medhurst (1977) comments that "the whole of the inaugural rite is a rhetoric of beginnings. In order to facilitate the move of the new leader [into power] the story of the beginning must be told" (p. 275). The metaphor of moving from winter to spring captures this inauguration process quite well.

The use of the seasonal cycles metaphor, which has a very high degree of stratification, reinforces the notion that Clinton is speaking in a different persona zone from the two previously identified zones. The President is speaking in a style which is uncharacteristic of the President.

The President used several other metaphors throughout the speech. He makes reference to "the engine of our renewal" to symbolize the need

to start the new administration and get moving. Clinton states that "Americans have forced the spring" to indicate that it is the public that put him in office and created the new administration. In closing, the President mentions that "From this joyful mountaintop of celebration we hear a call to service in the valley...." This metaphor has multiple meanings. Not only is the inaugural a big celebration, but it is taking place on capital "hill" with the audience seated below in a "valley." Thus the mountaintop metaphor is able to be interpreted both literally and figuratively.

While the use of metaphor in his inaugural address serves an immediate function of referencing the Clinton administration's new beginnings as well as the physical location of the inaugural, it also serves to create a new persona zone for the President. Clinton borrowed from Bakhtin's category of "social dialects." The figurative language which metaphors create is representative of the rhetorical style of former presidents. The "people's candidate" Bill Clinton, is now "President" Clinton and is speaking and acting as a President should. However, by engaging in this new persona zone, Clinton once more disassociates himself from the ideology which got him elected - being the "people's" choice. Presidents are not common people. They are eloquent speakers who have staffs to write their speeches for them. They are very special people. They are the elite. By trying to speak like a President and wax eloquent, Clinton leaves his "people's" persona zone, and enters an "elite eloquent speaker" zone.

Conclusion

Bill Clinton's heteroglottal inaugural address succeeds in allowing the President to speak to the many audiences confronting him on inauguration day. By using the three persona zones identified in this essay, Clinton is able to speak to members of both the masses and the elite and maintain the chronotope of the inaugural by reviving the cosmogonic myth. However, while his persona zones are multiple, the President's message is singular. The inaugural address just repeats Clinton's campaign ideology. Friedman (1993) notes that "While Mr. Clinton paid homage to many of the themes that won him the election - the need for renewal, health-care reform, economic revival, and political reform - his address was not an agenda for action, but rather another call to service" (A1). While ideology can win campaigns, it cannot carry a presidency. The candidate's ideology must turn to action once he occupies the White House.

Clinton's failure to provide the required action expected from a President is evidenced in his demise in public opinion polls. At the end of his first 100 days in office (April 26, 1993), President Clinton received only a 55% job approval rating from the American public. This is the

lowest 100 days rating of any elected president since such polling began with Dwight Eisenhower.⁷ Speaking in multiple persona zones may provide the appropriate narrative for an inaugural, but that type of narrative cannot sustain a presidency. It would appear that Clinton is going to have to find another narrative, perhaps his own narrative, if he is going to provide the expected action and achieve any type of increase in public popularity, not to mention re-election!

Notes

¹*Co-existing dialects* should not be confused with *co-existing languages*, or foreign languages, which is polyglossia.

²All references to Bakhtin are from his collection of essays *The Dialogic Imagination*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. All references to Bakhtin from here on out will be noted by only the page number from *D.I.*

³Michael Holquist provides a glossary of terms in Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* which he edited and assisted in the translation. The definition of chronotope provided here is from Holquist's glossary.

⁴Wolfarth (1961) isolated four major issues on which President's traditionally speak: Domestic issues, International Issues, American Traditions, and Others. Wolfarth also discovered that 21 presidents have concluded their addresses with a divine invocation. Finkelstein (1981) argues the existence of an inaugural genre composed of a distinct rhetorical situation and identifiable stylistic and substantive responses to that situation. Finkelstein's genre consists of three parts: 1) Perceived rhetorical situation; 2) Stylistic response; and 3) Thematisubstance. Ryan (1979) identified three rhetorical techniques in Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1st inaugural address to be the scapegoat technique, a military metaphor, and the carrot-and-stick technique. Yeager (1974) discovered a linguistic genre of inaugural addresses. Medhurst (1977) argues that inaugural prayer has a ritualistic nature patterned after what Jamieson (1973) identifies as the presentness of the past. Cheatham (1975) even found that Gubernatorial inaugurals addresses to have consistent themes and patterns.

⁵The word "persona" is borrowed from Fisher (1980) who argues that "the presidency is an office and a role, an institution and a persona" (p. 119). Fisher further notes that "Persona is a symbolic construct in life and in literature. When applied to an actual person, such as a president, it denotes a characteristic style of action and is clearly a rhetorical interpretation, an instance of a real fiction. Persona, in a sense, is nearly synonymous with ethos. When used to refer to the implied author in literature, persona may be considered a real-fiction in that real persons not only interpret story characters, they also create the story teller, and these interpretations exert a significant force in the making of the message. In short, persona is a type of rhetorical fiction" (p. 121). Each time Clinton speaks in such a way as to represent a particular group of people, he engages in a rhetorical fiction which creates each new persona.

⁶*USA Today*, Wednesday, April 26, 1993, p. A1.

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