

Postposing in Selected Political Speech: A Pragma_syntactic Study

التأخير في خطاب سياسي مختار: دراسة تداولية نحوية



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Abstract

This paper studies the use and function of postposing strategies in ten extracts given by Barack Obama, the former US president. It investigates the syntactic and pragmatic roles of postposing in political speeches, as well as the role of sentence structure in the rhetorical and persuasive effects of speeches. The study aims to advance knowledge of how political figures use linguistic strategies such as postposing to convey their messages, especially in the context of modern political speech. The researcher adopts Quirk et al (1985) for the analysis of data. The results indicate that all identified structures are present within the selected data. Furthermore, it has been shown that amongst the four strategies, which are extraposition, existential construction, pseudo-cleft construction, and right dislocation, the most frequent one is the pseudo-cleft construction strategy.

Key words: postposing, pragmatics, political speech, Obama.

المستخلص

تدرس هذه الورقة البحثية استخدام ووظيفة استراتيجيات التأخير في عشرة مقتطفات من خطاب الرئيس الأمريكي السابق باراك أوباما. تبحث الدراسة عن الأدوار النحوية والتداولية للتأخير في الخطاب السياسية، فضلاً عن دور بنية الجملة في التأثيرات البلاغية والإقناعية للخطب. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تعزيز المعرفة بكيفية استخدام الشخصيات السياسية للاستراتيجيات اللغوية مثل التأخير لنقل رسائلهم وخاصة في سياق الخطاب السياسي الحديث. يتبنى الباحث نموذج كوريك وآخرون (1985) لتحليل البيانات. تشير النتائج إلى أن جميع الهياكل التي تم تحديدها موجودة داخل البيانات المختارة. علاوة على ذلك، فقد تبين أنه من بين الاستراتيجيات الأربعة وهي، الإزاحة، التركيب الوجودي، تركيب الجملة شبه الانشطارية والإزاحة إلى اليمين فإن الاستراتيجية الأكثر شيوعاً هي استراتيجية تركيب الجملة شبه الانشطارية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التأجيل، التداولية، الخطاب السياسي، أوباما.

1-Introduction

Postponing, as a syntactic and pragmatic phenomenon occurs when significant sentence components, like the subject, object, or complement, are purposefully delayed until the end of the sentence. In linguistics, this method is extensively researched, especially in the fields of syntax and discourse analysis, and frequently heightens attention, changes focus, or builds suspense. In political discourse, postposing is used to shift attention and direct the audience's understanding of important points. Postposing is a technique used in that enables speakers to highlight and impact the way their message is understood by placing significant or resounding information at the conclusion of a phrase. This strategy is used in Barack Obama's speeches to draw attention to particular facets of his message, frequently strengthening the impact of important themes or establishing a narrative flow. Obama frequently uses pseudo-cleft constructs, for example, in which the sentence's object or complement is postponed, as in "What we need is a new approach," to emphasize the significance of the solution at the conclusion of the phrase. In political discourse, postposing has two functions, according to van Dijk (1997, p. 88): it can manage the audience's cognitive focus while framing issues by emphasizing particular concerns. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 204), these syntactic structures are crucial in determining the information structure of political rhetoric because they direct listeners to give priority to particular speech components. Key information can be purposefully delayed so that speakers like Obama can highlight their goals or solutions while reducing possible pushback or distractions. Postposing in political discourse is therefore a strategic tool in the pragmatic control of meaning rather than just a structural option.

2.Pragmatics

The diverse definitions of pragmatics found in scholarly literature highlight the importance of context for achieving a meaningful interpretation of language in practice. According to Leech (1983: 6), pragmatics is the meaning in relation to a language user or speaker. This perspective positions pragmatics as a theoretical framework focused on the appropriateness of discourse.



In this respect, Pragmatics is the study of the connections between language forms and their users (Yule ,1996: 4). He outlines four interconnected dimensions that define the scope of pragmatics: the study of what speakers mean; the study of meaning in context; the study of how extra meaning is communicated beyond what is said; and the study of how we express distance. Therefore, Pragmatists focus on the participants in communication, the context, the implicit meanings conveyed, and their implications within discourse.

In addition, According to Mey (2001: 6), pragmatics examines how language is used in human communication in light of societal norms. Pragmatics and syntax are closely related, The study of the arrangement of words and phrases to create cohesive statements. Specific syntactic constructions can provide valuable insights into the pragmatic implications of statements, as exemplified by the phenomenon of postposing.

3-Postposing: Definition and Its Strategies

Postposing is relocating the element of a clause from its standard position to a position closer to the end of the clause. Birner and Ward (2001:166) suggest that postposing constructions are those syntactic constructions in which some argument of the verb seems to be at the right of its conventional position. Postposing constructions refer to syntactic structures where an argument of the verb is positioned to the right of its standard location. These constructions serve to introduce new information in a position following the verb. when the standard word order would place new information in the subject position , postposing provides an alternative by positioning it towards the end of the clause, which is the anticipated location for new information (ibid).

According to Quirk et al. (1985:1357), postposing is used to give the postposed part an end-focus. Extraposition, right dislocation, existential constructions, and pseudo-cleft constructions are the general postposing techniques used in English. These strategies are clarified as follows:



1. Extraposition

This term is used in the analysis of grammar to refer to the moving or extraposing of an element from its normal position to a position at or near the last part of the sentence. Extraposition, as described by Ward and Biner (2006: 166), refers to the process whereby “a subordinate clause is moved from its original position as the subject, with the subject position being occupied by the non-referential pronoun it”. The strategy of extraposition is illustrated in the example (b) below as a counterpart to the canonical clause in (a):

a. "That a bloodthirsty, cruel capitalist should be such a graceful fellow was a shock to me".

b. "It was a shock to me that a bloodthirsty, cruel capitalist should be such a graceful fellow".

2. Pseudo-cleft construction

The pseudo-cleft construction is appropriate in situations where the information is already known or expected. This construction creates suspense by holding onto the targeted element until the clause's conclusion. According to Quirk et al. (1985:1389), pseudo-cleft creation is a system that clearly distinguishes between what is new and what is given in clausal information. As demonstrated in the example below, the provided information is presented with an initial wh-phrase, and the additional information is placed at the end and connected to the provided information with an auxiliary verb:

-What I love is watching horror movies.

In the wh-cleft construction, new information is included at the end of the sentence. as opposed to the it-cleft construction, which inserts it after the auxiliary. as clarified in the previous example.

3-Existential Construction

This strategy is utilized to delay the introduction of a subject within a clause to a later position. This construction can be adjusted to prevent the clause from commencing with new information. Consequently, It prepares the recipient or recipients to receive the most important information in the clause by alerting them that it will come after



the phrase "there is." By postponing the appearance of the topic "dog" after "there is," the following example promotes focus.

There is a dog in the garden.

According to Quirk(1985:1403) Existential sentences are primarily those that start with the unstressed word "there." They get their name from the fact that the clause reflects the idea of existence when an unstressed "there" is followed by a form of the verb "be."

- There is nothing more delightful than achieving the aims.

The existential-there construction is classified as a non-canonical structure, as it entails alterations in word order, which serves as a strategy employed for pragmatic objectives. It maintains the concept of end focus or end weight. The existential construction 'there' positions the information that is hearer-new at the conclusion of the structure.

4.Right-dislocation

The construction of right-dislocation include moving an element from its original location to be in the last part of the clause and replacing it with a coreferential pronoun in its initial place. Quirk et al. (1985: 1310) refer to this type of construction as "postponed identification" This construction is distinct from extraposition as it allows pronouns other than "it" to be used, and a comma marks it apart from the other parts of the clause. as in the following example:

-He is talkative, my classmate John.

4.The Model of Analysis

To accomplish the goals of the current paper, Quirk et al. (1985) model has been utilized for analyzing the data in question, by focusing on the non-canonical structure patterns and how they are used in the discourse to convey information. The study is based on instances derived from press conferences held for President Barack Obama in the United States. The selection of political discourse aims to explore the impact of political divergences on the language employed in the creation of implicatures and the formation of inferences through diverse



syntactic structures. This model is primarily based on the work of Quirk et al. (1985).

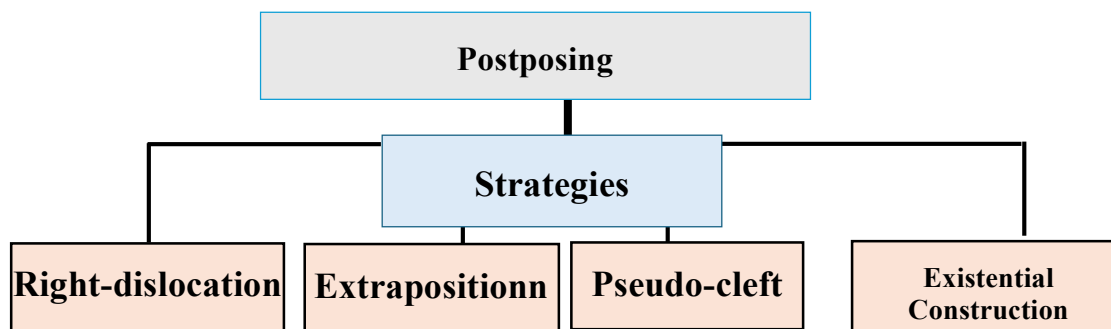


Figure (1) A Model of Analysis primarily based on Quirk et al. (1985).

Data Analysis

The following extracts are chosen from Obama's speeches to illustrate the strategies set by Quirk's model.

Speech No. (1)

"What's stopped us from meeting these challenges is not the absence of sound policies and sensible plans. What's stopped us is the failure of leadership, the smallness of our politics - the ease with which we're distracted by the petty and trivial, our chronic avoidance of tough decisions, our preference for scoring cheap political points instead of rolling up our sleeves and building a working consensus to tackle big problems".

In the abovementioned extract, Postposing through a pseudo-cleft structure is used in to draw attention to the reasons why difficulties are not being addressed. "What's stopped us from meeting these challenges" allows the focus to initially be on the idea of challenges by delaying the subject what has caused the failure until the end of the sentence. The cause ("the failure of leadership, the smallness of our politics...") is placed after the issue to highlight the detrimental effects of political dysfunction and leadership failure. The focus is successfully shifted to the internal issues that have impeded progress by this



postponement, which initially highlights the external difficulty before revealing that the true problem is with the internal dynamics of governance.

Extract No. (2)

"Addressing any one of these challenges is a tall order. Addressing all of them at once is a monumental task. But that's what the dedicated men and women of the Department of Homeland Security do every day. And today I'm proud to announce my choice to lead them -- an outstanding public servant who I've known and trusted for years -- Mr. Jeh Johnson".

In the following extract " I'm proud to announce my choice to lead them -- an outstanding public servant who I've known and trusted for years -- Mr. Jeh Johnson" , right dislocation strategy in President Obama's speech is used. Here, a major sentence is followed by other details regarding the topic to form the structure. The action is presented first in the main sentence, " I'm proud to announce my choice ," and Johnson's qualities are explained in the postposed information, "an outstanding public servant who I've known and trusted for years." By emphasizing the announcement before presenting the nominee, this design builds suspense and strengthens the statement's effect. The pronoun "who" links the subject "(Jeh Johnson)" to the noun phrase's description, emphasizing the speaker's personal trust as well as his qualifications. In addition to making the topic more understandable, this skillful use of proper dislocation strengthens the speech's argumentative qualities.



Extract No. (3)

"I do worry that Republicans, but also some Democrats, may think that we've got a bunch of other rabbits in our hat. There comes a point in which, if the Treasury cannot hold auctions to sell Treasury bills, we do not have enough money coming in to pay all our bills on time. It's very straightforward. And I know there's been some discussion, for example, about my powers under the 14th Amendment to go ahead and ignore the debt ceiling law".

In this extract, Obama, the American president employs an existential construction with "there" as exemplified in the following clause: "There comes a point in which, if the Treasury cannot hold auctions to sell Treasury bills, we do not have enough money coming in to pay all our bills on time." to create background and highlight the seriousness of the situation by postposing the delivery of the crucial point, which is the possibility of a fiscal catastrophe. In order to stress the issue's inevitable nature while keeping a measured delivery, the speaker uses this technique to change the focus from a direct assertion to a more neutral, anticipatory tone. This strategy also sets up the explanation that follows by drawing the listener's focus to the ultimate result. Through progressive information organization, this strategy improves rhetorical effect.

Extract No. (4)

"And what we have to do is it to create a positive cycle where people become more confident, the markets settle down, and they have the time and the space to execute the kinds of structural reforms that not only Europe, but all of us are having to go through, in balancing the need for growth, but also dealing with issues like debt and deficits"

The phrase "what we have to do is it to create a positive cycle" is a pseudo-cleft construction that President Obama employs to highlight the main concept by placing it at the end of the sentence. This syntactic technique delays the suggested answer for emphasis, highlighting its significance establishing a positive cycle. The audience is steered to concentrate on the solution as the most important takeaway by this structure, which



pragmatically first defines the larger context of difficulties (such as market stability and structural reforms) before providing the answer. This strategy improves the rhetorical impact by influencing the audience's interpretation and prioritization of the main point in addition to structuring the speech for clarity

Extract No. (5)

"I have a range of outstanding candidates. You've mentioned two of them. Mr. Summers, and Mr. Yellen -- Ms. Yellen -- and they're both terrific people".

As what is mentioned in the extract above, The phrase "Mr. Summers and Mr. Yellen -- Ms. Yellen" is coreferential with the pronoun "them" and is shifted to the right of its canonical position. The dislocated element could also be partial. The pro-form 'them' means some people including Mr. Summers and Mr. Yellen, not only Mr. Summers and Mr. Yellen. President Obama, in that example, is talking about a choice he is going to make for the next Federal Reserve chairman, and there are a number of candidates for that position. The names of two candidates have been mentioned by the journalist. In his response, the president uses right dislocation. This right dislocation can be seen as a conventional implicature, as the speaker may want to communicate some extra meaning, i.e. to convey emotive meaning. As the journalist has already mentioned the names, therefore, they are not discourse new entities. With this right dislocation the president seems to transmit certain feeling of camaraderie or a stronger relationship with hearer, either the journalist or the candidates.

Extract No. (6)

"And so what I've encouraged them to do is to lay out a framework for where they want to go in increasing European integration, in resolving the financial pressures that are on sovereign countries"

As for this extract (6), a potential inference that the listener may derive from the wh-cleft construction is the suggested notion of exclusivity, specifically regarding the exclusivity and affirmation of the matter to which President Obama is urging the European nations. The



implicature present here pertains to his particular encouragement to establish a framework. His speech conveys a palpable sense of confidence. Such inferences would likely not arise had the speaker opted for the standard version.

Extract No. (7)

"If you start seeing the various groups inside of Iraq simply go to their respective corners, then it is almost certain that Baghdad and the central government will not be able to control huge chunks of their own country".

Concerning this extract, Barack Obama uses extraposition as a postposing technique to highlight the ongoing consequences of a fragmented Iraq. The aim of the postposition "then it is almost certain" is to draw attention to the preceding condition, "If you start seeing the various groups inside of Iraq simply go to their respective corners." Obama highlights the possible conclusion and makes it seem more likely and significant by placing the main point that Baghdad will undoubtedly lose control at the end of the phrase. The logical flow of events is also made clearer by the postposed construction. Obama makes sure the audience comprehends the cause (the disintegration of Iraq) before the effect (loss of control) by putting the information about Baghdad's loss of control in the second section of the sentence. This arrangement supports the idea that Iraq's fragmentation is a direct threat to stability and national unity rather than only being a possibility.

Extract No. (8)

"And I think that there are certain procedures that both the FBI follow, or DOJ follow, when they're involved in these investigations. That's traditionally been how we view things, in part because people are innocent until proven guilty, and we want to make sure that we don't pre-judge these kinds of situations".

By employing the phrase "certain procedures", it represents the hearer-new information. To maintain the principle of end focus and to present this information after the verb, the speaker employs an existential "there" construction. This particular construction serves to emphasize the new information. The implementation of this construction may prompt the hearer to deduce that the FBI would adhere to their own procedures.



Extract No. (9)

"So tonight, I return to speak to all of you about an issue that is central to that future -- and that is the issue of health care. I am not the first President to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last".

The use of right dislocation by placing the phrase "to be the last" at the conclusion serves to emphasize Obama's unwavering dedication to healthcare reform, thereby reinforcing his intention to resolve this matter. The introductory segment of the sentence offers historical context, enabling the audience to grasp the importance of his resolve. This assertion illustrates Obama's commitment to tackling a persistent issue within American politics. It aims to garner support for his healthcare initiatives and underscores the necessity of achieving enduring change.

Extract No. (10)

"What is demanded, then, is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility -- a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task".

The phrase "What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility" can be reformulated in a pseudo-cleft structure as "What is required of us now is what a new era of responsibility involves ." This rephrasing highlights the immediacy and importance of the responsibility being advocated. Employing this structure clarifies the essential actions he deems necessary for the nation at that time, rendering the message both clear and powerful. By presenting it in this manner, Obama emphasizes the shared obligation of both the American populace and their leaders, promoting a sense of communal responsibility. This assertion aims to galvanize the audience by stressing that each individual has a part to play in shaping the future, thereby encouraging active engagement and dedication to common objectives.

Results and Discussion

The research results demonstrate that Obama, the former president of the United States, uses unconventional linguistic constructions,



especially postposing which includes extraposition, pseudo-cleft constructions, existential constructions, and right dislocation. The table below demonstrates that in the speeches of Obama , he primarily uses the pseudo-clefting strategy . It has the highest mounting rate (40) among other strategies. (40 %) among other strategies. Other strategies like existential 'there' scores (20%), Right Dislocation achieves)30%) , and the last strategy which is Extraposition ranks the lowest level and scores(10% .percentage).

No.	Type of strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Extraposition	1	10%
2	Pseudo-cleft	4	40%
3	Existential 'There'	2	20%
4	Right Dislocation	3	30%

Pseudo-cleft refers to a linguistic process that alters the order of words within a sentence, typically by fronting a specific word or phrase. This fronting entails repositioning a word or phrase to the beginning of the sentence to enhance its emphasis. Pseudo-cleft constructions, or sentences, serve as grammatical tools that allow the speaker to emphasize specific elements within a sentence. These constructions elevate the importance of one particular segment, known as the clefted constituent, in comparison to others. In English, this emphasis is achieved through a process referred to as "movement." The concept of movement implies that a phrase can be placed in a distinctive position to enhance its prominence within the sentence. This shows that Obama resorts to this strategy in his inaugural speeches to emphasize his ideas and beliefs to his audience

Conclusion

The study concludes that politicians use different strategies in their speeches to achieve their aims, such as convincing their people. According to quantitative analysis, it has been shown that various postposing strategies are employed which are extraposition, existential construction, pseudo-cleft construction, and right dislocation. Among these strategies, the most frequently utilized is pseudo-cleft construction, while extraposition is the least used one.



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