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A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF COHESIVE DEVICES IN KIM JONG UN'S INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the cohesive devices in President Kim's independence speech in order to uncover how language operates as a tool of ideological persuasion and nationalistic reinforcement in authoritarian political discourse. Drawing from Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework of cohesion, the research identifies the most recurrent cohesive strategies – such as reference, conjunction, repetition and lexical collocation – and examines their rhetorical and ideological functions. Through a qualitative and descriptive approach, the study reveals that cohesive devices in the speech are not merely structural elements ensuring textual unity but deliberate rhetorical choices used to project ideological clarity, emotional intensity, and leadership authority. Features such as collective pronouns ('we', 'our'), ideological repetition ('self-reliance', 'sovereignty'), and emotive adjectives ('heroic', 'glorious') are systematically employed to foster solidarity, moral legitimacy, and resistance to external forces. The speech's cohesive structure also supports a temporal and symbolic narrative of national struggle and future promise, aligning the speaker with both historical legacy and visionary leadership. By analysing these stylistic choices, the study contributes to political stylistics and critical discourse analysis, particularly in the context of high-control regimes. It argues that cohesion, beyond its linguistic utility, serves as a powerful ideological strategy for constructing collective identity and maintaining political continuity in North Korean rhetoric.

Keywords: Cohesion, President Kim Jong Un, political stylistics, rhetorical analysis, ideology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language has long served as one of the most potent instruments of political power, particularly in contexts where leadership depends on ideological unanimity, historical myth-making, and controlled narrative. In political discourse, particularly within authoritarian regimes, speeches delivered by state leaders function not only as expressions of governance but as powerful rhetorical tools for reinforcing ideological doctrines and asserting political legitimacy. The case of Kim Jong Un, Supreme Leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), offers a compelling instance of how political rhetoric is stylistically engineered to promote national identity, affirm revolutionary struggle, and sustain the regime's ideological continuity. Among the many features that enable the persuasive and ideological power of such speeches, **cohesive devices** stand out as crucial linguistic instruments for organizing thought, ensuring textual unity, and directing interpretation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

The cohesive devices, which mean lexical and grammatical patterns that cohere various components of a text, are not only a means to promote understanding but also the key stylistic and persuasive element in the political speech. The taxonomy of cohesion by Halliday and Hasan (1976) provides five key categories, namely, reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. These categories are of both a structural and rhetorical nature, and it is the existence of these categories that lends political speeches their clarity, rhythmic flow, and persuasive strength. Especially in the ideology-saturated speeches, like Independence Day speeches, the leaders can use them to list the national values, create a sense of cohesion with the audience, and style them with some variation of the same ideological motifs. A recurring reference to inclusive pronouns (we, our), emotional adjectives (heroic, glorious), and ideological catchphrases (self-reliance, sovereignty) is not a random element but a conscious decision to awaken the right response in the hearts of people and arouse a collective feeling of the unity of destinies (Fairclough, 2001; Lee, 2021).

Presidential addresses are not merely ceremonial speeches in the North Korean situation but ideological performances. They express the ideals of Juche (self-reliance) and Songun (military-first policy), and they are imbued with the mythologized images of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Collins (2017) states that the characteristics of the speeches of Kim Jong Un are the extreme repetition of the messages, the high level of ideological framing, and the collectivist rhetoric style that displays the combination of the present and continuity approach to history. In his speech on Independence Day, Kim takes advantage of the opportunity to point out the past achievements, honour the national endurance, and demonstrate the achievements of the future in terms of self-determination and power. With the help of stylistic consistency, such messages are not only conveyed; they become embedded. Ugoala & Israel (2020: 741) aver that the reason why the prominent characters such as the presidents of countries give public speeches is not in vain.

Although the rhetoric of Kim Jong Un is an important issue, there is a limited number of studies examining the rhetoric of the leader with regard to its stylistic aspects in general and cohesion-related concerns in particular. This article addresses that gap by offering a stylistic analysis of **cohesive devices** in Kim Jong Un's **Independence Day speech**, with particular attention to how these linguistic features support ideological communication and persuasive clarity. By drawing on Halliday and Hasan's theory of cohesion, the study analyses how reference, conjunction, repetition, and adjectives function within the speech to organize its themes and emphasize nationalistic ideals.

This study aims to **analyse the stylistic use of cohesive devices** in Kim Jong Un's Independence Day address, with a focus on how such devices support the rhetorical objectives of the speech and reflect the broader ideological framework of the DPRK. In doing so, the article examines the mechanisms through which language becomes not only a vehicle for communication but also a tool for constructing and maintaining national ideology.
To guide the inquiry, two primary **objectives** are set:

1. To identify the predominant cohesive devices used in Kim Jong Un's Independence Day speech.
2. To analyse how these devices reinforce ideological messages and contribute to rhetorical unity in the speech.

   From these objectives, the following **research questions** are derived:

1. What types of cohesive devices are most frequently employed in Kim Jong Un's Independence Day speech?
2. How do these cohesive devices function to enhance the ideological coherence and persuasive power of the speech?

   By exploring these questions, the study contributes to the growing field of **political stylistics** and offers insight into how language is strategically manipulated in authoritarian discourse. Unlike spontaneous conversation, political speech is carefully scripted. Every pronoun, every repeated phrase, and every descriptive term is selected to serve a specific function—whether to evoke emotion, assert power, or align the speaker with national history. In such speeches, cohesion is not a background feature; it is a foregrounded strategy of control and persuasion.

   In sum, this article investigates the stylistic architecture of a single speech as a microcosm of North Korean ideological rhetoric. Through a systematic analysis of cohesive devices, it reveals how political language, even at the level of structure and form, operates as a tool for shaping collective identity and sustaining regime legitimacy. The findings will contribute not only to our understanding of Kim Jong Un's rhetorical style but also to broader discussions on how authoritarian regimes use language to engineer ideological conformity and political continuity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysis of political discourse has been one of the key issues of stylistics, discourse analysis, and sociolinguistics. Language, especially when in the control of political leaders, has more than a communicative role: it creates ideologies, defines public consciousness, and even maintains structures of power. The use of political speeches is all the more essential in authoritarian countries, where the freedom of speech is highly restricted and the state narratives play a central role in the lives of its people. Such speeches are not just the results of some kind of performative event; they are tools to enforce ideology, and they can be extremely carefully constructed, in the language sense. In line with this, the analysis of stylistic elements in the context of such discourse, such as the purpose of cohesion, has received more and more attention from scholars in the effort to comprehend the way in which language is used as the tool of control, persuasion, and identity achievement.

Cohesion is one of the fundamental aspects of the stylistic analysis defining the ways by which the text can be held together through linguistic means and be made coherent to the audience. A strong work on cohesion in English by Halliday and Hasan (1976) provides the typology of types of cohesion, and they divide cohesive devices into grammatical (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction) and lexical (repetition, synonymy, antonymy, collocation). The above gives sentences and clauses the ability to relate to one another in a meaningful way and gives both a structural and semantic connectedness. Although initially designed as the means of analysing general written texts, this framework has shown itself to be particularly suitable to use in political stylistics. By virtue, political speeches need to be coherent: they have to keep the interest of more varied viewers, the continuation of the theme unperturbed, and a unanimous rhetorical process. In that regard, cohesive devices in the political discourse are not an accidental trope; rather, there is a conscious choice to frame the stories that are persuasive and idea-heavy.

Additionally, the use of **reference devices**—particularly pronouns and demonstrative determiners—serves as a key tool in managing narrative cohesion and perspective. In their analysis of North Korean political discourse, Kearney and Black (2020) observe that Kim's use of pronominal reference is consistent with a broader ideological strategy aimed at framing the nation as a unified organism. By embedding the first-person plural pronoun within ideologically charged contexts, Kim not only includes the audience within his vision but also renders dissent inconceivable. Ugoala (2017: 201) submits that pronouns are key identifiers in sentences, and they form important class of linkages in sentences. The cohesive effect of these devices is thus both grammatical and ideological: they ensure the continuity of discourse while embedding it within the regime's moral and political worldview.

Lexical cohesion—another key component of Halliday and Hasan's model—is especially prominent in political speech due to its capacity to reinforce key themes through repetition and variation. Repetition, often considered a rhetorical flaw in other genres, is a deliberate and valued technique in political oratory. It functions to emphasize key values, create rhythm, and enhance memorability. Tannen (2019) argues that repetition in political speech not only aids comprehension but also constructs authority and urgency. In North Korean rhetoric, repetition is often deployed in triadic structures, such as "self-reliance, self-defence, and self-development," which reinforce ideological tenets and convey a sense of moral and political completeness. These triadic patterns are not unique to North Korea but are particularly significant in a context where state ideology must be constantly re-articulated and internalized by the populace.

Kim Jong Un's reliance on **ideological collocations**—words that frequently appear together within a specific political context—also contributes to lexical cohesion. Terms such as "revolution," "sovereignty," "imperialism," and "heroic" are frequently paired in fixed or semi-fixed expressions, creating a lexicon of ideological familiarity.

Another stylistic device contributing to cohesion is **parallelism**, especially in the form of syntactic repetition. Parallelism lends rhythm and balance to a speech, helping to underscore thematic points and aiding the audience's retention of key messages. It often manifests as repetition of syntactic structures, such as in sequences like: "We struggled, we endured, we triumphed." In North Korean political discourse, parallelism is often infused with ideological content, reinforcing the narrative of resistance and perseverance. Kim Jong Un frequently structures sentences with ideological sequencing, such as: "Our people fought imperialism, upheld the revolution, and safeguarded our independence." The cohesion achieved through such structures is not merely textual but also cognitive and emotional, guiding the listener through a linear progression of thought while reinforcing ideological loyalty.

Therefore, the study of cohesion in Kim Jong Un's Independence Day speech is not a purely linguistic endeavour—it is also a political and ideological one. By attending to how cohesive devices operate at the lexical and grammatical levels, scholars can gain deeper insights into how language sustains authoritarian power and shapes public consciousness. This understanding is particularly urgent in contexts where propaganda is not only pervasive but is often indistinguishable from everyday language, making the stylistic architecture of political speech a crucial site for critical inquiry.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in the principles of stylistic analysis. Stylistics, as a method of linguistic inquiry, combines insights from linguistics and literary criticism to examine how language is used in creative texts—particularly speeches—to convey meaning, evoke emotions, and achieve rhetorical goals.

The design of this study is descriptive and analytical, centring on the textual features of a selected speech. This approach enables a thorough exploration of the linguistic choices and stylistic devices employed by the speaker. The research does not involve surveys, experiments, or numerical data. Rather, it relies solely on the close reading and linguistic interpretation of a primary text.

A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the speech for analysis. The chosen speech meets several criteria: it is publicly available, delivered in English, contextually rich, and recognized for its rhetorical significance. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to select texts or cases that are information-rich and capable of yielding deep insights. The selected speech is one that has gained public attention, is thematically relevant, and demonstrates a wide range of stylistic features that make it suitable for detailed linguistic study. Data for the study consist of the written transcript of the selected speech, retrieved from an official or credible online source to ensure authenticity.

The analysis was guided by a multi-level stylistic model. At the phonological level, features like alliteration, assonance, and rhythm were examined to determine how sound patterns enhance memorability and emotional impact.

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this study provides a robust and systematic framework for examining the stylistic features of the selected speech. By integrating various levels of linguistic analysis, the study reveals how the speaker's use of language enhances the emotional, ideological, and rhetorical power of the message.

4. DATA PRESENTATION

In analysing Kim Jong Un's 2019 New Year Address, this study draws on selected excerpts that reflect the dominant stylistic patterns and ideological framing found throughout the speech. The address, delivered on January 1, 2019, functions as a state-sponsored rhetorical device aimed at reinforcing ideological unity, promoting economic self-reliance, and projecting national resilience. The following analysis is based on ten key excerpts drawn directly from the official English translation. Each excerpt is discussed in terms of its linguistic, rhetorical, and ideological relevance to the speech's overall purpose.

The slogan, *"Let us open a new road of advance for socialist construction under the uplifted banner of self-reliance!"* (p. 6), serves as a foundational motif of the address. Framed as an imperative and collective appeal, the use of "let us" draws on the inclusive plural pronoun to foster unity and shared responsibility. The metaphor "uplifted banner of self-reliance" elevates the concept of economic independence to a near-sacred ideal. It signals not merely an economic strategy, but a nationalistic and moral imperative

Another key passage states: *"Thanks to our people's indomitable fight against the challenge of injustice, our state's might of self-development has increased on a steady basis..."* (p. 4). The choice of descriptors— "indomitable fight" and "challenge of injustice"—constructs a narrative of moral struggle and perseverance. The syntactic structure gives emphasis to collective agency ("our people") as the catalyst for national success. The phrase "might of self-development" invokes strength and autonomy, suggesting that North Korea's development is not only ongoing but is internally generated and morally justified. Through this rhetorical framing, hardship is reinterpreted as valour, and isolation as ideological purity.

The speaker further notes: *"A greater development should be achieved in establishing the Juche orientation in the metallurgical and chemical industries..."* (p. 7). The reference to "Juche orientation" embeds the speech in a distinctly North Korean political lexicon. Juche, as a guiding ideology of self-dependence and political independence, is not merely cited but woven into technical economic discourse. By coupling ideological terminology with industrial sectors, the statement equates material production with ideological fulfilment. The

On page 6, Kim asserts: *"The whole country should render active ideological and spiritual, material and technical assistance to coal mines..."* The listing structure used here—pairing abstract with concrete nouns—emphasizes a multi-dimensional national responsibility. Ideological and spiritual support is placed on equal footing with material and technical assistance, reflecting a distinctively North Korean model of political participation, where emotional allegiance is as valued as economic contribution.

The phrase *"Comrades, through the struggle of last year... we have been convinced once again of the validity of our own cause..."* (p. 4) is anchored in collective memory and solidarity. The opening vocative "Comrades" activates a shared political identity rooted in socialist tradition. The construction "we have been convinced once again" implies that faith in the regime must be constantly renewed through hardship and success alike. By characterizing their national effort as a "struggle," and its outcome as proof of righteousness, the speech affirms the moral superiority of the state's goals.

In another excerpt, the conditional clause *"Only when coal is mass-produced can we resolve the problem of electricity..."* (p. 6) establishes causality in policy language. The clause highlights coal as the cornerstone of economic stability, reinforcing the regime's prioritization of industrial self-sufficiency. The syntactic inversion ("Only when... can we...") adds a layer of formality and emphasizes necessity over contingency.

Kim states: *"We should make proactive efforts to implement the tasks for the second stage of the forest restoration campaign..."* (p. 7), framing environmental recovery not just as policy, but as a staged national campaign. The phrase "second stage" suggests long-term planning and continuity, while "proactive efforts" echoes a broader ideological emphasis on initiative. The modal verb "should" convey both obligation and shared responsibility, fitting within the broader discourse of mobilization.

Another notable statement reads: *"Let us usher in a heyday of peace, prosperity and reunification of the Korean peninsula..."* (p. 9). The tricolon— "peace, prosperity and reunification"—is a

classic rhetorical technique that delivers balance and rhythm, while reinforcing ideological objectives. This clause serves both as a future vision and a collective responsibility.

Finally, Kim declares: *"We will never tolerate the interference and intervention of outside forces who stand in the way of national reconciliation..."* (p. 10). This sentence is one of the most assertive in tone. The verb "never tolerate" reflects firm resistance, while "interference and intervention" are loaded terms that frame external actors as threats. By constructing national reconciliation as an internal affair, the speaker reclaims discursive ownership of peace and reunification. The sentence functions as both a boundary-setting act and a reaffirmation of sovereignty, underscoring how stylistic intensity is used to fortify nationalistic positioning.

Discussion

In respect to Research Question 1, which seeks to examine the dominant stylistic features employed in Kim Jong Un's 2019 New Year Address, the findings reveal a consistent deployment of ideological repetition, metaphorical imagery, syntactic parallelism, and collective pronouns. These stylistic strategies are instrumental in reinforcing the ideological thrust of the speech, namely self-reliance, unity, and sovereignty. The speech is dense with emblematic phrases such as "under the uplifted banner of self-reliance" and "our people's indomitable fight," which reflect both ideological fervour and rhetorical calculation.

This observation aligns with the findings of **Ugoala (2022)**, who examined President Vladimir Putin's use of "flaming devices" in his pre-invasion speech in February 2022. Ugoala's study noted that metaphoric and emotive language served to legitimize pre-emptive military action, intensify nationalism, and justify sovereign aggression under the guise of moral righteousness. Similarly, in Kim Jong Un's address, ideological metaphors such as "the treasured sword of self-reliance" and "revolutionary upsurge" are deployed not merely as embellishments but as instruments of psychological mobilization.

Moreover, in both cases, the use of **deictic expressions** such as "we," "our," and "this year" situates the speaker and the audience within a shared moral and political trajectory. This practice is reflective of what **Chilton and Schäffner (2002)** refer to as "discourse space" in political linguistics, where language constructs a symbolic geography of 'us versus them' and a temporal urgency tied to national destiny. In the North Korean context, this is visible in the persistent use of time-sensitive imperatives such as "let us open a new road of advance" and "usher in a heyday of peace," which serve to anchor ideological expectations in the immediate present while pointing toward a utopian future.

In respect to Research Question 2, which investigates how these stylistic features reflect ideological orientation and political intention, the analysis suggests that the language of the address is inseparable from the regime's political project. The emphasis on *Juche* ideology, economic self-sufficiency, and anti-external rhetoric functions not only as policy advocacy but as ideological reinforcement. The speech positions economic development and national survival within a moral framework of loyalty, resistance, and duty. This is particularly evident in passages such as, *"We will never tolerate the interference and intervention of outside forces who stand in the way of national reconciliation"* (p. 10), where the syntactic force and lexical choices amplify the theme of defiant nationalism.

A comparative insight can be drawn from **Charteris-Black (2014)**, who in *Analysing Political Speeches* emphasized the ideological function of metaphor and repetition in shaping national myths and political narratives. The metaphor of national restoration, central in Kim's address, echoes similar patterns seen in other authoritarian or revolutionary rhetorics. For instance, Charteris-Black identified how metaphors like "economic rebirth" or "moral decline" in Western populist speeches function to both diagnose and prescribe social transformation under central authority. In the North Korean context, these metaphors are intensified by historical memory and the rhetoric of military and economic siege, making the ideological function of stylistic features even more pronounced.

In a more contextual perspective, **Kwon and Chung (2012)** argue that North Korean political discourse traditionally blurs the boundary between governance and religious reverence, constructing the leader not just as a political figure but as a semi-divine authority. The stylistic grandeur in Kim Jong Un's speech—manifest in hyperbolic expressions such as *"feats that will shine brilliantly in the history of our country"*—functions within this tradition. The cumulative effect is the sacralization of leadership and the moralization of national policy, further deepening the fusion of political ideology and linguistic strategy.

In sum, the stylistic features identified in Kim Jong Un's 2019 address—especially metaphor, pronoun usage, rhetorical repetition, and imperative tone—are not randomly selected but deliberately employed to perform ideological work. They serve to create a linguistic atmosphere of unity, to cast external pressures as antagonistic forces, and to reinforce the authority of the state as the guardian of collective hope. These findings corroborate previous studies on political language and contribute to the broader understanding of how language is used in autocratic contexts to construct, maintain, and perform power.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the stylistic features employed in Kim Jong Un's 2019 New Year Address and how those features reflect ideological orientation and political intention. Through a qualitative stylistic analysis, it became evident that the speech was carefully constructed with linguistic choices that serve to reinforce the values of self-reliance, national unity, and resistance to foreign interference. Dominant stylistic features such as metaphor, repetition, modal verbs, collective pronouns, and syntactic foregrounding were not merely rhetorical flourishes, but deeply embedded tools of ideological expression and political legitimization.

The findings support earlier scholarship, such as Ugoala (2022), which emphasized the role of figurative and persuasive language in projecting authority and justifying political stances. Similarly, comparisons with works by Charteris-Black (2014) and Chilton and Schäffner (2002) confirm that stylistic features in political discourse are often strategically aligned with broader ideological and nationalistic narratives. In the North Korean context, such features are further amplified by a political culture where leadership is sacralised and language is used as a vehicle for shaping not just opinion, but identity and allegiance.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that future research into political discourse, particularly within authoritarian contexts, should pay closer attention to the intersection of language, ideology, and cultural history. Ugoala (2024: 75) avers that people's understanding

of linguistic utterances rests on an assumption of common ground that both the speaker and the hearer share. The assumption both reader writer and reader have almost the same amount of information on the semiotic resources used in communication.

Political communication in such regimes often transcends mere policy promotion; it performs ideological reinforcement, emotional manipulation, and the orchestration of collective consciousness. Scholars should consider longitudinal studies comparing multiple speeches over time to better understand shifts in rhetorical strategies as they respond to changing domestic or international conditions.

Another recommendation is for educators and analysts involved in political communication, linguistics, or international relations to adopt stylistic analysis as a methodological tool. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how language functions beyond its surface semantics, revealing deeper layers of intention and control embedded in political texts.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on political stylistics and critical discourse analysis by offering empirical insights from a non-Western, highly ideologized speech context. It reinforces the argument that stylistic analysis is a powerful tool for deconstructing how political authority is linguistically enacted and sustained. Practically, the study offers a framework for decoding the performative aspects of political leadership in state-controlled media, especially in nations where the media operates under strict government direction.

In conclusion, the stylistic devices in Kim Jong Un's 2019 address are not incidental but intentional instruments used to construct a political reality in which the state is central, the leader is revered, and the people are morally bound to the revolutionary cause. Understanding such linguistic mechanisms is essential for scholars, analysts, and diplomats who seek to interpret state messaging and ideological positioning in regimes where language is a fundamental tool of governance and control.

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