

Content Analysis as Rhetorical EEG of the Presidency

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Abstract

Electroencephalography (EEG) tracks voltage fluctuations resulting from ionic current flows within the neurons of the brain by recording electrical activity along the scalp to reveal what regions of the brain are involved in different mental processes. This chapter demonstrates how DICTION can be used to measure the fluctuations in the rhetoric in drafts of presidential speeches as they move through the White House speech drafting and review process. This chapter incorporates rhetorical analysis of 494 drafts of 67 presidential speeches gathered from the archives of administrations from Franklin Roosevelt to George H.W. Bush. Like the EEG, looking at the fluctuations in rhetorical scores may reveal exactly what the thoughts are in the process, but it can reveal how a speech's language changes over the course of the speechwriting process and help us unravel the mysteries of the inner working of this vital institution.

Content analysis as rhetorical EEG of the White House *

Introduction

*Big presidential speeches are constructed in the way the Romans built their temples: The major components are carved in workshops all over the site and then hoisted into place according to the architect's plans.
George W. Bush speechwriter David Frum (2003, 147)*

While the serene exterior of the White House has become one of the world's most reassuring symbols of American democracy, its inner workings involve a messy set of institutional, ideological, and personal clashes seldom seen by the people. Scholars often reinforce this image by talking about the presidency as a single institution and focus almost exclusively on the occupant of the Oval Office, occasionally acknowledging different perspectives from the other offices in the building but regarding such differences as aberrations caused by unhealthy personal ambitions or overworked political ideologies.

Paradoxically, the story behind speeches, the presidency's most public function, may provide the best window into institutional politics hidden within the White House. In fact, speechwriting may present the best opportunity for studying inner workings of the presidency for several reasons. First, it is a waypoint for every kind of policy that finds its way to the president's desk. Jeff Tulis has described the speechwriting office as "an institutional locus of policy making in the White House, not merely an annex to policymaking" (1987, 185). While policy advising has increasingly become specialized and segmented, almost every presidential decision involves some kind of speech or formal message that will pass through the speechwriting office. Speechwriters seldom decide public policy or political strategy (with notable exceptions like Ted Sorensen and Mike Gerson), but they work closely with policy and political advisors on every type of presidential decision. The speech clearance process brings the full range of political and institutional interests that roam the Executive Branch to the editing table much like a watering hole draws many exotic species to one location. Speechwriters often become, in the words of one Reagan

speechwriter, “the referee among warring factions” (Muir, 1992, 34) and the internal debates they mediate reveal a great deal.

In addition, the centrality of speeches to the power of the modern presidency means that the speechwriting process is as important to scholars and the public as it is to those inside the White House. As Nixon speechwriter Will Sparks mused, “Now that nudity has taken over the stage, politics is the sole remaining branch of show business where importance is still attached to the spoken word.” (1971, 49) The struggle between the president and his opponents is often termed a “war of words” and presidential statements are analyzed, repeated and sometimes carved into stone. There is little doubt that speeches become a primary tool that citizens and scholar use to judge the historical legacy of a president. As Bradley Patterson (1988) put it, “Speeches and statements are the testament of each presidency.” (198)

Finally, the paper trail that the speechwriting process can yield a rich data set because it requires that the White House commit specific idea to paper at different points in time. Thus, while many of the plans and principles of the presidency may never be fully articulated and recorded in some corners of the White House, the nature of the speechwriting leaves the remnants of deliberation in written drafts as a proposed speech takes form and moves from office to office. This trail of drafts traces the intellectual and political evolution of the administration’s deliberations and helps researchers to see differences between individuals and offices otherwise not recorded.

This chapter utilizes data from a larger study of presidential speechwriting that explores changes to drafts of presidential speeches from the archives of presidencies from Franklin Roosevelt to George H.W. Bush to construct a kind of crude rhetorical electroencephalograph designed to detect institutional fluctuations of the thinking within White House. Medical science uses electroencephalography (EEG) to track voltage fluctuations resulting from ionic current flows within the neurons of the brain by recording electrical activity along the scalp. Using this technique, researchers can learn what region of the brain is involved in different mental processes. In a similar fashion, this chapter introduces the use of changes in the rhetoric of presidential speech drafts to demonstrate that speeches change significantly over the course

of the process within the White House and that the presidency is best viewed as a collection of many offices with similar--but not identical--perspectives and goals, supporting Terry Moe's description of the institution as "a maze of supporting expectations and relations" (1985, 241). In fact, while the different perspectives within the White House walls are often relatively subtle, *DICTION* proves proficient at detecting differences in speech drafts that reveal significant disagreements within the presidency.

Studying speechwriting and clearance

What most people fail to realize is that making a major Presidential address is something akin to enacting a public law.

Ford Speechwriter Robert Hartmann (1980, 384)

Presidential speeches has become the central focus of both media coverage and scholarly treatments of the presidency. Whether talking about the "bully pulpit" or "going public" citizens, reporters, and scholars evaluate presidents based on their public performances and presidential speech has been the focus of some of the most influential books on the presidency. While Neustadt's classic Presidential Power did not focus exclusively on the public side of the presidency, it was clear that the public was an important target of what Neustadt described as the "power to persuade" and Neustadt labeled the president's ability to define issues and shape the agenda through speeches "merchandising." (1990, 83). Jeff Tulis argued in The Rhetorical Presidency (1987) that presidential appeals for public support have fundamentally transformed the office and undone the intention of the authors of the Constitution. In Going Public (1997), Sam Kernell made a similar claim and suggested that presidential appeals to the public have undermined the compromise and bargaining needed to make our representative democracy work well. Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro (2000) described presidents increasingly engaged in a strategy that they label "crafted speech" that has subtly undermined representation. While many scholars have accepted the assumption that rhetoric has dramatically transformed the presidency and the political system, George Edwards (2003) has offered evidence that the impact of presidential speech is often overstated. While his research has tempered some of the more extreme claims about the rhetorical presidency, it has done little to diminish interest in those speeches.

While presidential speeches have been the most visible component of president power for several decades, much less study has focused on their construction. Even as the White House press corps hangs on every presidential utterance, they usually show little interest in writers who helped draft those phrases. The coverage of the rest of the process focuses more on the personalities of a few star speechwriters than on the broader process. Some important scholarship on presidential speechwriting has come from several recent books. Martin Medhurst, notes in the introduction of his edited volume Presidential Speechwriting (2003), “Unfortunately, there is more than a little misunderstanding about presidential speechwriting and its role in the creation and shaping of presidential discourse” (4). While this book does a great deal to highlight the importance of speechwriting, by its nature the edited volume does not produce one clear picture of the speechwriting process and its evolution. Michael Nelson and Russell Riley (2010) brought together a variety of interesting perspectives and focused on some key speeches in The President’s Words, the nature of the volume invites a more comprehensive and systematic study of speechwriting across administrations. In White House Ghosts (2008), Robert Schlesinger chronicled the work of presidential speechwriters since Roosevelt and Carol Gelderman’s All the President’s Words (1997) offers some provocative insights from the perspective of a professor of English. In 1984, Roderick Hart used content analysis to analyze presidential rhetoric as well as where and when presidents speak as a tool for understanding the pre-eminence of presidential speech in our political system. Hart’s study has advanced our understanding of the shape of presidential rhetoric but did not focus on its origins.

Some of the most valuable contributions to the understanding of the White House speechwriting process in general have come from books by Karen Hult and Charles Walcott. While their studies do not focus exclusively on the White House, they include specific chapters on speechwriting. By framing the speechwriting process in the general functioning of the White House, Hult and Walcott effectively demonstrate the realities of a creative writing process that must survive within a politicized instructional structure. Additionally, in Spin Control John Maltese explores the machinery behind White House efforts to shape public opinion. While most scholars have been content to hypothesize about presidential power

from the outside, Maltese takes his view from inside the White House Office of Communications giving readers an understanding of the wide array of resources that the White House uses to shape public perceptions. While Spin Control (1994) contributes a great deal to our understanding of the public relations efforts in general, Maltese devotes his time to developing a picture of the organization of the White House communications strategy rather than the development of presidential messages. More recently, Justin Vaughn and José Villalobos looked at changes to veto announcements by George H. W. Bush. Their analysis found differences between the speechwriters and policy advisors, but their results were limited to one kind of speech under one president.

Thus, while presidential speeches have become the defining feature of the American presidency, scholars have not fully developed an understanding of the speechwriting process and its impact on presidential rhetoric. Further, while the connection between presidential rhetoric and presidential power makes the crafting of speeches significant on its own, we can also use the speechwriting process as a window for studying the functioning of the modern White House. As William Muir (1992), a speechwriter for Vice President Bush noted, “Within the quiet and the unity of the presidency, the circulation of a draft speech aroused strong-willed individuals. Those who knew what mattered in government converged on speeches.” (34). As Karen Hult and Charles Walcott (2004) point out, “presidential speeches can be catalysts for the formulation of public policy and political strategy, compelling presidents and their advisers to make policy decisions in order to be able to articulate them.” (154). Drafts of presidential addresses are often the first time specific positions are committed to paper and circulated throughout the administration. In cases where it does not start the policy process, it sometimes compels a final decision. George W. Bush’s communications director Karen Hughes noted that speechwriting “forces the policy decisions to be finalized” (Max, 2001, A32). Ideas may be tossed around by individuals and offices within the White House, but they do not become the position of the White House until uttered by the president. The significance of presidential phrasing goes beyond the response of the public because presidential speech plays an important role in the policy process as offices

throughout the government pour over presidential comments searching for an endorsement of their office's priorities. As Bradley Patterson (1988) eloquently puts it, "A slight verbal nuance could set hundreds of thousands applauding but may commit hundreds of millions in resources" (196). In addition, the speechwriting process itself can change policy ideas in the search for inspiring language. Franklin Roosevelt once took a pencil and raised the number of planes that he was calling for in a speech draft. When Harry Hopkins questioned why the President was now calling for production beyond what military and production advisors had given, Roosevelt remarked: "Oh, the production people can do it if they really try" (Rosenman 1952, 325).

Finally, the battles over lines in presidential speech in the White House may be a unique place to study White House politics because they involve the full array of personal, bureaucratic, interest group, and even geographic perspectives at play. Speeches relate to every major issue that comes before the presidency and the president seldom remains silent on any issue for very long. While they need to present a unified front to the outside world, these forces are free to debate among themselves inside the walls of the White House. While generally out of sight, these battles can be unearthed in the changes to drafts of presidential speeches stored in the archives.

The Speechwriting Process in the Modern White House

Presidents have been enjoying the help of others since George Washington read an inaugural address drafted with the assistance of James Madison. Judson Welliver, who served as the "literary clerk" and helped Calvin Coolidge with his speeches, is widely regarded as the first assistant who was focused on speechwriting. While former presidential speechwriters celebrate Welliver as the first of their breed by meeting periodically as the "Judson Welliver Society" to discuss their work, his role was not formally recognized at the time. According to former White House Usher Irvin "Ike" Hoover (1934), "there was no legal appropriation for his [the speechwriter's] salary. It was skimmed from here, there and everywhere. At one time it was taken from the fund for the payment of chauffeurs and the upkeep of the garage"(253). While early presidential speechwriters were not always hidden amongst the chauffeurs,

they functioned as “ghostwriters” who operated with a degree of secrecy and only gradually emerged from the shadows as the need for help with presidential speeches became more accepted. The Nixon administration would be the first to have an office openly dedicated specifically to speechwriting and the staff today has grown to include numerous speechwriters, fact checkers, and support staff.

The growing demand for more presidential speeches and the increased scrutiny on those words have driven the evolution of the speechwriting and review process. Writing almost a century ago, Calvin Coolidge (1929) worried: “Everything that the President does potentially at least is of such great importance that he must be constantly on guard” (216-217). Given the scrutiny that the president’s words will face once spoken, it is natural that the White House wanted to carefully consider them before they are spoken. One presidential speechwriter responded to complaints about the scripting of presidents: “Why can’t he just wing it? The answer is that everything the president says is engraved eternally in stone” (Humes, 1997, 5).

While presidential speechwriters have been relatively consistent fixture of the White House for almost a century, the circulation of speech drafts throughout the executive branch, a process often labeled “staffing,” has become more expansive and formalized since the 1970s. For example, during the Kennedy Administration, the circulation speech drafts would vary from speech to speech with the President deliberately avoiding departments where he expected to encounter resistance. In a draft of his remarks for the annual Gridiron Club Dinner, Kennedy pointedly joked, “This speech has not been submitted to the State Department for clearance... so I have been asked to announce that these views are not necessarily theirs - - which is all right, since their views are not always mine” (Sorensen, 1962, 2). The review process is not a routine clerical matter left to minor administration officials. While cabinet secretaries may leave the initial review of most speech drafts to assistants, the process often involves many of the most prominent figures in the executive branch battling over speech language. Ronald Reagan’s famous June 1987 speech at the Brandenburg Gate generated a great deal of debate within the administration with both Deputy National Security Advisor Colin Powell and Secretary of State George Shultz strongly objecting

to versions of the draft that included the language urging “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Reagan would eventually approve the strong language telling his speechwriters with a smile, “The boys at State are going to kill me but it’s the right thing to do” (Robinson, 2003, 103).

While there was a legitimate need for a systematic process to vet speeches, staffing would continue to grow in both the number of people involved in speechwriting and the number of speeches subjected to this process. For example, after drafting the remarks for George H.W. Bush’s 1989 National Christmas Tree lighting ceremony, the speechwriters circulated their draft to 17 key officials in and around the White House. A White House Staffing Memorandum (1989) asked for “action” by eight individuals including Brent Scowcroft (National Security Council), Boyden Gray (White House Counsel), Fred McClure (head of Congressional Relations), and Roger Porter (Director of Policy Development). Nine others were given copies “FYI” including Chief of Staff John Sununu, Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater, presidential image-maker Sig Rogich, Deputy Assistant to the President for Communications Chriss Winston, and Vice President Dan Quayle. Despite the ceremonial nature of the speech feedback was reflected substantial policy considerations. National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft suggested deleting the phrase “From the Atlantic to the Urals” from the speech’s claim of a “far better Christmas than Europe has ever known.” As Scowcroft noted in the margins, the phrase “Echoes Soviet contention regarding a ‘Common European house.’” Scowcroft also circled a reference to “Unconquerable people” and noted, “In fact, the Czechs have a history of yielding without a fight.”

The differences uncovered in the staffing process reveal a variety of perspectives. For example, a member of Gerald Ford’s National Security Council (NSC) staff complained “the fact remains that if we do not break the continued absence of any reference to Africa in the President’s speeches, the adverse impact this creates in Africa will only increase” (Horan, 1975). Hal Horan, as a representative of the NSC, was not simply representing an institutional focus on national security focus of the agency, he also represented those within the administration who focused on Africa and wanted to make sure that the continent was not lost among the concerns about other regions. The language of George W. Bush’s

speech to a joint session of Congress after the September 11 attacks was edited due to similar concerns. In the original draft Islamic extremists were compared to the Nazis and Communists who had disappeared “History’s graveyard of discarded lies.” However, the word “communist” was changed to “totalitarianism” to avoid offending China whose vote would be needed in the U. N. Security Council (Frum, 2003, 147). International constituencies even found their way into Reagan’s famous address at Pointe du Hoc on the anniversary of the Normandy invasion. After being lobbied by the State department, Peggy Noonan added a reference to the Soviet Union’s role in defeating the Germans to the speech that honored the Rangers from U.S. forces. As she complained at the time, the added reference interfered with the flow of the speech: “It sounds like we stopped the speech dead to throw a fish to the bear” (Brinkley, 2005, 156).

Differing institutional perspectives shape rhetoric independent of specific policy goals. For example, the difference between the perspective of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Kennedy speechwriters illustrates the divide between the particularized view of NASA and the broad vision required of the presidency. The draft prepared by NASA focused more on the power of their rockets than the potential of space exploration. One example of the agency’s suggestions about the capabilities of their hardware is an explanation of the power of the Saturn rocket that would propel America to the moon.

NASA Draft

Only a few hours ago, I stood on a little hill in Huntsville, Alabama, to watch the ground-testing of a Saturn booster rocket, seven hundred yards away. The power developed by the cluster of eight rocket engines, fire simultaneously, cannot be fully appreciated unless one is close enough to hear the deafening roar and feel the earth quake underfoot.

This first-model Saturn, which generates 1,300,000 pounds of thrust - - a force equal to 28 million horsepower - - is the most powerful rocket yet revealed to the world. It generates power equivalent to 100,000 standard 1962 automobiles with their accelerators pressed to the floor.

As delivered by Kennedy

In the last 24 hours we have seen facilities now being created for the greatest and most complex exploration in man’s history. We have felt the ground shake and the air shattered by the testing of a SATURN C-1 booster rocket, many times as powerful as the ATLAS which launched John Glenn, generating power equivalent to 10,000 automobiles with their accelerators on the floor.

The technical details of the systems are a good example of the kind of expertise that agencies can contribute to the speechwriting process. This left the speechwriters to blend the technical capabilities of NASA's equipment with the president's theme of the potential of space exploration to paint an eloquent picture of a nation rising to the challenge.

The president's annual "state of the union" speech is the premier battleground for presidential rhetoric as every department and agency jockey for the place in the speech that will give them a foothold in policy and budget battles to come. As Aram Bakshian (2002), a veteran of three administrations, pointed out: "Every little crappy agency wants their stuff, their agenda, included" (45). Based on his experiences writing speeches for President Truman, Clark Clifford joked that, "Every department, of course, would want the State of the Union message devoted practically exclusively to their problems" (350).

Some of the battles are ideological rather than institutional. John Ehrlichman (1982) complained that in the writing of one of Nixon's speech on Vietnam as "all the ideological factions of the White House staff—came creeping out of the bushes" (21). Some of Reagan's speechwriters considered themselves the ideological heart of the White House and sought to protect their view of conservatism from the more moderate or pragmatic forces in the White House like Chief of Staff James Baker. The fight over words is often seen as a battle for the heart and soul of the administration and how the policies are framed can become almost as important as the policies themselves.

Interest groups can make their own appearance in the review process. Elizabeth Dole, head of the Reagan Office of Public Liaison, was tasked with working with organized interests and asked to see a draft of the 1982 State of the Union address so that she could see how well the draft reached key constituencies. Dole (1982) wrote head speechwriter Aram Bakshian: "Since you are well aware of our mandate, I am sure you can appreciate my interest in having the opportunity to see one of our SOTUA drafts. From a constituency standpoint, it is critical that we have a solid acknowledgement of the importance of women, Hispanics, Blacks, and ethnics."

Rounding out the intrigue within the White House is personal ambition. As one veteran of the White House observed, personal conflicts overlay the complex politics of the executive branch: “Amidst the vortex of controversy, personal ambitions would swirl” (Muir, 1992, 35). Putting it more colorfully, Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan complained about “cheap jockeying” and “sleazy backstabbing in the White House” (Muir, 1992, 33). The personal interest in presidential speech drafts goes beyond the thrill of hearing the president read your words since getting ideas into something as visible as a presidential speech is an ideal way of demonstrating influence. Complicating matters, many of people at work in the executive branch considers themselves both a great writer and keen political mind.

By the end of the staffing process, speeches have been circulated around the executive branch and reviewed by a range of officials, all with their own institutional, ideological, and personal perspectives. The speechwriter’s task to pull these together into one coherent speech that fits the president’s speaking style. Incorporating this feedback requires a unique combination of literary art and negotiating skills as speechwriters try to incorporate conflicting advice from a large number of administration officials—most of whom outrank them. Michael Gerson, who was head speechwriter during George W. Bush’s first term, often told his fellow speechwriters that their jobs were “half-writing and half-diplomacy” (Wertheimer, 2006).

Outranked or outmaneuvered by cabinet secretaries, senior White House staff, friends of the president, and others, the speechwriters may find it difficult to turn away suggestions lacking eloquence or making the speech too long. In these cases the ultimate fate of the speech rested in the pen of the president. Salvaging a speech burdened by a thousand edits is difficult for a president with limited speechwriting skills or time. For example, in his attempt to placate different sides battling for control over drafts of the 1976 State of the Union, Ford took bits and pieces of the competing drafts and, according to head speechwriter Robert Hartmann (1991), “strung them together like a string of beads. He thought that was pretty dandy. Nobody was willing to tell him how terrible it was” (5). Ronald Reagan could write a good speech but he seldom found the time to do so after the first few months of his presidency. Every

president studied did extensive editing on major speeches. However, this almost always involved working with the basic structure provided through the speechwriting staff and presidents rarely find time to redraft speeches from scratch.

By the time the speech is delivered by the president, any claim of authorship is clouded. As the writers and the analysts square off, all sides jealously guard their turf--with good cause. The speechwriters produce better prose, but the policy makers know the subject area. The President serves as editor in chief, although it is generally hard for them to find time to do more than choose from among competing drafts provided by others. While the existence of different perspectives throughout the White House is evidenced by listening to the experiences of speechwriters and those who worked with them, the significance of these differences is not clear and merits systematic study.

Data and Measures

To compliment the use of traditional case studies, speech drafts from the ten administrations from Franklin Roosevelt through George H. W. Bush were examined. Studies from more recent administrations are impossible because materials from the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have not been opened to researchers. Speeches from these ten administration were selected for detailed analysis and a complete list of speeches utilized in this chapter is included in Appendix A. These cases do not reflect a random sample of speeches for several reasons. First, while having a random sample of all speeches from each administration might be desirable for the study of some hypotheses, such sampling is not possible. The production and retention of written drafts was inconsistent and drafts of some speeches are not available. This is especially common in early administrations before the process was institutionalized, laws were in place about ownership of material, and technology allowed the creation of multiple copies of drafts. Some drafts were simply not saved while other drafts would be sacrificed to the process, their pages physically cut and pasted into a new version of the speech. The speeches that received more staff attention were more likely to be chosen for study since the White House produced and retained more drafts. Secondly, even if a random sample was possible, the time and expense

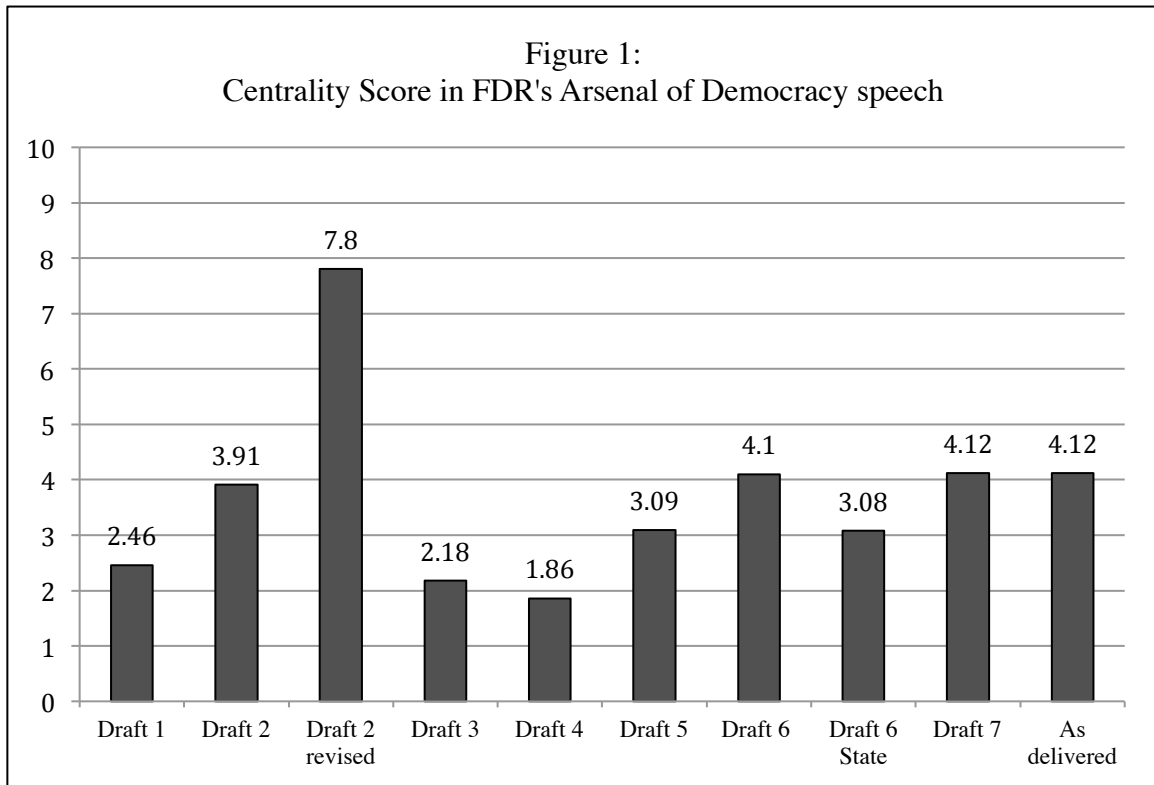
required gathering, copying, and coding multiple drafts of enough speeches to provide a reliable sample is not practical for a multi-administration study.

A random sample is not necessary here because my argument is not that significant differences will be evident on all speeches, only that different perspectives reside in the White House. The presence of clashing perspectives on routine speeches like the National Christmas Tree Lighting statement is not the standard sought here, even though an earlier study (Collier, 2003) has found an active editing process and some lively debate on that speech as well. Instead, this study identifies and studies especially significant presidential speeches because those cases were more likely to produce evidence of internal differences. At least one State of the Union address was utilized as well because it represented the only other major policy address common to all presidents. Campaign speeches were deliberately excluded because they often used different sets of speechwriters and reviewers.

Multiple drafts of each of speech were either photocopied or digitally photographed from the respective presidential libraries or from Nixon Project in the National Archives. The drafts were then put into machine-readable form for analysis using DICTION. Because some drafts were often hand-written, included hand-written revisions, or were hard-to-read carbon copies, automated scanning was often not possible and most passages had to be manually typed. In some cases a single paper draft could yield two distinct drafts, in one form to reflect the original typed version created by the speechwriter with a second version that includes handwritten revisions and additions by the president or others in the White House.

To date, 494 speech drafts including over 1.33 million words have emerged from this process to be analyzed. These drafts reflect 67 speeches delivered by the ten presidencies studied. DICTION's broad examination of language and the prominence of Hart's research made DICTION a logical choice because its measures were familiar to many scholars in the field and results would be comparable to other studies. The precise nature of rhetorical variables is not a central issue here because *change* is the primary concern. Further, we can not precisely predict what kinds of rhetorical shifts will occur because political discourse dynamic and nuanced. No software or human coder will be able to fully anticipate all the

implications of political rhetoric across the many events and issues addressed here. For example, the Clinton White House spent its years after the Monica Lewinsky scandal trying to insure that no sexual innuendo found its way into presidential speeches. These concerns dictated that the broadest approach to language be used.



To illustrate the data and the need to refine the reporting of results, Figure 1 charts the levels of *centrality* (the DICTION variable reflecting substantive agreement on core values) on different drafts of Franklin Roosevelt’s famous “Arsenal of Democracy” speech. The figure shows that *centrality* changes over the course of the drafting and revision process, with a large spike in the revisions suggested on draft two. The results paint an interesting picture of the speech’s development and look much like what we might expect. The chart reveals some early experimentation with language before the speechwriters settled into the more moderate or cautious language that we would expect from the refinements of a staffing process.

While the picture looks interesting, we need some help making sense of these changes since it is unclear what such a shift in scores means. The jump from 4 to 8 on centrality tells us that words associated with centrality doubled with the revisions proposed to the second draft, but it is hard to judge how significant a change of this magnitude and place that shift in the context of presidential speeches. DICTION proves especially useful here because it allows users to compare their results from their data with results from a pool of results from different speech types. Most relevant to this study, DICTION allows comparisons to results from the “public policy speeches” profile based on 615 policy speeches delivered by presidents from Harry Truman to Bill Clinton. This profile was chosen as a baseline for this study since it closely matches the kind of presidential addresses studied here. For each profile, DICTION reports a “normal range” that spans scores ± 1 standard deviation of the mean of the scores from these 615 presidential speeches. Although this range was designed to evaluate whether the rhetoric in texts fall into what might be considered typical for a type of communication, the normal range can also be used to provide a standard for evaluating changes across drafts of the same speech. For example, based upon the 615 presidential speeches in Hart’s database, the normal range for the *centrality* variable in presidential addresses ranges 2.27 to 6.97. The difference between these two (4.7) can be interpreted as the amount of variation in *centrality* normally found across different presidential speeches. This difference, labeled “*normal variation*,” is used as a foundation for a standard for evaluating the degree of change in rhetoric across drafts.

This use of the *normal variation* measure creates something similar to ANOVA (analysis of variance) technique that compares variation across different groups to variation within groups. Because DICTION’s variables have different ranges, the range of variation between drafts of each speech for each variable was divided by the *normal variation* for that specific variable. This created the *percentage of normal variation* measure that facilitates comparison of the changes across variables and speeches. On this scale, a score of 100% indicates that the drafts of a speech varied as much as different presidential speeches. For example, as we saw in Figure 1, the score for *centrality* ranged from a minimum of 1.86 to

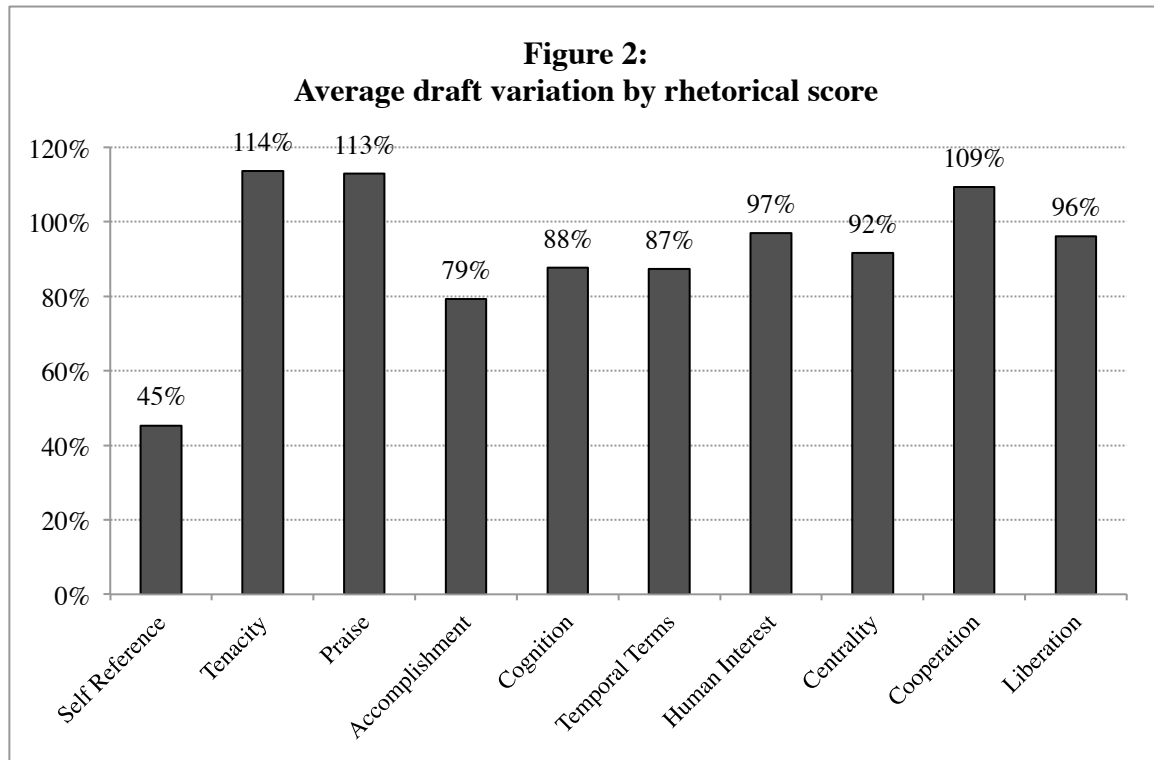
a maximum of 7.8 in drafts of Roosevelt’s “Arsenal of Democracy” speech. Thus, the speech has a draft range of 5.94. Dividing the draft range by the normal variation for centrality (4.7) yields a score of 126% for the *percentage of normal variation* score used in the rest of this chapter. The decision to measure change between drafts of the same speech against differences between speeches from different presidents on wide range of issues sets a high standard for gauging the significance of observed differences. However, such a cautious approach to defining the significance of change makes finding positive findings more compelling.

This study does not use the results from all 31 variables based on DICTION’s dictionaries for two reasons. First, presenting the results from 31 variables would be cumbersome and render figures unreadable. Second, in order to further insure that the case selection behind this study or DICTION’s normal variation was not driving results, I constructed a measure of normal variation based only on the presidential speeches included in the study of drafts in this paper. Only those variables that performed consistently (across both measures of normal variation) were utilized here. Using only variables that were within ten percent of each other on the two measures yield ten variables: *Accomplishment*, *Centrality*, *Cognition*, *Collectives*, *Cooperation*, *Human Interest*, *Praise*, *Liberation*, *Self-Reference Temporal Terms*, and *Tenacity*. These scores produced some of the highest and lowest average measures of the 31 basic DICTION variables (as illustrated in Appendix B).

Results

Before looking at differences across speeches and presidents, we need to first look at what kind of changes to rhetoric occur during the speechwriting process to better understand and evaluate the performance of the rhetorical variables themselves. The average change across all drafts included in this study in *percentage of normal variation* is reported in Figure 2. The variables reflect a wide range of performance. *Self reference* is the most stable (45%) while *tenacity* (114%), *praise* (113%), and *cooperation* (109%) see the most change over the drafting process. The finding that the average difference between drafts of the same speech exceeds even slightly exceeded the difference in presidential

policy speeches for several of these variables tells us that the speechwriting process often has a significant impact on the language of speeches. Further, the different levels of variation that these results reveal that the software's dictionaries are neither failing to pick up differences nor generating high variation scores based on minor changes.



Finding the largest shifts in *praise*, *tenacity* and *cooperation* seems consistent with the kind of adjustments a White House would make in fine-tuning its message. *Cooperation* may be more sensitive to political strategies since that responds to changes in words related to getting along and working together as well as terms related to include more neutral interactions (like consolidate, mediate, alignment) and personal involvement (including teamwork, sharing, contribute). *Praise* may be sensitive to internal White House differences about how the president talks about people and policy because it measures frequency of adjectives describing important social, physical, intellectual, entrepreneurial, and moral qualities. For example, there might be internal discussion about how to cast the moral qualities using terms DICTION identifies like faithful, good, or noble. The degree of hyperbole often seems to be a

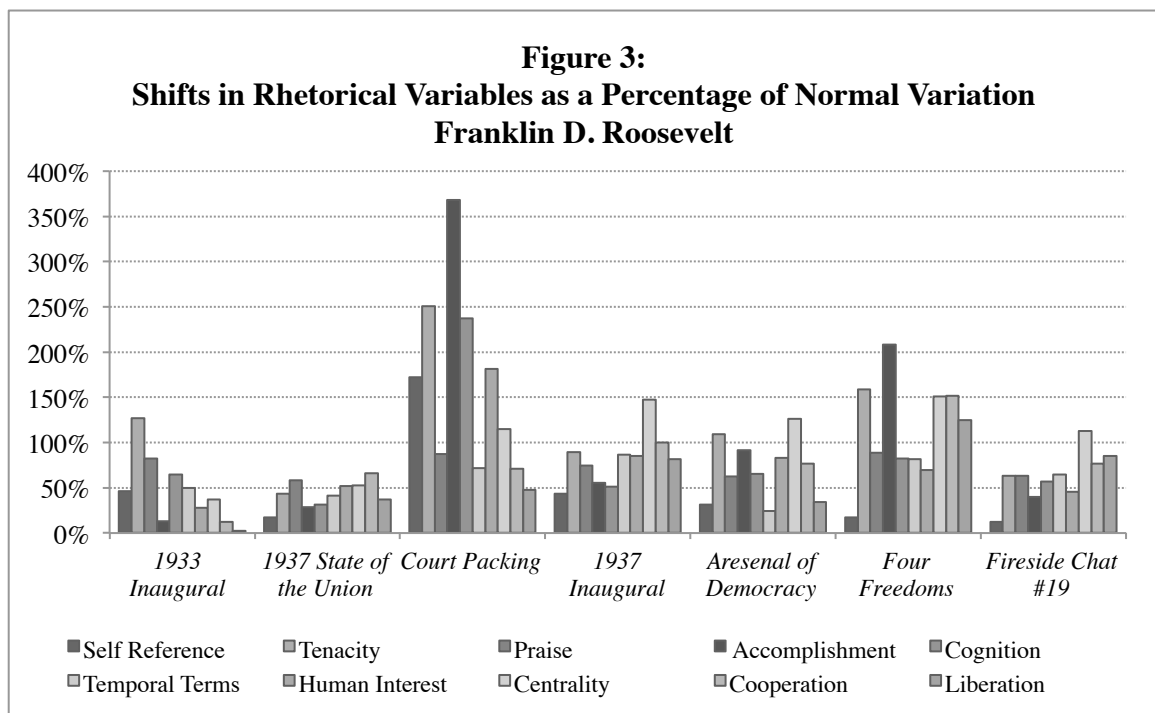
consideration within the White House and *praise* may be well suited to detecting those concerns. *Tenacity* is designed to detect confidence and totality by analyzing all uses of the verb “to be” (is, am, will, shall) as well as variants of three definitive verb forms (has, must, do). Both *Cooperation* and *Tenacity* may be responding to differences in drafts between ideologues and pragmatists within the White House as ideologues seek to spell out the president’s position in terms of broad principles while pragmatists prefer more flexibility and negotiation.

On the other end of the scale, the very high level of stability in the *self reference* over the course of the speechwriting process is expected since the kind of first person references tracked by this variable would be more likely to be shaped by the personal speaking style of the president and less sensitive to the strategic situations. Individuals in the White House might have different preferences on this kind of verbal style, but everyone involved in the speechwriting process understands the necessity of writing prose that is consistent with the president’s style. The *accomplishment* variable might be relatively stable since it involves language related to the success and the completion of tasks or organizing and motivating human behavior. We would expect descriptions of accomplishment to be relatively stable unless the actual level of accomplishment changed dramatically. Also, the frequency of *temporal terms* (languages places the subject a specific time-interval) changes relatively little over the development of a single speech unless the broad framing of the message changes. *Cognition* (terms related to questioning, learning, calculating and analyzing) and *centrality* (language relating to agreement on core values) both seem less likely to respond to ideological or tactical differences in the White House.

The levels of change found in *human interest* and *liberation* are more modest. DICTION’s *human interest* dictionary looks for personal pronouns as well as those that describe family members and relations (cousin, wife, grandchild, uncle), as well generic terms (friend, baby, human, persons) because concentrating on people and their activities gives rhetoric a friendly, humanizing quality. The fact that a variable without clear political elements scores nears 100 percent is somewhat surprising. However, it is consistent with the differences in presentation between speechwriters and others who like casting policies

in very human terms and cabinet and policy advisors who often prefer a more technical, statistical description of problems. *Liberation* involves language describing the maximizing of individual's choices and the rejection of social conventions. While a higher score might be expected relative to some of the other variables, the percentage of normal variation of 96 percent suggests that there is almost as much difference within each administration as there is across administrations.

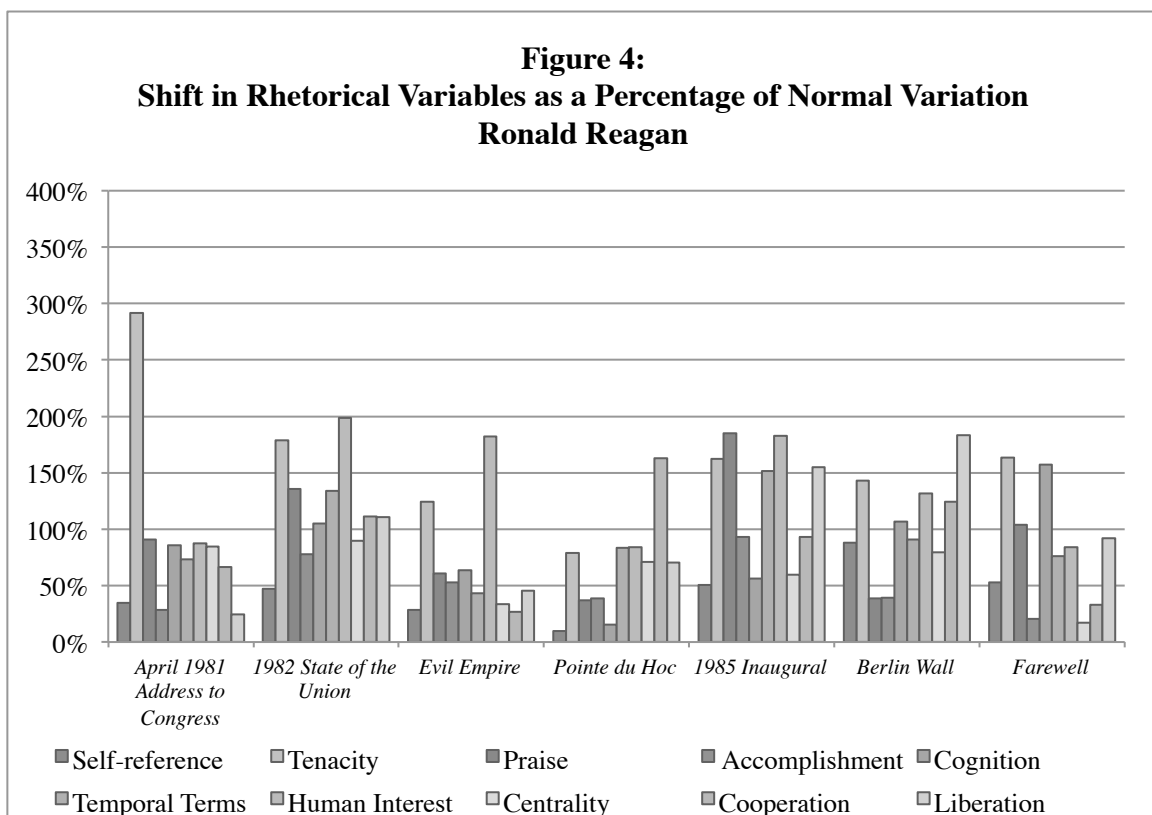
As the first presidency studied, the Roosevelt administration makes an obvious starting point for comparisons across speeches. As Figure 3 shows, the amount of change in speech drafts vary tremendously over the seven speeches analyzed.



While FDR's speechwriting process usually produced the relatively stable rhetoric we expect in those early administrations when presidents were more personally involved at all stages of speech preparation, his address defending his "court packing" plan reveals much more instability than the other address. Most remarkably, language related to DICTION's *accomplishment* variable (usually one of the most stable variables) shifted 368% of the normal range over the course of the drafting process. Because the *accomplishment* dictionary looks for words related to expansion (grow, increase, generate, construction)

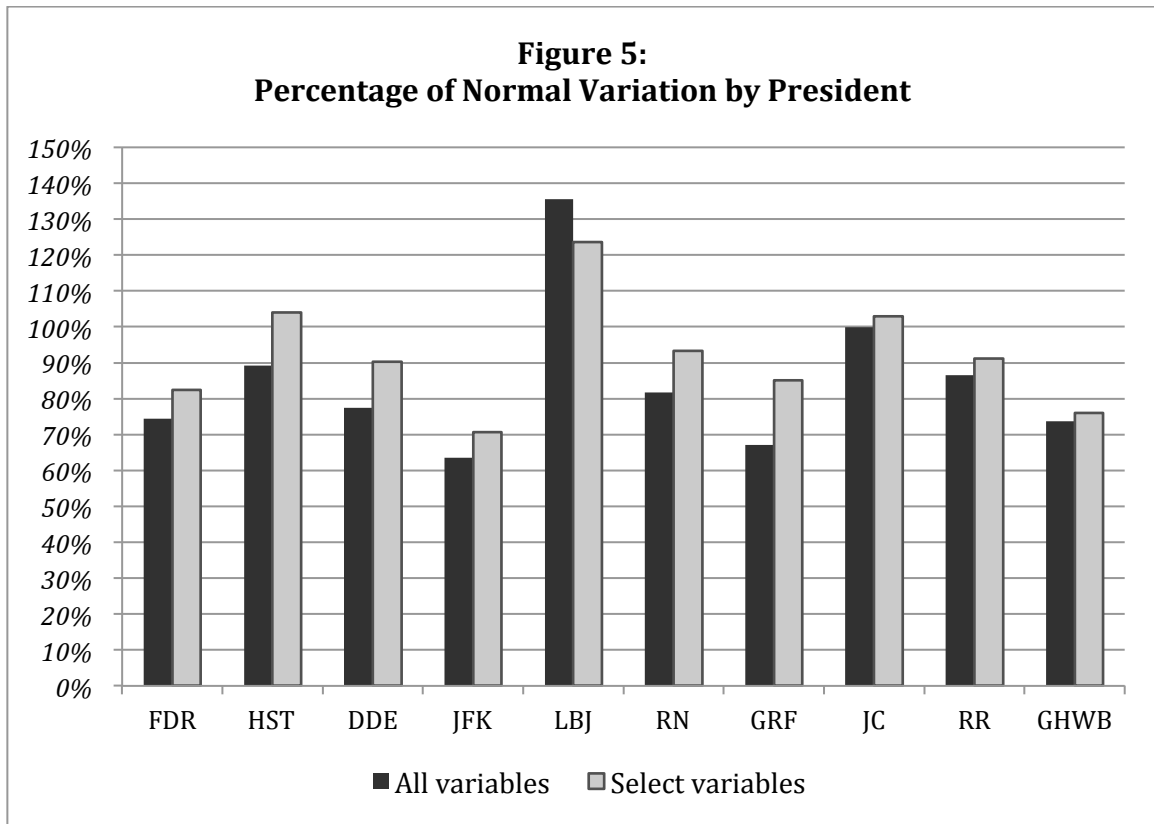
and general functionality (handling, strengthen, succeed) as well as programmatic language (agenda, enacted, working, leadership) the high scores on the court packing speech seem logical as the president and his staff grappled with how to frame the need to change the Supreme Court. Roosevelt's court packing speech generated scores above 100 percent on six of the ten variables, including very high levels of change for tenacity (257 percent) and cognition (237 percent). These high scores on this speech are consistent with the level of internal disagreement reported in various memoirs and oral histories, suggesting that DICTION can successfully discriminate between cases with internal consensus and those cases that generate major policy disagreements within the White House.

Ronald Reagan's reputation as the "great communicator" makes his administration another especially interesting case. And, Figure 4 shows, Reagan's speechwriting process reveals levels of change similar to those seen under FDR, with only changes in *tenacity* in Reagan's April 1981 address to a joint session of Congress standing out dramatically.



The relatively modest amount of change found in drafts of Reagan's "Berlin Wall" speech reflects one limitation of this analysis. In that speech, Reagan famously urged: "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" That challenge to Gorbachev spawned a major disagreement between the speechwriters and officials in the State and Defense Department who wanted less confrontational language. The problem is that while the world became very much absorbed on the verbal confrontation contained in those few sentences directed at the Soviet Union, the speech overall spoke to other audiences and other concerns. While the choice of these words might have reflected a major shift in posture toward the Soviet Union, the back and forth over those 38 words becomes lost in a content analysis of all 2,676 words in the speech. This dilemma is especially relevant for more recent presidents operating in era of "sound bite" coverage of television when presidents like Reagan knew that most of the audience would never hear the entire speech and that he could make headlines (and policy) with sound bites like calling the Soviet Union the "evil empire."

Presidency scholars will have a natural interest how these shifts differed between administrations. Figure 5 charts the average percent of normal variation across the speeches studied for both the ten selected variables and the average for all 31 basic DICTION variables. While comparisons across presidencies are perilous because of questions resulting from the selection of cases, the data illustrates some differences certain to inspire speculation.



Most obviously, the Johnson administration clearly has the highest level of change in speech drafts. This is consistent with the insider accounts of Johnson’s speechwriting process that paint a picture of it being one of the most erratic of modern presidents. Specifically, the high levels variation reported likely begin with the fact that the drafts analyzed often come from different sources, reflecting Johnson’s habit of encouraging competing speech drafts from around the White House. In some cases, two or three people would be working on speech drafts—often unaware of the role of others. Johnson’s obsession with secrecy often resulted in speechwriters working on drafts that would never be seriously considered because they were not fully aware of the President’s intentions. The most famous example of his secrecy is the drafting of the March 1968 address in which, after discussing the Vietnam War, Johnson announced at the end of the speech that he would not be seeking reelection. Most of the speechwriters were not aware of Johnson’s decision until the day before the speech and some received only a few hours notice. The Johnson results may also be the product of the transitional nature of the early days of the administration

and the lingering philosophical and political battles between Kennedy and Johnson loyalists within the administration.

The results for the Johnson administration are especially interesting next to those for the Kennedy administration. Kennedy's speechwriting process was generally consistent given the strong role that Ted Sorensen enjoyed in speech preparation. Sorensen was both a gifted speechwriter with a good sense of Kennedy's style and a trusted policy advisor who knew Kennedy's preferences. Equally important, Sorensen held enough clout in the White House to defend speech drafts from all but the most serious concerns coming from other advisors.

In contrast to Kennedy's trust in Sorensen, Jimmy Carter's high scores reflect his low level of comfort with speechwriters and the limited influence they enjoyed in his White House. Also, while Carter was not a great speechwriter, he was not shy about tossing out a speechwriter's draft and attempting his own. Most famously, Carter transformed a speech originally intended to focus on energy into what would come to be known as the "malaise" speech.

The high scores for Truman may reflect the personality of the President more directly. One of the functions of Truman's staff was to try to make sure that Truman's fiery temper did not find its way into his speeches and Clark Clifford's rise to prominence began with his ability to gracefully tame Truman's more excited speech drafts. For example, when Truman became frustrated with the railroad strike he drafted a speech to Congress calling them "weak-kneed" and urging them to take dramatic action: "Let's give the country back to the people. Let's... hang a few traitors and make our country safe for democracy. Come on, boys, let's do the job" (Frantz and McKean, 1995, p. 48). In this case, the speechwriting's staff role in refining the president himself is clear.

This data set allows measuring the impact of the speechwriting process by making comparisons across different rhetorical variables, different speeches, and different presidents to create a fuller understanding of the development of presidential rhetoric and the nature of differences inside the White

House. While each of these perspectives is limited combining the three throws a little light on some unexplored areas of the presidency.

Conclusion

Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan (1990) noted, “speechwriting in the Reagan White House was where the philosophical, ideological, and political tensions of the administration got worked out.” (p. 67). The data analyzed here demonstrates that a great deal happens to speech drafts as they work their way through the White House drafting and clearance process. While this use of content analysis is new to the study of White House speech drafts, the results presented here demonstrate that the DICTION software is as effective in discriminating between different perspectives within the presidency as it is differences across presidencies

Generally, presidential speech has been studied as power visibly wielded against other political forces. This chapter demonstrates how presidential speech drafts can be used to learn about political forces within the presidency that are seldom, if ever, visible to the scholar. The results presented here provide evidence to back the historical accounts of battles in the White House and suggest that the view of the presidency as a monolithic institution with one motive and world view is too simplistic and in need of revision. While the results here do not point to any clear trend inside the process, it does indicate that there are multiple sources of change within the process and that the dynamic within the White House that might be uncovered with further study.

Future research directions

While not designed to measure difference between drafts of the same speech, the DICTION software has proven precise enough to measure changes between drafts of the same speech and the results of this chapter indicate that the software has produced results consistent with expectations on three different fronts. First, the analysis has identified meaningful differences between the rhetorical variables as they vary from draft to draft of a speech. Second, the analysis has detected predictable variations between

different speeches by the same president. Finally, the tests have detected distinctions between presidents consistent with the results of more traditional case studies.

DICTION's ability to effectively track the relatively subtle changes within the speechwriting opens the door for looking at changes in a variety of ways as researchers approach issues like authorship by individual or institution. The possibility of content analysis of speech drafts will increase exponentially in the years ahead when the electronic records of more recent administrations are made available. Freed of the burden of getting the speeches into an electronic format, researchers will be able to almost instantly incorporate the analysis of multiple drafts.

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Appendix A Speeches

Franklin Roosevelt

Inaugural Address, March 3, 1933
 Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937
 1937 State of the Union Address, January 6, 1937
 Fireside Chat #14, September 3, 1937
 Court Packing Radio, March 9, 1937
 Arsenal of Democracy, December 29, 1940
 The Four Freedoms, January 6, 1941
 Fireside Chat 19, February 23, 1947

Harry Truman

Baylor University, March 6, 1947
 Truman Doctrine, March 12, 1947
 Princeton University, June 17, 1947
 Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949
 1950 State of the Union, January 4, 1950
 Address to Special Session, July 27, 1948

Dwight Eisenhower

Inaugural address, January 20, 1953
 Atoms for Peace, December 8, 1953
 State of the Union Address, January 7, 1954
 Columbia University Commencement, May 31, 1954
 Address to the UN, June 20, 1965
 Inaugural address, January 20, 1957
 Farewell Address, January 17, 1961

John F. Kennedy

Inaugural address, January 20, 1961
 National Association of Manufacturers, December 6, 1961
 State of the Union Address, January 11, 1962
 Commencement address at Yale, June 11, 1962
 Independence Hall, July 4, 1962
 Rice University, September 12, 1962
 National Address on Desegregation of the University of Mississippi, September 30, 1962

Lyndon Johnson

Address to Joint Session, November 27 1963
 University of Michigan, May 22 1964
 Civil Rights Act Signing, July 2, 1964
 State of the Union, January 4 1965
 Johns Hopkins University, April 7 1965
 State of the Union, January 10, 1967
 War on Poverty, May 8 1967
 Address to the Nation, March 31, 1968

Richard Nixon

Silent Majority, November 3, 1969
 State of the Union Address, January 22, 1970
 University of Nebraska, January 14 1971
 Watergate Address to the Nation, August 15 1973
 Resignation, August 8, 1974

Gerald Ford

Swearing in, August 9, 1974
 Address to Congress, August 12, 1974
 Nixon pardon, September 8, 1974
 University of Pennsylvania, May 18, 1975
 Energy address, May 27, 1975
 State of the Union, January 12, 1976
 Independence Hall, July 4, 1976

Jimmy Carter

Inaugural address, January 20, 1977
 State of the Union Address, January 19, 1978
 State of the Union Address, January 25, 1979
 Malaise speech, July 17, 1979
 Dedication of the John F. Kennedy Library, October 20, 1979
 Farewell address, January 14, 1981

Ronald Reagan

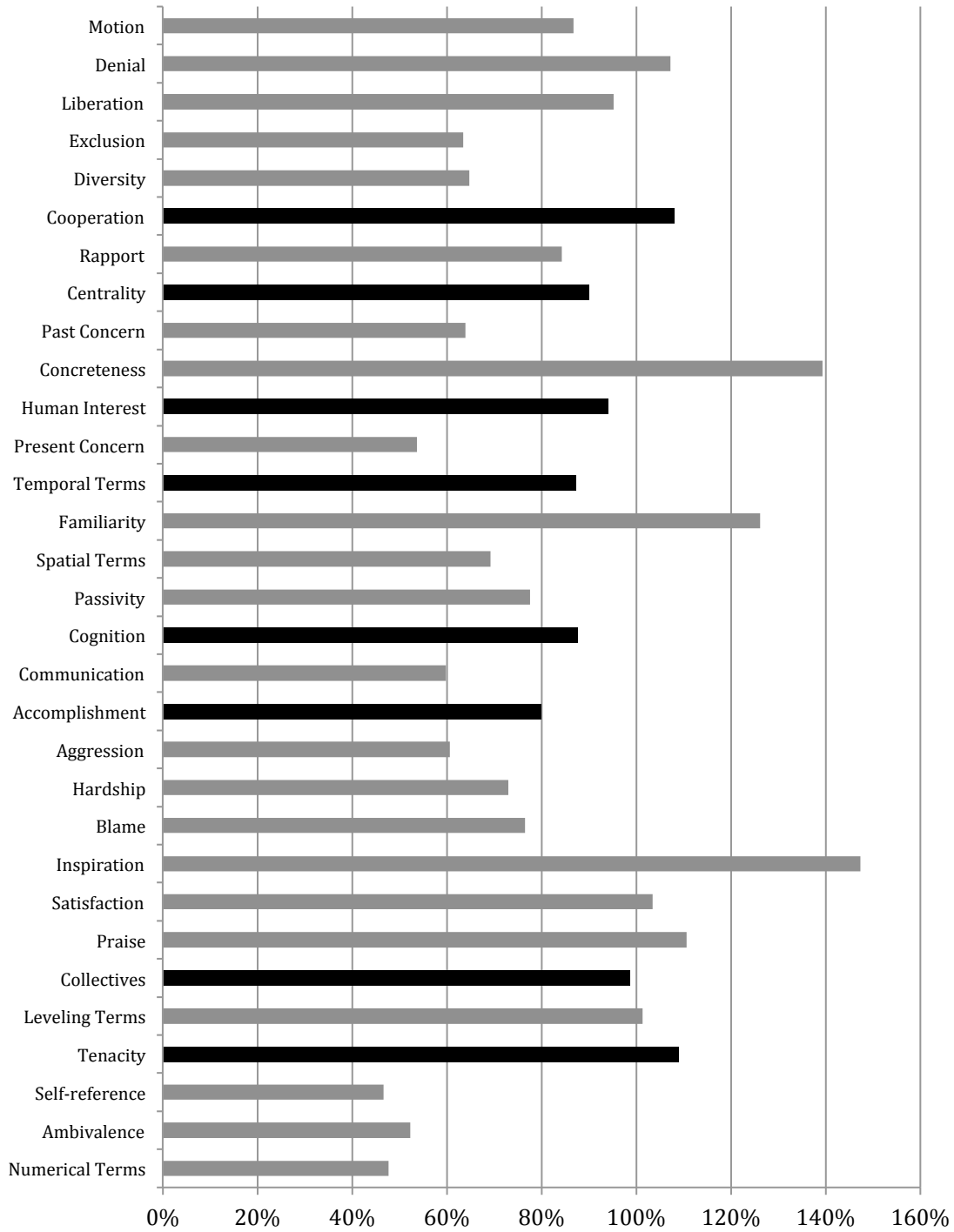
Joint Session of Congress April 28, 1981
 State of the Union Address, January 26, 1982
 National Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983
 Pointe du Hoc, June 6, 1984
 Second Inaugural Address, January 21, 1985
 Berlin Wall, June 12, 1987
 Farewell Address, January 11, 1989

George H. W. Bush

Texas A&M, May 12, 1989
 Boston University, May 21, 1989
 National Drug Policy, September 15, 1989
 State of the Union Address, January 31, 1990
 Joint Session of Congress, September 11, 1990
 Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1991
 Los Angeles Riots, May 8, 1992

Appendix B

Average draft variation by rhetorical score



Endnotes

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