

Defining digital oratory – from Zelensky’s “war” videos to content produced by influencers

While social media discourse is the object of a growing number of studies, relatively little attention has been given to discursive formats that showcase spoken communication via videos posted to social media platforms. In this paper, I focus on examples of “digital oratory”, and notably “social media oratory” (Rossette-Crake, 2022). These qualify as new types of public speaking in that they deploy language that constitutes the main (if not the unique) social process, and enact “language as reflection” (Eggins 2004: 91). Within the “hyperdiscursive space” (Maddox & Creech 2020: 2) of social networks, many different types of social actors are taking to the digital interface and are making their voices heard. Examples range from President Zelensky’s iconic “war” speeches, to content produced by influencers. However, a set of shared communicational conventions have emerged, which can be understood in light of the new formats of public speaking that have developed since the advent of digital technology.

Drawing on discourse analysis within the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, I will define the multimodal and linguistic characteristics of these performances, and link them to the current socio-cultural context. Aspects that are examined include linguistic form (e.g. conversationalisation - Fairclough 1993), speaker ethos, the collapse of the public and private divide (“backstaging”), movement, filming, and use of captions.

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