Fortition processes as a marker of style-shifting on the example of Presidential Inaugural Adresses

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In political discourse the language itself is of little importance and a speaker's image is built on the aesthetic and rhetoric values of the performance (Kreidler 1997). Politicians often design their style for their audience and switch between codes in order to satisfy the listeners' needs (Milroy 1997). The choices are made even on the level of details e.g. how precisely a given word should be uttered (Cutler 1987). There is some general evidence that politicians like Margaret Thatcher or Garry Adams made adjustments within their phonological systems for political effect (Wilson 2006).

From the viewpoint of Natural Phonology the increase in the number of fortitions, listener-friendly processes which optimize properties of segments and make them more salient (Dresseler 1985), may be seen as an attempt to satisfy the needs of the audience. As Dziubalska-Kołaczyk (2002) notices, fortitive processes apply in more formal contexts where the tempo of delivery is slower, the degree of attention rises and the discrepancy between production and the underlying intention diminishes. Also Milroy (1997) pinpoints that political speech situations elicit hyper-articulation.

The aim of this empirical study is to prove that in order to sound attractive for listeners politicians abandon the casual manner of delivery in favor of more sophisticated and richer in fortitions. I analyzed and compared articulations of two types of political speeches: Constitutional Oath and selected parts of Presidential Inaugural Addresses. My subjects were Barack Obama (2008), George W. Bush (2001), Bill Clinton (1997) and Ronald Reagan (1985). The outcomes of the research were twofold. From the phonological viewpoint the frequency and distribution of fortitive processes was established. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, it was shown that fortitive processes acted as indicators of style-shifting and were used to satisfy listeners' needs.

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