

# **Investigating Power Negotiation through Rhetorical Exchange between Washington and Pyongyang: A Systemic Functional and Semantic Perspective**

Datondji Cocou André

*Department of English, Abomey-Calavi University, Abomey-Calavi, Republic of Benin*

---

**Abstract:** This article associates the semantic resources for meaning construction and the Hallidayan systemic functional standard to analyse and explain the ongoing tough rhetorical exchange between Washington and Pyongyang over the nuclear weapon development program. The major and ground-breaking result of this exclusively scientific work posits that the outcome of the rhetorical exchange between two presumably unequal interlocutors does not depend on the state of affairs in the real world alone. Rather, it might have much to do with their mental representations which includes their epistemic and deontic states of mind. The findings offer insights into the existence of a power negotiation instance through the rhetorical exchange between the first world power who avails itself of indicating what the rule should be and a presumably less developed and less powerful country who keeps on resisting by drawing the world's attention on its weaponry that it deems respectable, and by taking into account some geopolitical factors and some mental states as this paper concludes.

**Keywords:** Washington, Pyongyang, power negotiation, rhetorical exchange, state of the mind, semantics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, epistemic state, deontic state.

---

## **1. Introduction (and review of the literature)**

This research work aims at checking for the reason that might explain the rather tough and somewhat surprising rhetorical exchange between two countries which I presume to be unequal in weaponry power. The first one, the United States of America, is known up to date for its first world power status and its worldwide influence before and since World War II. The United States of America takes the liberty to tell North Korea what it should and should not do in terms of nuclear weapon development because it believes it has the power and pedestal to do so. The second one, North Korea, still suffers sanctions from the United Nations who still have the possibility to issue injunctions to this country in the nuclear weapon development program field. The motivation to write this article arises from my amazement at the rather tense discourse style between Washington and Pyongyang over the nuclear weapon development program. As a matter of fact, the rhetoric exchange between the two nations has reached such a level of fierceness that it is worth analysing the part language is really playing on a strictly scientific stand. The ultimate aim in checking the gathered literature and applying various linguistic theoretical underpinnings to the matter is to provide some answers to the questions that my observation has raised. Among such questions are the like : why has the United States of America not yet succeeded in imposing its desiderata over North Korea while records and literature indicate that the discussions between Washington and Pyongyang over the nuclear weapon program has now lasted for decades? How does North Korea manage to resist the first world power for so many years? How does the North Korean Head of state address the President of the US without using any rhetorical device that expresses the inferior power distance that seems too obvious to the layman?

### **1.1 –Literature review**

Various research works have focused both on the thorough understanding of written and spoken texts through semantic analysis and the study of interpersonal rhetorical exchange by undertaking a systemic functional analysis. This paper made the way from its outset to associate both theories in the attempt of providing an explanative contribution to the ongoing rhetorical exchange between two countries of unequal power.

In an attempt of grasping social interactions from the very threshold, Allan (2014) approaches the process of understanding the meaning conveyed and the discourse flow between interlocutors from an all-inclusive stand by starting from their psychological states. He points out that one must first of all ascribe to speaker "S" and hearer "H" the qualities of reasonable people, behaving and co-operating reasonably towards one another, in their language interchanges as in other kinds of social behaviour. Speech roles distribution during conversations is almost automatic when the involved parties recognise their mutual social power distance and willingly take or accept the giving or demanding part. Most frequently then, in the act of speaking, the

speaker adopts for himself a particular speech role, and in so doing assigns to the listener a complementary role that he wishes him to adopt in his turn (Halliday, 1984a; Eggins and Slade, 2005; Martin, 1992). This is for example the case of a lecture-student or mother-daughter exchange where the prevalent social rank and subsequent speech roles are true to the adopted ones. However, as one may guess, this can only be expected in peaceful and reciprocally agreed social exchange instances. As a matter of fact, in cases of conflicting interests, when the interlocutors deny one another the other party's claimed power position, social status and speech role distribution may become a very sensitive and controversial issue. The 'act' of speaking being something that might more appropriately be called an interact (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014), the reaction of the hearer/audience may happen in such cases to be the opposite of the expected one. As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) indicate, the listener has considerable discretion when he moves into the role of speaker. Not only can he give any one of a wide range of different responses to a question, or carry out a command in different ways; he may refuse to answer the question altogether, or to provide the goods &-services demanded.

In actual fact, the acceptance or refusal of a given speech role depends not only on the already known experience of the speaker in the real world but also on the still undisclosed ideas or information he has on the subject or situation under discussion (his epistemic state) and his intention about the way he decides on his own authority to deal about it (his deontic state). Especially in occurrences of strategic discussions, when tremendous economic, military and political interests are at stake, parties taking part in talks would play mightily on the presumed weaknesses of their counterparts along with their own undisclosed strength. In human communication, the hidden information corresponds to what are loosely referred to as ideas or – more scientifically – mental representations (Krauss and Moresella, 2000). Besides, there is more to words, clauses and sentences meaning than denotations, which sets into play the extra dimension of sense that takes into account the association of the produced text – oral and written – with what lies in the speakers/hearer's mind. This is what Saeed (2007) terms as mental representation. While describing the experiential meaning of the clause, Halliday (1976 : 27) cited by Fontaine (2013) indicates that this component serves to 'express our experience of the world that is around us and inside us'. The part inside the speakers' virtual world corresponds to their mental representation and plays an important role in the orientation of the interpersonal relation during the information sharing on the subject matter of a discussion, which is the experiential metafunction aspect.

As developed in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the two most conspicuous aspects in every communication instance are the interpersonal interaction between the interlocutors and the management of the information flow on the experiential part. Givon (2005) goes along with this when he posits that people engaged in conversation are simultaneously tracking both the social collaboration that allows their interchange of ideas, and the gradual development of a body of information as it flows back and forth between them. The social position taken or claimed by the interlocutors in the course of various interactions depends not only on the representation of what is going on in the real world, but also and sometimes more significantly on the mental state of each of them. Indeed, the experiential meaning sees the clause as a representation of some phenomenon in the real world (Fontaine, 2013) and Halliday (1976) cited by Fontaine (2013) usefully specifies that this component serves to 'express our experience of the world that is around us and inside us'. For the sake of the specific focus of this paper, it is important to point out that Halliday (1976) does mention two aspects in the representation of experience: the visible and shared one related to the world around us on the one hand, and the invisible and unshared one inside us on the other. In fact, most of the analyses focus more on the first aspect, which is the produced spoken or written text with the interpersonal dynamics serving as the matrix within which the information flow takes place. Givon (2005) disapproves of this imbalance between the two above mentioned equally important aspects of experience by denouncing that the study of the information flow of communication focuses too often almost exclusively on the produced text both in linguistics and psychology. For a better understanding of the subject at stake in this research work, a synoptic view over the relations between North Korea and the US would be instrumental.

## **1.2 - An overview of the relations between North Korea and the United States of America**

The division of Korea into North and South Korea was the result of the United States and Soviet Union allied victory in World War II in 1945, which ended Japan's 35-year rule over Korea (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division-of-Korea>). The United States of America and the Soviet Union then occupied the two parts of the country with the boundary of their zones of control along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. After the failure of the negotiations between the occupying powers aimed at reunifying Korea, UN-supervised polls led to election of the anti-communist Syngman Rhee in 1948 in the American part of the country. At the same time in North Korea, Kim-Il-Sung was appointed as the leader by the Soviet statesmen Joseph Stalin. This led to the birth of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The clash and stormy bilateral relations between North Korea and the United States became more obvious with the events that followed the division of

the country. As a matter of fact, on 25 June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea after a series of misunderstandings (Schnabel and Watson, 1998). In this war, the United Nations, with the United States as principal force supported South Korea on the one hand, while the Soviet Union and China, then not yet a member of the United Nations, supported North Korea on the other hand. It was a very sensitive issue wherein decisions were hard to make. The separation between the two zones was confirmed in 1953 by the Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) at the end of the 1050-1953 Korean War (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division-of-Korea>). Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the North Korean regime has faced extraordinary challenges with economic collapse and dire famine and major confrontation with the world's only superpower over its nuclear weapons program (Bluth, 2017). The North Korean leadership survived such hard times and remained in power. The KIM regime presently has its third head of state starting from Kim Il-sung (1912-1994), then Kim Jong-il (1998 – 2011) and now Kim Jong-Un who took power in 2011.

Important enough to mention is that since the end of the Cold War, the world has lived without the dread of superpowers confrontation, with the United States of America alone claiming superpower status because there were few restraints on the deployment and use of US military forces around the world. Now, however, not one but three nuclear-armed powers—Russia, China, and North Korea—have set explicit limits to the exercise of American power abroad (The Nation, July 31/August 7, 2017). Other countries such as Russia and China, including North Korea, took time, while United States was having rather hard times in Iraq and Afghanistan to invest huge amounts of money in their air, naval and missile military capabilities with the military horizon of resisting Washington. Due to its geopolitical position in the region, the threat that the former colonial master (Japan) still represents and the permanent possibility of military attacks from South Korea and the United States, North Korea's leadership has always set as utmost goal to strengthen its sovereignty through the development of the nuclear weapon. This is one of the major motives for the development of its weaponry so as to be able to counteract every attack with a pre-set goal of challenging the United States. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s also came as a motivation to North Korea to definitely compensate such a loss of protection by accelerating the substantial upgrading of its defensive and offensive capacities. This resulted in Pyongyang's first successful missile test in 1993 during Clinton's Administration and the first nuclear test in 2006 during President George Walker Bush' Administration. More than a strong political aim, the focus on weaponry achievement has developed along the years into an ideology. This has remained up to date a crucial and highly sensitive concern to the successive American administrations.

On this specific point, both the government and the people of the United States of America take very seriously every action of the North Korean regime relating to the development of nuclear weapon. Three successive U.S. presidents - Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama - have dealt in different ways with the threat posed by North Korea's weapon tests to prevent the development of its nuclear program ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/young-professionals-in-foreign-policy/three-presidents-facing-n\\_b\\_9335546.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/young-professionals-in-foreign-policy/three-presidents-facing-n_b_9335546.html)) without achieving the expected result. The persistent uneasy relations and the uncomfortable rhetorical atmosphere thereby generated is meaningful enough not to the two countries alone, but to all the geographical region with threatening corollaries on the whole world. The following section identifies some theoretical frameworks mainly in the semantic and Systemic Functional Linguistics fields that have been instrumental in the analysis of the linguistic aspect of the relations between Washington and Pyongyang.

## **2. Theoretical background**

This paper is grounded on a twofold theoretical backdrop that contributes in various and convergent ways to the attempt of explanation of the ongoing rhetorical exchange between the two countries. Such theoretical underpinnings are those of semantics as developed by John I. Saeed (2007) and Thomas Givon (2005) on the one hand and Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) as studied by M.A.K Halliday (1976, 2014).

### **2.1 –Semantics**

Semantics is the study of meaning communicated through language (Saeed, 2007). In terms of hierarchical distribution, there are two levels of meaning: lexical meaning and sentence meaning. The second one is the main concern in this article as it aims to explain the type of discourse going on between Washington and Pyongyang. The meaning carried by a piece of text is determined by both the linguistic environment and the knowledge of the world that help account for ambiguity cases. The study of sentence meaning thus directs our attention from the individual semantic features of words to the ways in which they combine together with role relations (Traugott and Pratt, 1980: 188). Indeed, the capacity to use an utterance relies on the ability to know how the meanings of words combine into the meanings of larger syntactic units and how the meanings of such phrases combine into sentence meanings, (Hamann and Puskas2005/

[www.ucd.ie/artspgs/semantics/Semantics.do](http://www.ucd.ie/artspgs/semantics/Semantics.do)). Meaning may be approached in various perspectives depending on the aspect that needs to be pinpointed. Among such perspectives are linguistic meaning, social meaning and affective meaning. In a parallel with the primacy of deep structure on surface structure, the vocal expression of experience proceeds from abstract forms of cognition that play a large part in the social use of language. Mental representations, as Saeed (2007) terms such abstract cognitive forms are images existing in the forms of concepts that are closely related to the experience of each speaker/writer and listener/reader involved in specific language production and/interpretation instances. Such concepts, when remained unchanged, represent on the long run, the mental frame and the layout through which each user of a language reads and understands their lexicalised forms or their still abstract interpretations in the real world. Language use being a purposeful behaviour (Eggins, 2004), the content words used by a linguistic community are then characteristic of a particular social, ethnic contexts, and convey information about the feelings and attitudes of the speakers. In his seminal work on context as other minds that draws on mental representations, Givon (2005) has arranged the involvement levels of the memory in human linguistic activities according to the cognitive labels and their corresponding communicative equivalents. The following table is a summary of his classification.

<b>Cognitive label</b>	<b>communicative equivalent</b>
Permanent semantic ('procedural') memory	The generic lexicon
Episodic ('declarative') memory	The current text
Working ('short term') memory and/or attention	The current speech situation

Adapted from Givon (2005)

Procedural memory is a long run, implicit and unconscious memory that is linked with automaticity. It is created through cultural immersion or repetitive and procedural learning. It acts as the major conditioning frame and plays a critically important part in the way the social man gets involved in linguistic or other social activities. ([psy241.group.shef.ac.uk/psy241/wiki/index.php/Procedural](http://psy241.group.shef.ac.uk/psy241/wiki/index.php/Procedural)). Episodic or declarative memory refers to the memory that can be consciously recalled such as facts and knowledge. Working or short term memory represents what is available for current activation by the attentional system (Schneider and Chein 2003; Posner and Fan 2004, Mesulam 2000). Working memory is a limited storage-and-processing buffer of small capacity and short duration, where material is kept temporarily activated pending further processing decisions.

## **2.2 - Systemic functional Linguistics : the interrelatedness between experiential and interpersonal meanings**

The SFL theory set forth by Halliday (1976; 2014) works on the fundamental basis of the three strands of meanings simultaneously embedded in the clause viewed as a multifunctional unit of language (Fontaine, 2013). As a matter of fact, the clause contains three distinct structures, each expressing one kind of semantic organization, mapped on to one another to produce a single wording (Halliday and Matthiessen, 1999). Through the experiential meaning (clause as representation of the real world), the interpersonal meaning (clause as exchange) and textual meaning (clause as message), any piece of text can be analysed for the interpretation of the ongoing social relations, experiences and textual organization. As far as the experiential meaning is concerned, it sees the clause as a representation of some phenomenon in the real world (Fontaine, 2013), it serves to 'express our experience of the world that is around us and inside us (Halliday, 1976: 27 cited by Fontaine, 2013). It is worth pinpointing here that Halliday has mentioned two aspects in the representation of experience : the one related to the world around us and the one inside us. As for the interpersonal meaning, it considers the social interaction, the power distance expressed in the clause with a focus on 'the speaker's participation in, or intrusion into the speech event' (Halliday 1976: 27) as a way of orienting language (Fontaine, 2013).

In his attempt to classify the aforementioned three metafunctions, Halliday identifies experiential and interpersonal meanings as more closely related as they both complementarily deal with the representation of experience and the way of sharing it on the basis of the social relations at play between the interlocutors. SFL sets its focus on meaning because meaning is what counts, and getting the right meaning is what is most important (Fontaine, 2013). This all pervasive meaning focus in SFL leads to draw a parallel between interlocutors' epistemic (knowledge) and deontic (intention) states as developed in semantics (Givon, 2015; Saeed, 2007) on the one hand and the epistemic and deontic modalities as developed in SFL (Halliday 1976) on the other. As Halliday and Matthiessen (1999: 526) explain, 'modality is a rich resource for speakers to intrude their own views into the discourse: their assessments of what is likely or typical, their judgments of the rights and wrongs of the situation and of where other people stand in this regard'. Modality or mood, as Finegan

(2015) confirms, is a category through which speakers can convey their attitude toward the truth or reliability of their assertions in the form of probability, assertion/statement, conjecture (epistemic modality or modalization) or express obligation, permission or suggestion (deontic modality or modulation). Epistemic modality thus represents a kind of connotative meaning relating to the degree of certainty the speaker wants to express about what he or she is saying or the estimation of probability associated with what is being said (Fontaine, 2013). In the same way, deontic modality is a kind of connotative meaning but, in contrast to epistemic modality, it relates to obligation or permission, including willingness and ability (Fontaine, 2013). The whole process that has started from the identification of the subject matter of the work to the finding of various results has developed along a methodological line that is presented in the following section.

### **3. Methodology**

This article originates from a thorough observation of the communicative interplay between Washington and Pyongyang over the North Korean nuclear program, especially since the coming in office of President Donald Trump in the United States of America. The questions and interests raised along with the idiosyncrasies noticed during this watchful observation led to the proofreading and scrutiny of a number of available literature on the subject. A part of the information thereby gathered being essentially of political stature, I had the apprehension of diverging on this sensitive and slippery ground whereas my very goal was to undertake a sheer linguistic study. In order to stick to the linguistic aspect of the subject, I searched for some theoretical linguistic underpinnings that could be instrumental enough in the explanation of the observed communication trends. Semantics appeared as the first anchor to this need of an in-depth scrutiny of the abstract aspect of human cognition and conceptual framing, shaping and wording of meaning. The scientific rationale of my focus on this first aspect is inspired by the Saussurian standpoint whereby the deep structure of any human utterance always exists first before the surface structure. The second theoretical foundation draws from the patterning of the linguistic activity between the two political authorities that prompted me to embark on this research work. In this rhetorical exchange, there is a frequently expressed and manifested tendency on the part of one of the interlocutors to give orders to the other as for the way it wants things to happen in the real world and even to take sanction initiatives as a reply to resistance and threats. I thus identified SFL, in association with semantics, as the linguistic tool that can best help depict and explain the ongoing situation. The contribution of SFL in the scientific analysis of the rhetorical exchange lies in its focus on meaning in general, and the complementary relation it draws between interpersonal meaning and experiential meaning.

The analysis of the rhetorical exchange between the heads of state takes into account the impact of the bilateral relations between the United States of America and the Republic of North Korea as from the negotiations that put an end to World War II in 1945 and some ensuing and parallel occurrences in world military affairs. Some excerpts from President Trump's address during the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly and the subsequent reaction from President Kim Jung Un have served as corpus in the illustration of the discourse trend between both heads of state. The geopolitical status in the peninsula and at worldwide level of countries such as China, Russia, South Korea and Japan have also been instrumental. I have to point out once again at this level that the aforementioned events have contributed in the scientific approach of this paper in terms of the power shift and probably reshuffle they induced and most importantly through the state of mind I presume they generated at various regards.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

#### **4.1 - Semantic and interpersonal analysis**

This analysis builds on the assumption that the interpersonal dynamics serve as the matrix within which the information flow, that is the representation of experience, takes place (Givon 2015). Indeed, the social relations and distance between the interlocutors to a rhetorical exchange play an important part in the way the representation of experience itself is shaped and oriented. The other important assumption in this analysis as far as the state of affairs in the real world is concerned is that the United States of America hold an unquestioned position as first world power. As a matter of fact, its weaponry leader position worldwide with the possession of the nuclear weapon as far back as 1945 is but one illustration. The stand of the US during World War II negotiations, and the holding of veto power at the United Nations Security Council are few supporting factual examples of its first world power position. On the other hand, Korea remained a Japanese colony until 1945 and was divided into two zones by the allies during the aforementioned negotiations between the Soviet Union in the North, and the United States of America in the South. As far as official records provide (<https://www.journaldunet.com>) in terms of domestic and international influence in the social, political, economic and military achievements, Washington may be considered to have an overall distance of superiority vis-à-vis Pyongyang. Surprisingly enough, and as incongruous as it may appear, and this is the core rationale for

this paper, this distance does not display at all in the rhetorical exchange between the heads of state of both nations. The following selected sentences and parts of sentences drawn from both leader's speeches are illustrative. More attention is to be focussed on the underlined parts.

President Donald Trump speaking about North Korea at the United Nations 72 <sup>nd</sup> session	President Kim Jung Un's reply to President Donald Trump's speech
<p>a. The <u>scourge of our planet</u> today is a small group of <u>rogue regimes</u></p> <p>b. If the righteous many do not confront <u>the wicked few</u>, then <u>evil</u> will triumph</p> <p>c. <u>the forces of destruction</u> only gather power and strength</p> <p>d. <u>the depraved regime</u> in North Korea</p> <p>e. It is <u>responsible for the starvation deaths</u> of millions of North Koreans, and for the <u>imprisonment, torture, killing, and oppression</u></p> <p>f. the regime's <u>deadly abuse</u></p> <p>g. We saw it in the <u>assassination</u> of the dictator's brother</p> <p>h. using <u>banned nerve agents</u> in an international airport</p> <p>i. North Korea's reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles <u>threatens the entire</u> world</p> <p>j. a country that <u>imperils the world</u> with nuclear conflict</p> <p>k. this <u>band of criminals</u> arm itself with nuclear weapons and missiles</p> <p>l. we will have no choice but to <u>totally destroy North Korea</u></p> <p>m. <u>Rocket Man</u> is on a <u>suicide mission</u> for himself and for his regime</p> <p>n. to isolate the Kim regime until it ceases its <u>hostile behaviour</u></p>	<p>a. what he used to utter in his office on <u>the spur of the moment</u></p> <p>b. he made unprecedented <u>rude nonsense</u> no one has ever heard from any of his predecessors.</p> <p>c. <u>A frightened dog barks louder.</u></p> <p>d. I'd like to advise Trump <u>to exercise prudence in selecting words</u> and <u>be considerate of whom he speaks to</u> when making a speech in front of the world</p> <p>e. The <u>mentally deranged behaviour</u> of the U.S. President</p> <p>f. makes even <u>those with normal thinking faculty</u> think about discretion and composure.</p> <p>g. His remarks remind me of such words as "<u>political layman</u>" and "<u>political heretic</u>"</p> <p>h. he is surely a <u>rogue and a gangster fond of playing with fire</u></p> <p>i. Action is the best option in treating <u>the dotard</u> who, hard of hearing, is uttering only what he wants to say</p> <p>j. on behalf of <u>the dignity and honor</u> of my state and people and on my own</p> <p>k. I will make the man holding the prerogative of the supreme command in the US <u>pay dearly for his speech</u></p> <p>l. <u>when he allowed such eccentric words to trip off his tongue</u></p> <p>m. he <u>will face results beyond his expectation</u></p> <p>n. I will <u>surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged</u> U.S. dotard with fire</p>

One critically important aspect to consider first and foremost on the semantic aspect is the way both heads of state address each other. There are expressions such as "scourge of our planet", "wicked few", "evil", "the forces of destruction", "the depraved regime", "Rocket Man", from President Donald Trump while speaking about the North Korean Regime. On the other side, there are expressions such as "rude nonsense", "a frightened dog", "political heretic", "a rogue and a gangster", and "the dotard" from President Kim Jung Un while speaking of President Donald Trump. The preference for such rude metaphorical person deixis is telling enough on the mutual hatred. It is important here to mention that, while President Donald Trump uses words and expressions designating or qualifying both the North Korean regime and its president, President Kim Jung Un uses words and expressions targeting almost personally President Donald Trump. This observation is confirmed by the comparisons Kim Jung Un insinuates between President Donald Trump and his predecessors.

The mental representation each head of state has of the other is playing a great deal in the words they use. In fact, the level of reprehension of the interlocutors is so high that common deictic pronouns such as "he" or deictic lexical expressions such as "the President of North Korea" and "the President of the US" are deemed insufficient to satisfactorily express the state of mind. The willingness to be as accurate as the inner feelings suggest thus leads to the leap from the literal/denotative to the figurative/connotative in a permanent perspective

of negatively affecting the face of the interlocutor. On this aspect of the rhetorical trend between Washington and Pyongyang, it is important enough to point out that the length of the unstable diplomatic relations between both countries characterized by the versatile series of agreement and disagreement periods has really shaped the minds of both societies and has greatly influenced the lexical field developed by each party against the other. Whorf's (1956 : 213 – 14) words wrap up this specific aspect in a rather peculiar manner as he posits that :

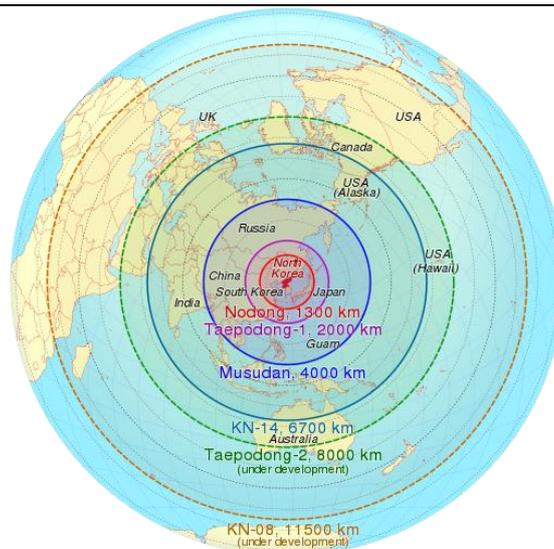
we cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organise it in this way – an agreement that holds through our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, **BUT ITS TERMS ARE ABSOLUTELY OBLIGATORY**; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organisation and classification of data which the agreement decrees.

While this study from Whorf may seem to cover the lexical aspect of communication, it is worth highlighting that the very underlying structure that underpins human linguistic communication is fully dependent on the mental representation aspect of rhetorical exchange. Indeed as one embarks on an in-depth scrutiny of this inner aspect of the representation of experience along the channel of information flow, one discovers that “context” in cognition, and even more so in communication, is not an objective entity but rather a mental construct (Givon, 2015). As a matter of fact as Givon (2015) illustratively contends, what the use of grammar is sensitive to, what grammar is adapted to do, is to represent - systematically, in the mind of the speaker-hearer - the constantly shifting epistemic and deontic states that the interlocutor is presumed to hold while communicating. In other words, grammar is an adapted code for the mental representation of other minds, or what is currently known in cognitive neuro-science as theory of mind. The implicit and unstated parts of this agreement is its mental representation part on which there is more to be said as far as North Korea is concerned.

In spite of its consciousness of Washington's first world power stand, Pyongyang has a state of mind according to which, first, Washington does not have a clear and specific knowledge of the level of nuclear weapon development in North Korea, secondly the multiple long range missile tests have succeeded in bringing the world to the consciousness that a step has been reached, and thirdly that any attack from the US against North Korea would unquestionably be highly mindful of the geopolitical positions of Russia and China. As a matter of fact, history provides an illustration to such assumption as the vote of the United Nations resolutions 83 and 84 on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1950 and 7<sup>th</sup> July 1950 authorising the United States led military coalition to support South Korea in repelling the North Korean attack was only possible because of the absence of the Soviet Union who indulged in an empty chair policy for other strategic reasons. General Collins' words in 1951 during the United Nations support to South Korea against North Korea allow no doubt about this aspect, as he declared that :

‘... It is not possible to ignore the dangers inherent in conducting military operations near the borders of North Korea's powerful Communist neighbour nations. “I don't think you can ever in modern war divorce purely military considerations from political or overall considerations,” said General Collins during the MacArthur hearings in 1951.’

As a matter of fact, apart from sharing border with North Korea, both countries are veto power holders at the Security Council of the United Nations and all possess the nuclear weapon. The following map showing the geostrategic positions of the countries involved is illustrative and explanative of the supposed mind state source of Pyongyang.



One more systemic functional aspect in this analysis draws from the result of the state of mind wherein the hidden aspect of the representation of experience turns out to have a paramount impact on the way the involved parties address each other on the interpersonal platform. Taking from Halliday's (2014) words, the component of the experiential meaning serves to express our experience of the world that is around us and inside us. As far as the inside part is concerned and as previously mentioned, it has a great deal of impact on the way President Kim Jung Un addresses President Donald Trump. This state of mind obviously influences the way Kim Jung Un addresses Trump by showing no sign of inferior social distance and not giving up in the least to anyone of Washington's requirements. His epistemic state, that is the quantity of knowledge available in the real world and most importantly in his mind, along with his deontic or intentional state play a great deal in this aspect of the rhetoric exchange.

#### **4.2 - Discussion of the findings**

This research work ends up with three main results that need to be pinpointed both for the way they elaborate and dig deeper on previous works and how they provide new discourse exchange scrutiny approach and instruments. One important finding of this research work suggests that interlocutors' mental representations that include their epistemic state and deontic state play an important role in the flow of the rhetorical exchange between unequal interlocutors. Secondly, this paper points out the influence of the time span over which a topic remains in active discussion on the shaping of the mindset within the involved community or social environment, in line with Givon's (2015) work on permanent semantic, episodic and working memory. The third finding of this work sheds light on the impact of external sensitive parameters on the overall interpersonal orientation and eventual outcome of the rhetorical exchange.

Indeed, the advantage of equally considering the contribution of the abstract cognitive portion of experience in the linguistic activity between interlocutors lies in the fact that it adds to the state of affairs in the real world in an all-inclusive perspective. In other words, including mental representation makes it possible to consider interlocutors' mindset, in terms of unshared information, in terms of crystallised lexical and grammatical social frameworks. The works of Saeed (2007), Givon (2015) on mental representations and those of MAK Halliday (1976) and others (Fontaine, 2013; Hasan, 1985) in pointing out the importance of the internal aspect of experience are actually seminal in this regard. However, one important limit to this approach is its subjectivity. This research work is also a ground-breaking one in the fact that it draws from Givon's (2015) study on the layer classification of human cognitive labels (permanent, episodic and working memories) and their communicative equivalents (generic lexicon, current text and current speech situation). As a matter of fact, this sets the focus on the influence of the time span of a rhetorical exchange on the framing and shaping of the mindset that in turn has an unavoidable impact on their outcome. The longer a subject lasts, the more it reaches the permanent semantic memory and influences the generic lexicon at the level of the subconscious. This analysis pairs up with Whorf's (1956) standpoint on the unstated and implicit social agreement terms that he deems absolutely obligatory for the members of a given community. The attempts of Washington to have Pyongyang surrender have lasted much long now. Still to be pointed out is the fact that the outcome of the rhetorical exchange depends on other factors that are external to the interacting nations. It is not wrong to

consider that the undeniable changes on the worldwide scene since the end of World War II as to the possessing of the nuclear weapon, the entry of China among the United Nations veto power holding countries, the presence of Russia and their constantly changing positions vis-à-vis Washington counts for much in the mindset and position of Pyongyang.

## 5. Conclusion

The interpersonal orientation choices and the outcome of the discussion between two presumably unequal interlocutors does not depend on the state of affairs in the real world alone. Mental representations and external factors play a great part in it. In the case of the rhetorical exchange between the first world power to date, Washington, and Pyongyang, a country I presume of lesser power and influence, the above conducted analysis and the achieved results show that the latter does not adopt a rhetorical pattern in line with a distance of inferior power. The investigation of the straight replies and nuclear weapon threats from North Korea allow to guess the important part played by mental representations that include interlocutors' unshared epistemic state and deontic state. In other words, both the trend and outcome of discourse between two socially, economically, military and politically distant interlocutors may depend for a large part on less obvious and less measureable parameters. The private and subjective features of such abstract forms of knowledge may justify the fact that they have often been overlooked in the semantic and interpersonal analysis of rhetorical interactions. The contribution of aspects that are external to both Washington and Pyongyang, such as the strategic geopolitical stands of China, Russia, South Korea and Japan is also to be listed among those scarcely graspable issues. It is beyond the scope of this article to express any prospective outcome to the situation between the two countries. Meanwhile, it aims to share these scientific views that will surely be helpful to the linguistic scientific community in understanding the interpersonal flow between both heads of state. A further study that associates some aspects of human psychology may be useful in achieving other findings.

## References

- [1]. **Allan, K.** (2014) *Linguistic meaning*, London and New York : Routledge Publishing Editions
- [2]. **Bluth, C.** (2017). *The Paradox of North Korea's Nuclear Diplomacy*. In *North Korean Review / Volume 13, Number 1 / pp. 45–62*, United State of America : McFarland & Company, Inc.
- [3]. **Bolinger, D.** (2014) *Language - The Loaded Weapon : The use and abuse of language today*. London and New York :Routledge.
- [4]. **Eggs, S. & Slade, D.** (2005). *Analysing casual conversation*. Second edition. London : Equinox.
- [5]. **Finegan, E.** (2015) *Language : its structure and use (seventh edition)* United States of America University of Southern California, Cengage learning.
- [6]. **Givon, T.** (2015) *The Adaptative Approach to Grammar*. In Heine, B. and Narrog, H. (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of linguistic analysis (second Edition)* pp. 43-64. United Kingdom : Oxford University Press.
- [7]. **Givon, T. and Young, P.** (2000), *Cooperation and interpersonal manipulation in the society of intimates*. In Shibatani, M. (Ed) *Language 48 : The grammar of causation and interpersonal manipulation*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia : John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- [8]. **Halliday, M.A.K. (1976a)**. *System and function in language*. Edited by Gunther Kress. London: Oxford University Press.
- [9]. **Halliday, MAK &Matthiessen M.I.M. C.** (2014) *Halliday's Introduction to functional grammar*. London and New York :Routledge.
- [10]. **Halliday, MAK.** (1984a). *Language as code and language as behaviour : a Systemic Functional Interpretation of the Nature and Ontogenesis of Dialogue*. In Halliday, MAK, Fawcet, R.P. ,**Lamb, S. &Makkai, A.** (eds.) *The semiotics of language and culture*. London : Frances Printer. Volume 1 : 3 – 35.
- [11]. **Hasan, R.** (1985b). *Linguistics, language and verbal art*. Geelong, Vic.: Deakin University Press.
- [12]. **Krauss, R.M. and Morsella, E.** (2000) *Communication and conflict*. In Deutsch, M. and Coleman, P. (Eds.) *The handbook of constructive conflict resolution: Theory and practice* (pp.131 – 143) San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- [13]. **Martin, J.R.**, (1992) *English text : system and structure*. Amsterdam :Benjamins.
- [14]. **Redmond, M.V.**, (2015) "Face and Politeness Theories". In *English Technical Reports and White Papers. 2*. United States of America : Iowa University.
- [15]. **Saeed, J.I.** (2007) *Semantics (Second Edition)*, Oxford : Backwell Publishing

- [16]. **Schnabel, J. F. and Watson R. J.** (1998), *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff , The Joint chief of Staff and National Policy 1950 – 1951 : The Korean War, Part One Volume III.* Washington, DC : Office of Joint History.
- [17]. **T. Givon** (2005) *Context as other minds : The pragmatics of sociality, Cognition and Communication,* Philadelphia : John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- [18]. **Thomas, L. and Wareing, S.** (2005). *Language, Power and society : an Introduction.* London and New York :Routledge.
- [19]. **Traugott, E.C. & Pratt, M.L.** (1980). *Linguistics for Students of Literature.* London and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- [20]. **Whorf, B. L.** (1956), *Language, Thought and Reality : Selected writings of Benjamin Whorf.* Edited by John B. Carroll. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [21]. <https://www.journaldunet.com/patrimoine/finances-personnelles/1171985-classement-pib/> retrieved on January 12th, 2018
- [22]. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division-of-Korea> retrieved on January 12th, 2018
- [23]. [www.ucd.ie/artspgs/semantics/Semantics.do](http://www.ucd.ie/artspgs/semantics/Semantics.do) retrieved on January 15th, 2018
- [24]. <https://www.journaldunet.com> retrieved on January 5th, 2018
- [25]. <https://www.thenation.com/issue/july-31-august-7-2017-issue/> retrieved on December 17th, 2017