Generic studies of texts consider the structure and content of messages and place them into distinct classes. Each of these classes exerts a control over both the speaker's and the audience. In each case, the genre has a specific structure and content that defines it, like journalism with its genres of news, features, and editorial and more genres within these three classes, for example, an op-ed that fits in the editorial class. From these premises, we may infer that similar situations, with similar demands, may lead to similar texts, even if the contexts differ. To study genre is to study the form and content of a message as appropriate to a rhetorical situation. The patterns of a genre may reveal social and political truths. Political speeches are no different. It is in this perspective that I would like to look at President Pohamba’s address. The President is a genre that is important as a piece of language – although not always in the way one might expect. It belongs to ritual language and is, therefore, subject to heavy constraints conditioned by the ceremonial occasion. This piece is based on a paper about “President address as a genre” by Jean-Pierre Van Noppen from the Université Libre de Bruxelles.

On the face of it, Van Noppen says, one might say that the speeches of Presidents are largely similar, and it is true that they belong to a same genre and convey a number of similar devices. This is because these speakers are involved in the same sort of speech act – basically, epideictic rhetoric in which they do not only convey information, but also seek to strengthen links within and with the audience. In a way, they must give the audience a core message – a sense of pride and patriotism, a sense of involvement in what is going on, and a sense of commitment to a common cause. In this respect, the speech must qualify as a kind of a rhetorical exercise of the epideictic genre, i.e. more or less spectacular oratory seeking to propagate a worldview, in other words, to convey value judgments. This effect is achieved by increasing adherence to the values it leads to provoke the action wished for, or at least, to awaken a disposition so to act. In order to obtain such action, the speaker tries to establish a sense of comprehension and meaning recognised by the audience.

The differences between the Presidential addresses are to be sought on a subler level – in what is highlighted or what is played down; in how words like « democracy » or « freedom » are placed in different contexts, or in such as they differ in different aspects. It is at this level that the linguist can give insight – that awareness of the rhetorical devices may help the citizen comprehend the context and easily by pretty words and phrases – whether in politics or in advertising. Too often, the linguist is seen as a nit-picker who judges people on whether they spell « potato » with an o or with an error by means of which ex-President Quayle made a fool of himself in front of a class he visited; but once we realize that spelling, structure, rhetoric and rhyme are all put to the service of meaning, and that meaning things is part of our total social and human behaviour, linguistics becomes a way of approaching the world critically … On these occasion, the President tends to make a point towards the past (his predecessors), the present (the present state of the country) and the future (his own term of presidency and his hopes and prospects for the nation). This triple temporal perspective is another characteristic of the genre. The medium (i.e. the channel of communication) here is a complex one: the speech has been written to be delivered orally over a public address system, where it is recorded, broadcast, and televised. The text itself will be circulated to the news agencies and papers. The use of the speech prompter and recored to a very large pubilc address system condition the speed and intonation of delivery both put to the service of comprehensibility as well as to the affective, “ceremonial” nature of the occasion.

Major Themes: The constraints of the genre also involve adherence to what have been recognized as the « fundamental themes of a country’s dreams », i.e. a set of ideas which recurr throughout the various Presidents’ addresses, with differences only in order and in emphasis. Amongst these themes, the concept of time and history holds an important place. As pointed out above, some of these celebrations are viewed as a turning-point between the past and the future, but also as a renewal, a renascence of the nation’s ideals. The problems are many: Lassiness, unemployment, drugs, crime, HIV/AIDS, and corruption. Nevertheless, the President qualifies the present day as a time in which the country is called upon « with proper planning, hard work and dedication » to be able to overcome its challenges by drawing on its strong moral anchor, to effectively combat crime and corruption which “negate what we fought for”. Freedom constitutes another major theme in the speech. Whereas under his predecessor’s presidency, « freedom » was associated with « the idea of a new democratic dispensation and a country that is able to govern itself », in Pohamba’s discourse it is more closely related with human rights. In this regard, he posed a rhetorical question to find out whether those suffering under the vices of corruption and crime are truly free? A time when the world and Africa’s foreign politics appears politically tumultuous and in an economically uncomfortable situation, the president invokes strength to « the spirit of nationhood », and feels that « We must ensure that we stand united: strong, at peace, and free from crime and corruptions ». But strength is such an address also appears as an inner, moral quality, in conlo- cration with hope. The president appeals to the moral strength, the sense of sacrifice and solidarity of the people, and appeal to the young and their fundamentalists, while also mod- estly using the « no crime, no corruption» gambit – but his avowed aim is to make govern- ment more democratic, to hope for unity-in-diversity, in which people interact and « live freely ».

Initial Greeting: Departing from his prepared speech for the occasion, the president first made a Presidential statement by informing the nation on Libya under attack from forces across the Mediterranean sea, and ongoing invading troops in- terfering in the internal affairs of a fellow African country. The President then reiterated the country and the government’s stance deflating and regretting the latest invasion of Libya and went on to “condemn and re- ject in the strongest terms any foreign invasion in the internal affairs of any African country”.

Thanks to President; The allusion to the president is a “must”, since it strengthens the idea of the link with the nation’s history and timeless “values”. Here again we can note, the President seeks to un- derscore the idea of continuity and unity. The initial terms and the thanks addressed to the pre- decessor are also typical of the situation-conditioned genre when the President acknowledg- ed, on this occasion, the presence of the Founding Presi- dent as the father of the Nation, H.E. Dr Sam Nujoma, because “on this day, twenty-one years ago, we hoisted the flag of na- tionhood, freedom and sovereignty… and started in earnest with the task of nation building, reconstruction and National Reconciliation”.

Through the unwavering deter- mination of the Namibian people acting in unity of purpose, the nation has made great strides in socio-economic de- velopment and succeeded in building a strong constitutional foundation for democratic govern- ance as “the necessary in- stitutions and legal framework that serve as the bedrock for the rule of law as well as transparent and accountable govern- ance.” For this reason, Namibia is one of the benchmarks of constitutional and demo- cratic governance on the Afri- can Continent and thanks to the SWAPO Party led post-inde- pendence Government (led by H.E. Dr Nujoma), “today all Namibians enjoy constitutionally guaranteed fundamental human rights and freedoms that they were denied for many de- cades. Reference to forefa- thers; the President also paid tribute to our forebearers for their selfless sacrifices during their resistance against foreign occupation and oppression and asked the nation to honour their