

A Stylistic Investigation: Verbal Parallelism in Reverend Budde’s 2025 U.S. Presidential Inauguration Prayer Service Sermon

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ABSTRACT

Verbal parallelism is a stylistic device frequently employed in public and religious discourse to enhance rhythm, emphasis, and memorability. This study investigates the use of verbal parallelism in Reverend Mariann Budde’s sermon delivered at the 2025 United States presidential inauguration prayer service. The research aims to explore how verbal parallelism functions stylistically in the sermon and how it contributes to highlighting key messages. A qualitative research design was employed, using documentation and analysis of the sermon transcript as the primary data source. The analysis identified eight types of verbal parallelism based on Leech’s (1969) classification. The findings revealed that seven types verbal parallelism was deliberately and systematically used throughout the sermon. Anaphora was found to be the most frequently used type, followed by homoioteleuton, epistrophe, symploce, polyptoton, anadiplosis, and antistrophe. On the whole, this study confirms that verbal parallelism serves as an effective stylistic strategy in public and religious discourse.

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1. Introduction

In the modern era, public speeches have become increasingly accessible and more capable of capturing public attention. Public speeches are not only discussed widely in society but are also frequently analyzed by linguists for their linguistic richness and rhetorical strategies. Among these, religious speeches such as sermons have attracted particular interest due to their unique communicative purposes. Lawal and Otemuyiwa (2021) defined a sermon as a talk on a religious or moral subject delivered by a clergy member as part of a religious service. Beyond the religious message, the language used in a sermon is a central component that contributes significantly to its overall impact.

Language holds the power to influence public perception and engagement. Rashkin et al. (2017) emphasized that language can effectively attract public attention and shape how messages are received. In sermons, language selection is not simply a matter of clarity but also a deliberate strategy to achieve specific communicative goals. Joseph et al. (2017) explained that sermons aim to educate and motivate religious followers. Therefore, the linguistic features employed in sermons are crucial tools that can reinforce the speaker’s intentions and ensure the message resonates with the audience (Ko et al., 2025; Aswad et al., 2019; Prihandoko et al., 2021).

The so-called foregrounding analysis is one method used in stylistics, the study of language style, to examine linguistic elements employed in sermons. In stylistics, "foregrounding" refers to the unconventional use of language in literary and non-literary works that is thought to attract attention (Stockwell & Whiteley, 2015). There are two main categories of foregrounding: parallelism (regularity) and deviation (irregularity). Free repetition and verbal parallelism are the two categories of parallelism that Leech (1969) distinguished. "The exact copying of some previous part of a text (whether word, phrase, or even sentence)" is what Leech (1969) defined as free repetition (p. 77). Verbal parallelism, on the other hand, is the repetition in the same position within different parts of a text and it could also be in the form of a word, phrase, or sentence (Leech, 1969).

This current study focuses on exploring the use of verbal parallelism in the sermon delivered by Reverend Mariann Budde at the U.S. Presidential Inauguration Prayer Service as one of the non-literary texts. Unlike other non-literary texts, sermons significantly involve matters of religion and morals. Earlier this year, the sermon addressed by Reverend Budde

at the Inauguration Prayer Service obtained the public's attention and responses towards the points she mentioned in the sermon, which even includes the responses of President Trump himself. In this matter, the language used by Reverend Budde as the speaker plays a major role. As Joseph et al. (2017) argued, the main purpose of sermons is to motivate the disciples and their audiences, which made language one of the speakers' weapons to achieve their goals. Therefore, this study aims to explore Reverend Mariann Budde's sermon at the 2025 presidential inauguration prayer service and focuses on finding verbal parallelism features in her sermon that were treated as stylistic devices.

Verbal parallelism is an interesting stylistic device to be explored, for it can be found in both literary texts and non-literary texts, such as sermons. According to Emmott and Alexander (2014), verbal parallelism has the power to emphasize particular points through its forms of repetitions. This idea is also in harmony with Leech (1969) who demonstrated, in his book *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, that verbal parallelism helps capture the audience's attention and reinforces meaning by creating patterns within the speech. Furthermore, not all stylistic devices can be used in every linguistic levels. Metaphor and simile are the ones that cannot be used in every linguistic level, for these devices are only considered as a functional-semantic category (Udovichenko et al., 2023; Weda, 2018; Rahman & Weda, 2019). Meanwhile verbal parallelism can be appeared at the level of syntax, phonology, etc. without any limitations. This further means that verbal parallelism, as part of foregrounding, could highlight any messages throughout a text at any linguistic level. With no limitation to appear at any linguistic level, verbal parallelism has more power and potential to give broader impact to the speakers compared to the other stylistic devices.

This study employed a sermon as the research subject, as it offers an optimal framework for the application of verbal parallelism, given its communicative aims and dependence on language as a persuasive instrument. A sermon aims not just to convey religious or moral precepts but also to inspire, motivate, and engage both spiritual and secular audiences (Kim et al., 2023; Pieterse & Wepener, 2021). Considering these objectives, it is quite probable that speakers employ particular linguistic tactics to attain a more profound effect. Verbal parallelism serves as a crucial communicative instrument in preaching. It assists speakers, particularly religious leaders, in emphasising moral and theological principles, preserving rhythm and clarity, and ensuring that essential concepts are emotionally and cognitively reinforced (Emmott & Alexander, 2014; Youngsun et al., 2024; Yaumi et al., 2024).

This stylistic device has the potential to improve message memorability and sermon persuasiveness, especially when addressing diverse or politically sensitive audiences. Given that sermons are intended to influence beliefs and steer behaviours, examining linguistic parallelism may indicate how language adds to the sermon's efficacy and rhetorical impact. According to Joseph et al. (2017), sermons are designed to motivate and educate, therefore linguistic differences such as verbal parallelism of phrases or clauses might aid listeners in understanding and remembering the essential topics. As a result, the use of word parallelism in this case could benefit both the spiritual and rhetorical functions of the sermon.

This study focuses on the sermon presented by Reverend Mariann Budde at the 2025 United States presidential inauguration prayer session for various reasons. Initially, it was introduced at a momentous national event in the United States earlier this year. The sermon was directed at both religious communities and political leaders, as well as citizens nationwide. Reverend Budde, as a respected religious leader, used the opportunity to address significant issues within the country, eliciting both sympathy and criticism from the public. The sermon exhibits grammatical richness through repetition, particularly in instances of verbal parallelism. The abundance of linguistic components gives it an appropriate and significant object for stylistic investigation, especially in comprehending the role of verbal parallelism in religious speech.

Numerous studies have been undertaken to investigate the utilisation of language in public discourse, including political speeches (Clarke & Grieve, 2019; Rashkin et al., 2017; Tayyab et al., 2022) and sermons (Hattab, 2021; Lawal & Otemuyiwa, 2021; Obioma, 2018). Scholars have examined sermons as a data source, analysing the linguistic elements employed to engage the audience from stylistic viewpoints (Emike & Abdurraheem, 2015; Obied & Adia, 2020). Emike and Abdurraheem (2015) examined the application of stylistic elements in 20 statements from both Christian and Islamic sermons. The study aimed to determine the impact of stylistic devices on both sermons and concluded that the employment of figurative language as a stylistic device improves the clarity of communication in the sermons. On the other hand, Obied and Adia (2020) examine whether African American and White American preachers use metaphorical language to show their beliefs in the same way and how metaphorical language helps people understand American preachers. This research used critical style analysis to investigate at conceptual metaphors, such as ontological and orientational metaphors. Obied and Adia (2020) found that both African American and White American speakers use conceptual metaphors as they speak about their beliefs.

Nonetheless, the investigation of verbal parallelism as a stylistic device remains very uncommon. Research conducted by Fitriyanti (2017) and Latt (2021) has examined the application of verbal parallelism in both non-literary and literary texts. Latt (2021) analysed two poems through the lens of Leech's linguistic parallelism and determined that, of the eight varieties identified, homoioteleuton is the most prevalent form employed in both poems. Meanwhile Fitriyanti (2017) recognised seven of the eight categories of verbal parallelism in Michelle Obama's Speech for the America Campaign in New Hampshire.

Previous research studies have shown that public discourse, especially political speeches and sermons, employ a wide range of language style assessments. Even so, sermons' use of verbal parallelism as a stylistic device is not widely researched. Therefore, it is crucial to examine a sermon for the occurrence of verbal parallelism. Anaphora, epistrophe, symploce, anadiplosis, epanalepsis, antistrophe, polyptoton, and homoioteleuton are the eight types of verbal parallelism developed by Leech (1969), which were explored in the sermon delivered by Reverend Mariann Budde during the prayer session for the 2025 presidential inauguration in the United States.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative stylistic analysis to examine the use of verbal parallelism in Reverend Budde's 2025 U.S. Presidential Inauguration Prayer Service sermon. The object of the research is the sermon transcript, obtained from the San Francisco Bay Times (<https://sfbaytimes.com/full-transcript-of-the-2025-inauguration-prayer-service-address-by-the-rt-reverend-mariann-edgar-budde-the-bishop-of-washington/>). The data consists of words, phrases, and sentences that exemplify verbal parallelism. The documentation method was used to collect the data, with the sermon transcript serving as the primary source. This aligns with Bowen's (2009) definition of documentation as the analysis of texts within their contexts, allowing for in-depth interpretation of stylistic features.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

From the analysis, it is found that there are various instances of verbal parallelism used in Reverend Budde's sermon at the United States 2025 presidential inauguration prayer service. The study focuses on ten selected data points that represent different types of verbal parallelism identified in the sermon. Among these, anaphora appears as the most frequently used type, demonstrating the speaker's tendency to emphasize key messages through initial repetition. Other types of verbal parallelism identified in the selected data include homoioteleuton, epistrophe, symploce, polyptoton, anadiplosis, and antistrophe.

Data 1

"It is not conformity. It is not victory. It is not polite weariness or passive passivity born of exhaustion." (Budde, 2025)

This sentence demonstrates anaphora through the repetition of the clause "It is not" at the beginning of three consecutive sentences. Each sentence introduces a different complement while maintaining the same initial structure. The repetition of this clause follows the typical anaphora pattern where the same linguistic unit is placed at the beginning of successive phrases or sentences. The use of anaphora in this example helps the speaker emphasize what unity is not, creating a rhythmic and persuasive effect.

Data 2

"Unity is not partisan, rather unity is a way of being with one another..." (Budde, 2025)

The repetition of "Unity is" at the beginning of two adjacent clauses marks this sentence as anaphora. Although each phrase is completed differently, the repetition of the initial structure maintains consistency and emphasizes the definition of unity from the speaker's perspective. The identical starting position of the clause in each part follows the characteristic structure of anaphora. This pattern strengthens the sermon's central message about the true meaning of unity.

Data 3

"...when power and wealth and competing interests are at stake, when views of what America should be are in conflict, when there are strong opinions across a spectrum of possibilities..." (Budde, 2025)

This example uses the repetition of the word “when” at the beginning of three successive clauses. Each clause introduces a new condition or situation, creating a repeated rhythm that draws attention to the challenges being discussed. The continuous use of “when” at the initial position is a direct application of anaphora. The repetition effectively builds the sermon’s argument and maintains the audience’s focus.

Data 4

“...but to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us, to be merciful as our God is merciful, to forgive others as God forgives us.” (Budde, 2025)

This sentence presents anaphora through the repeated use of the infinitive structure “to” + verb at the beginning of several coordinated phrases. The phrases “to love,” “to pray,” “to be,” and “to forgive” are syntactically parallel, following the anaphora pattern of repetition at the start of each unit. This structural repetition helps create a strong ethical appeal, reinforcing the sermon’s call to compassionate action. The use of anaphora here effectively highlights the behavioral expectations within the religious message.

Data 5

“...that encompasses and respects our differences, that teaches us to hold multiple perspectives and life experiences as valid and worthy of respect, that enables us in our communities...” (Budde, 2025)

This sentence demonstrates homoioteleuton through the consistent use of the verb endings “-es” in “encompasses,” “respects,” “teaches,” and “enables.” These similar grammatical endings create a sound pattern that links the verbs and enhances the rhythm of the sentence. Unlike other forms of parallelism, homoioteleuton relies on phonological similarity rather than structural repetition. The repeated endings contribute to the musicality of the sermon, making the message more engaging and memorable.

Data 6

“For unity at times is sacrificial in the way that love is sacrificial...” (Budde, 2025)

This data illustrates epistrophe through the repetition of the phrase “is sacrificial” at the end of both the independent and dependent clauses. Epistrophe is identified when the same linguistic unit appears at the end of successive clauses, and this structure aligns with that pattern. The repeated closing phrase helps reinforce the sermon’s central theme by underlining the cost of unity and love. This closing repetition contributes to the sermon’s persuasive and poetic style.

Data 7

“...labeling ourselves as the good people versus the bad people.” (Budde, 2025)

This sentence presents symploce, which combines repetition at the beginning and end of phrases. The pattern “the X people” is consistently used, with “the good people” and “the bad people” both following the same structural format. The shared opening “the” and the common closing “people” meet the criteria of symploce, which repeats elements in both initial and final positions. This repetition strengthens the sermon’s moral contrast and draws the audience’s attention to the dangers of division.

Data 8

“God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger for we were all once strangers in this land.” (Budde, 2025)

This sentence is an example of polyptoton, which involves the repetition of the same word with different grammatical forms. The noun “stranger” appears first in singular form and then in its plural form “strangers,” creating a variation in number while retaining the root word. Polyptoton draws attention to the inclusive message that all people have shared experiences. This variation reinforces the sermon’s theme of empathy and shared humanity.

Data 9

“Well, I hope we care. I hope we care because the culture of contempt...” (Budde, 2025)

This example demonstrates anadiplosis, which is marked by the repetition of the last phrase of one clause at the beginning of the next. The phrase “I hope we care” concludes the first sentence and immediately reappears at the start of

the second sentence. This direct transition emphasizes the importance of the speaker's hope and concern. The use of anadiplosis effectively links the two sentences and strengthens the sermon's emotional appeal.

Data 10

"In public discourse, honoring each other's dignity means refusing to mock... and, whenever possible, to seek common ground. And if common ground is not possible, dignity demands that we remain true to our convictions..." (Budde, 2025)

This sentence demonstrates antistrophe, which involves the reversal of two linguistic elements across successive clauses. The terms "*dignity*" and "*common ground*" appear in one order in the first sentence and in the reverse order in the second sentence. Antistrophe requires this mirror structure, and the arrangement here fits that pattern. This reversal helps to balance the message and emphasizes the reciprocal importance of dignity and finding shared understanding.

3.2. Discussion

The analysis of Reverend Mariann Budde's sermon revealed a consistent and deliberate use of verbal parallelism, particularly through the application of anaphora, homoioteleuton, epistrophe, symploce, polyptoton, anadiplosis, and antistrophe. These repetitions were not placed randomly but were intentionally positioned at significant points in the sermon to reinforce meaning and emphasize key messages. This structured use of repetition aligns with Leech's (1969) classification of verbal parallelism as a stylistic device that relies on the systematic repetition of linguistic units to achieve rhetorical strength. Among the types identified, anaphora emerged as the most dominant form in the sermon, indicating the speaker's preference for using initial repetition to guide the audience's attention.

Anaphora appeared prominently in the sermon through several examples where Reverend Budde repeatedly used phrases at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences. The repetition of expressions such as "It is not," "Unity is," "when," and "to" + verb strongly illustrates the typical formula of anaphora described by Leech (1969), which is the recurrence of the same linguistic unit at the start of multiple syntactic structures. This repeated opening pattern not only created a rhythmic flow but also helped establish a cohesive structure within the sermon. Through the use of anaphora, the speaker effectively emphasized the moral, social, and religious values that served as the core themes of the sermon.

Although anaphora was the most frequent, other types of verbal parallelism also played essential roles in shaping the sermon's stylistic quality. Homoioteleuton was observed through the phonological repetition of verb endings, particularly the shared "-es" endings in verbs such as "encompasses," "respects," "teaches," and "enables." This repetition of similar suffixes contributed to the phonological harmony of the sermon and created a pleasing auditory pattern that complemented the message delivery. Homoioteleuton demonstrated that verbal parallelism could function not only at the structural level but also at the level of sound.

Epistrophe was identified in the repetition of the phrase "is sacrificial" at the end of successive clauses. Leech (1969) defines epistrophe as the repetition of the same linguistic element at the conclusion of phrases or clauses, which was evident in this example. The repeated closing structure reinforced the sermon's thematic focus on unity and sacrifice, strengthening the sermon's persuasive and ethical appeal. Moreover, symploce, which combines repetition at both the beginning and end of phrases, was exemplified in the contrast between "the good people" and "the bad people." This form of verbal parallelism added structural balance and rhetorical emphasis, presenting a sharp moral contrast that the audience could easily recognize. The careful arrangement of repeated openings and closings in symploce enriched the sermon's overall stylistic pattern.

The sermon also demonstrated polyptoton through the repetition of the noun "stranger" in both singular and plural forms. Leech (1969) characterizes polyptoton as the use of the same word with different grammatical inflections within a text. This variation of grammatical number highlighted the inclusive message of shared human experiences and emphasized the importance of compassion and empathy. Furthermore, anadiplosis was another verbal parallelism identified in the sermon, shown through the immediate repetition of "I hope we care" at the transition between sentences. This form follows the pattern where the final word or phrase of one sentence is repeated at the beginning of the next, creating a syntactic link that maintains continuity and reinforces the importance of the repeated expression. The seamless connection between clauses through anadiplosis strengthened the sermon's rhetorical cohesion. Lastly, Antistrophe appeared in the reversal of the elements "dignity" and "common ground" across consecutive clauses. According to Leech (1969), antistrophe involves the repetition of two linguistic units in reverse order, which was precisely demonstrated in this part of the sermon. The mirrored structure effectively emphasized the mutual importance of dignity and shared understanding, adding balance to the sermon's rhetorical construction.

Overall, the findings confirm that verbal parallelism was not only stylistically present but also systematically applied throughout Reverend Budde's sermon. The use of multiple types of verbal parallelism demonstrates the richness and versatility of this linguistic device in shaping the sermon's structure and emphasis. The dominant use of anaphora, supported by the presence of homoioteleuton, epistrophe, symploce, polyptoton, anadiplosis, and antistrophe, reflects a deliberate stylistic strategy aligned with Leech's (1969) framework. These patterns provided rhythm, cohesion, and clarity, all of which contributed to the sermon's effectiveness as a piece of public and religious discourse. The results of this study confirm that verbal parallelism is a powerful stylistic tool that enhances both the structure and communicative impact of a speech.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored the use of verbal parallelism in Reverend Mariann Budde's sermon delivered at the 2025 United States presidential inauguration prayer service. The analysis revealed that verbal parallelism was carefully and systematically applied throughout the sermon. The speaker used this stylistic device to emphasize key messages and strengthen the structure of the speech. The deliberate placement of these repetitions allowed the speaker to capture the audience's attention and reinforce essential themes.

The study identified several types of verbal parallelism based on Leech's theory, including anaphora, homoioteleuton, epistrophe, symploce, polyptoton, anadiplosis, and antistrophe. Among these, anaphora was found to be the most frequently used type, showing the speaker's preference for repetition at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences. Other types such as homoioteleuton and epistrophe were also effectively used to create rhythmic and phonological patterns. The presence of these various types demonstrates the speaker's skillful use of language to construct a persuasive and cohesive sermon.

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