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Presidential Inaugural Speech: Traditional and Communicative Approaches to Its Study

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The objective of the paper in question is to make a multifaceted study of presidential inaugural speech using the basic concepts of communicative linguistics.

The presidential inaugural is defined as an essential element of the investiture ritual. Being closely connected with the ceremonial event this type of political speech is attributed to the epideictic rhetoric which distinctive features are the contemplation of the present moment by means of incorporating the past and future, the speaker's praising and / or criticizing the situation, observing the orator's skills by the audience.

The inaugural address is exploited to build trust in the newly elected president and his / her vision of the state prospects. To fulfill its main purposes of consolidating the nation after the election and establishing the values common for the audience, various engaging lexical and stylistic means are included into the text of the inaugural.

The matrix of seven parameters based on the components of communication is used to make a profile of presidential inaugural speech. The subject of this type of political communication is the president-elect who addresses the nation which is the recipient of the communication. The role of the audience in this ritual is to witness the transition of power and its legitimacy. The message transmitted in the form of monologue is the public realization of the written text prepared by the speechwriter in good time before the occasion. Regarding the functions of the inaugural address it is classified as ritual if we are to choose between this type and the other two – orientation and agonal types. With the information scope being taken into consideration, the presidential inaugural speech is attributed to the medium genre. In terms of the communicative goal of the utterance, the address of the president-elect is characterized as evaluative with the features of the informational type. As an additional aspect of analysis the historical context is suggested.

Key words: political communication, political speech, presidential inauguration, epideictic, components of communication

Statement of the problem and relevance of the research topic. One of the problems that the representatives of political linguistics face at the current stage of its development is the write-up of political communication and its species, the overall description of political speeches in particular. The decisive step has been taken by featuring the typological traits of the political speech [2]. It is high time to carry out the further research devoted to one of its varieties – inaugural speech that accompanies the ceremony at which “the oath of office as president” [9] is taken. The event in question draws attention of the entire country, and if the state is the principal player in the political game, it is the landmark occasion to talk about worldwide.

Analysis of the recent research and publications. Such type of political communication has been and remains in the focus of special research of different disciplines among which there are rhetoric, stylistics, political studies, and sociolinguistics.

At the initial stage of its study the inaugural address has been viewed from the standpoint of classical rhetoric [5, p. 22]. The presidential inaugural is identified as the subspecies of epideictic rhetoric. According to Aristotle, this species of rhetoric has the following traits: there is the contemplation of the present moment, the speaker praises and / or blames the situation, and the audience observes the orator's skills [4, p. 46–50].

The peculiar features which differentiate the presidential inaugural speech from other subspecies of epideictic rhetoric are distinguished. The four interrelated points are seen to recur: 1) reconstituting the members of the audience as “the people” who can witness and ratify

the ceremony” [5, p. 31]; 2) rehearsing “communal values drawn from the past” [5, p. 31]; 3) setting forth “the political principles that will guide the new administration” [5, p. 31]; demonstrating “through the enactment that the president appreciates the requirements and limitations of executive functions” [5, p. 31].

One of the intents of presidential inaugural address is “to build trust in the newly elected political power” [1, p. 114].

The genre specific attributes of inaugural speech have been determined due to the study carried out by S. Romaniuk. The researcher defines the inaugural speech as the mixture of two styles – “official documents style and publicistic style” [3, p. 166]. This feature is reflected in such lexical and stylistic units as evaluative vocabulary and idioms, language clichés, similes, metaphors and other figurative means [3, p. 159–160]. M. Vassileva points out: “The genre convention of the inaugural address in the characteristics of political speaking is also accentuated by the overwhelming power of logic eloquence” [11, p. 54].

Nevertheless, the traditional approaches are rather narrow. It is the communicative framework within which we can better understand the essence of the phenomenon in question. The considerable success in using the above mentioned approach to define the presidential debate [7] is the evidence of its efficiency.

The research objective is to conduct a multifaceted study of inaugural speech highlighting its communicative attributes.

Main findings. The special character of inaugural speech is created by the nature of the ceremony itself. The inauguration means “a ceremonial induction into office” [6]. In its turn, the inaugural speech is defined as “an essential

element in a ritual of transition in which the covenant between the citizenry and their leaders is renewed” [5, p. 29]. The presidential inaugural articulates the common interpretation of the event in order to forge its picture in the minds of the audience making it the only way of remembering it.

The matrix of the limited parameters has been suggested to describe any political speech [2, p. 42]. They are related to the general theory of communication within which the following basic components of this process are singled out: the subject of communication, the message, the channel, the recipient, the goal of communication, etc. To outline the political speech the configuration of seven items is rational to apply, namely “characteristics of the subject and the recipient, the way of realization, the opposition of monologue and dialogue speech, functions, information scope, and communicative goal” [2, p. 42].

In the case of inaugural the subject of communication is the newly elected president who uses the unique opportunity provided by the occasion to demonstrate the leadership abilities, in particular, the ability to unify the nation which is the recipient as a whole.

It should be noted that due to the mediation of the mass media the total number of recipients reached by the address has increased drastically since the mid-20th century. Nowadays the mass media and modern technology not only expand the circle of the immediate recipients of the inaugural speech but make it (in the format of recording) available to the potential audience.

This facet of the study helps to determine “the various ways citizens are exposed to and participate in different forms of political communication” [12, p. 2]. In the case of inaugural speech the role of the audience in the ritual is witnessing the investiture.

The political speech in question is the public realization of the written text prepared in good time before the occasion. The speaker is considered to be the declarative author of the text. As a rule, the text of the speech delivered at the ceremony is well thought-out and measured by the specialist in this field – a speechwriter – or the group of such specialists, and the president-elect promotes the ideas implemented in the address as his / her own. This text in the form of his / her monologue is perceived by the audience.

If the fifth parameter (the functions) is used to describe the political speech then the inaugural is characterized as a ritual speech because its delivery is closely connected with the ceremony, the event of great momentousness as well as the media event, and encompasses the issues topical for the state and its members (the relevant requests of most of the voters should be taken into account while preparing the inaugural).

With regard to such a parameter as the information scope the inaugural speech is attributed to the medium genre. The statistics [8] show that the length of the

inaugural addresses of the US presidents varies, with an average of 2,337 words [10].

The last but not the least parameter of the matrix is the communicative goal of the utterance. As a rule, the political speech has the traits of all the three main types – informational, evaluative and imperative – but the only one dominates. Being a subspecies of epideictic rhetoric the inaugural address contains the orator’s praise and / or blame verbalized by means of various lexical and stylistic devices. So it is primarily characterized as evaluative. At the same time the text “provides an initial blueprint of governance for the electorate” [10] which is usual to the informational subtype. As to the segments that directly call to action, they are rather rare. The newly elected president’s discourse is persuasive: reasoning is exploited to accomplish the task of consolidating the nation.

The synergy of classical rhetoric and speech act theory results in the notion of “rhetoric performative” [12, p. 8], “reinforcement of values” [12, p. 9] being the basic feature of the epideictic species of rhetoric. If considered in terms of speech act theory the epideictic aims not at the locutionary aspect but illocutionary one – “communal and historical significance of the speech itself” [12, p. 9] as it “generates a distinct kind of knowledge” [12, p. 8], offering the audience “guidance in conducting their lives” [12, p. 9]. Thus, it “constitutes a significant social action” [12, p. 9]. This is typical of the presidential inaugural: the orator focuses on the above mentioned action done in words.

The prominent aspect of the inaugural speech analysis concerns the point that “rhetorical action occurs in relation to history and context” [5, p. 22]. For instance, the background of the latest inauguration in the USA (the 2021 inauguration) is characterized as “politically and socially complicated” [11, p. 54]. The context of J. Biden’s inauguration can be described, in a nutshell, by using these facts – “impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the worst economic crisis ..., a national reckoning on racial justice, and the violent aftermath of ... presidential election” [11, p. 54]. Thus, one more facet of the communicative model of inaugural address is the communication context.

Conclusion and prospects for further research. The usage of the communicative approach combined with the traditional one (generated by rhetoric and stylistics) has resulted in compiling the profile of the presidential inaugural speech. Being an essential part of the president inauguration ceremony the speech addressed to the audience helps to certify the fact of the power transition simultaneously activating the set of values shared by the citizenry. The historical context is crucial for its analysis as this type of rhetoric focuses on the present moment by means of incorporating the past and future.

The further research is possible in the direction of analysing the inaugural speech of the definite president-elect as well as comparing the peculiar features of inaugural speeches delivered by different persons to find out similar qualities. The cross-cultural approach can be regarded as the potential trend of research.

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Інавгураційна промова президента: традиційний та комунікативний підходи до її вивчення

Мета цієї наукової розвідки – комплексне вивчення інавгураційної промови президента із застосуванням основних понять комунікативної лінгвістики.

Політична промова цього різновиду є важливим складником ритуалу інвеститури. Відповідно до класифікації традиційної риторики, інавгураційну промову віднесено до промов епідейктичного типу, диференційними ознаками якого вважають апелювання до поточного моменту, вихвалювання та / або осуд ситуації з боку мовця, спостереження аудиторією за його ораторською майстерністю.

Виступ під час інавгурації принагідно використано для формування довіри до новообраного президента та його бачення розвитку країни. Для виконання основних завдань цієї промови, серед яких намагання об'єднати націю після виборів та затвердження спільних для аудиторії цінностей, різноманітні лексико-стилістичні засоби введено до тексту промови.

Для всебічного опису політичної промови розглянутого типу послуговуємося матрицею з семи параметрів щодо компонентів комунікації. Суб'єктом комунікації є новообраний президент, котрий звертається до нації, яка є реципієнтом комунікації і виконує роль свідка переходу влади та засвідчує легітимність процедури. Виголошена промова є публічним виступом, що готується заздалегідь спічрайтером та реалізується у формі монологу новообраного президента. Це промова ритуального типу, якщо обирати між зазначеним типом й іншими двома – орієнтаційним та агональним. Якщо брати до уваги обсяг передаваної інформації, то це промова середнього жанру. За комунікативною метою висловлювання, інавгураційна промова тяжіє до промов оцінного типу з ознаками, які притаманні інформаційним текстам. Як додатковий аспект аналізу інавгураційного виступу запропоновано історичний контекст.

Ключові слова: політична комунікація, політична промова, інавгурація президента, епідейктична промова, компоненти комунікаціїis
