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MODESTY IDEA IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURALS: EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT MEANS OF EXPRESSION

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*У статті доводиться, що в інавгураційних промовах американських президентів ідея скромності висловлюється експліцитно й імпліцитно. До експліцитних засобів належить прикметник *humble*, який характеризує особу, уряд, націю, людську расу й очікування від майбутнього. Імпліцитні граматичні засоби включають: мінімальну кількість вживань займенника першої особи на фоні значного поширення об'єднувального займенника *we* і дієслова, які позиціонують президента й народ як цілі зовнішнього впливу. Імпліцитні лексичні засоби позначають попередників, події минулого й апелюють до Всевишнього.*

*Ключові слова: інавгураційна промова, скромність, прикметник *humble*, особовий займенник, дієслово.*

*В статье доказывается, что в инаугурационных обращениях американских президентов идея скромности выражается эксплицитно и имплицитно. К эксплицитным средствам принадлежит прилагательное *humble*, характеризующее президента, правительство, нацию, человечество и ожидания от будущего. Имплицитные грамматические средства включают: минимальное количество употреблений местоимения *I* лица на фоне доминирования инклюзивного местоимения *we* и глаголы, позиционирующие президента и народ как цели внешнего воздействия. Имплицитные лексические средства обозначают предшественников, события прошлого и апеллируют к Всевышнему.*

*Ключевые слова: инаугурационное выступление, скромность, прилагательное *humble*, личное местоимение, глагол.*

*The paper argues that the idea of modesty is manifested in American presidential inaugurals explicitly and implicitly. The explicit means include the adjective "humble" characterizing the president, the government, the nation, the human race and the expectations from the future. The implicit grammatical means encompass: a meager number of the first person pronoun *I* against a large quantity of the inclusive "we" and verbs positioning president and his nation as targets of external influence. The implicit lexical means refer to the predecessors, the prior events and appeal to God.*

Key words: inaugural address, humility, adjective "humble", personal pronoun, verb.

Presidential inaugurals are epideictic speeches which being delivered on ceremonial occasions fuse past and future in present contemplation, affirm or praise the shared principles that will guide the incoming administration, ask the audience to "gaze upon" traditional values, employ an elegant, literary language, and rely on "heightening of effect," that is, on amplification and reaffirmation of what is already known and believed. The special character of the presidential inaugural address is defined by these general epideictic features and by the nature of the inauguration ceremony [5, p. 282–283]. The special sense of the present is central to the generic character of the inaugural because the address is about an institution and form of government fashioned to transcend any given moment [3, p. 395].

The general qualities of epideictic rhetoric, modified by the nature of presidential investiture, generate a constellation of five interrelated elements which differentiate the presidential inaugural address from other types of epideictic rhetoric. Any presidential inaugural performs the following functions: unifies the audience by reconstituting its members as "the people" who can witness and ratify this ceremony; rehearses communal values drawn from the past; sets forth the political principles that will govern the new administration; demonstrates that the President appreciates the requirements and limitations of his executive functions; achieves these ends through means appropriate to epideictic address, i. e. while urging contemplation not action, focusing on the present

while incorporating past and future, and praising the institution of the Presidency and the values and form of the government of which it is a part [3, p. 396]. Besides the features common for all the inaugurals some of them express specific traits characterizing a particular president, for example, modesty and determination in President Obama's first inaugural and Congressional speeches [7, p. 243], or responsibility in President Putin's two inaugurals [1, p. 143].

The **aim** of this paper is to compare how the idea of modesty is expressed in the inaugurals of four American Presidents from different periods of the country's history: George Washington from the early stage, Dwight Eisenhower from the mid-20th century and our contemporaries Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. This aim presupposes the solution of the following **tasks**: to reveal the explicit means of expressing modesty idea and to single out the implicit means of verbalizing the modesty idea.

Though explicitly modesty can be expressed in English by the adjectives *modest*, *humble* and the derivative nouns *modesty*, *humility*, the presidential inaugurals only include the adjective *humble* which characterizes the president, government, citizens, human race in general as well as anticipations of the future.

Personal humility is expressed in President Obama's first inaugural [7, p. 245]. Though second addresses are regarded as somewhat more modest in their scaling than the first inaugurals because by this stage the public and the world know what's good about the president, what his weaknesses are [4], it is not the case with President Obama: his first inaugural is regarded as *modest* [2; 6, p. 19]. This primary nomination is used in his first inaugural three times: in the introductory utterance it is represented by the participle *humbled* (*My fellow citizens, I stand here today **humbled** by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors*), in the body of the text by the noun *humility* (*Our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of **humility** and restraint*) and in the section dealing with the feats accomplished by Americans by the adjective *humble*: *As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with **humble** gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains* [10].

The humility of the Government is reflected in President Clinton's inaugural. The adjective *humble* occurs only once in the body of the text in the paragraph about the government: *We need a new Government for a new century, **humble** enough not to try to solve all our problems for us but strong enough to give us the tools to solve our problems for ourselves, a Government that is smaller, lives within its means, and does more with less* [8]. In this passage Bill Clinton introduces his personal vision of a new government by the phrase *we need a new Government* with the adjectives *smaller* and *less* lowering its significance in the state system.

The modesty of a nation is explicitly implemented in President Eisenhower's first inaugural by the substantivized adjective *humble* in the superlative degree used in the passage about the values and principles of his governing: *In the light of this equality, we know that the virtues most cherished by free people—love of truth, pride of work, devotion to country—all are treasures equally precious in the lives of **the most humble** and of the most exalted* [9].

The humility of the human race and people to God is employed by President Washington who in such a way shows his inferiority and submissiveness to the will of the Almighty who can contribute to national prosperity and better life. Consequently, Washington himself gets a diminutive status of his presidency mentioning that the success of the government depends on God's blessings, permissions, will. He doesn't show any wish to surpass the supremacy of the Almighty. In the concluding paragraph the adjective *humble* puts God above all humans referring to him as Parent of the Human Race: *But not without resorting once more to the benign Parent of the Human Race in **humble** supplication that, since He has been pleased to favor the American people* [11]. The noun *supplication* and the word combination *to favor the American people* in the cited example indicate submissiveness of Americans to God.

President Washington also expresses humble expectation from the future by the adjective *humble* in the following passage: *And in the important revolution just accomplished in the system of their united government the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct communities from which the event has resulted can*

*not be compared with the means by which most governments have been established without some return of pious gratitude, along with an **humble** anticipation of the future blessings which the past seem to presage* [11]. The adjective *humble* is followed by the noun *anticipation* and the word combination *future blessings* placing the national humility against the background of the future in the concluding paragraph.

The implicit means, underscoring the idea of humility expressed explicitly, fall into two groups: grammatical and lexical. The grammatical means include pronouns, namely the meager quantity of the pronoun *I* against a large number of the inclusive *we* and verbs that imply inferiority. The tiny quantity of the first person pronoun singular *I* which places the President at the ruling top is the first means of implying modesty. President Eisenhower and President Obama use the pronoun three times while President Clinton resorts to it only twice. President Eisenhower says: *My friends, before I begin the expression of those thoughts that I deem appropriate to this moment, would you permit me the privilege of uttering a little private prayer of my own. And I ask that you bow your heads* [9]. President Clinton uses *I* to make pledges: *To that effort I pledge all my strength and every power of my office. I ask the Members of Congress here to join in that pledge* [8]. President Obama uses *I* in the first two sentences of the introduction and in the sixth paragraph emphasizing the problems facing America: *My fellow citizens, I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors. I thank President Bush for his service to our Nation, as well as the generosity and cooperation he has shown throughout this transition. Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real* [10].

Against the meager quantity of the pronoun *I* the inclusive *we*, subordinated to the integrative function, indicates a president's unity with his nation underscoring his modesty. In President Clinton's second inaugural (1997) the inclusive *we* used against the background of the small amount of the pronoun *I* unites the president with other Americans. This correlation of the pronouns *I* and *we* creates a modesty effect affirming the personal humility of the president. In his speech the inclusive *we* together with its derivative pronouns *us* and *our* occurs 126 times almost in each sentence: *Each and every one of **us**, in **our** own way, must assume personal responsibility not only for **ourselves** and **our** families but for **our** neighbors and **our** Nation. **Our** greatest responsibility is to embrace a new spirit of community for a new century. For any one of **us** to succeed, **we** must succeed as one America. Today **we** can declare: Government is not the problem, and Government is not the solution. **We** – the American people – **we** are the solution* [8].

The second grammatical means of implying *modesty* is represented by the verbs positioning presidents as targets of activity: *to bestow upon, to summon, to succumb, to submit, to grace upon*. In this vein, President Washington opened his address with a modest disclaimer of his qualifications, stating that he had been summoned from his longed-for retreat at Mount Vernon by the voice of his country which seems to be a humble indication of his submission to the call of public duty: *I was **summoned** by my country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love* [11]. In this example, the passive form of the verb *to summon* signals president's inferiority to his voters. Ironically, the only President to have been unanimously elected by his peers to take the office George Washington begins the speech by humbly revealing his insecurities, reluctance and lack of confidence at accepting such an official position. He states he is uncertain he is qualified to execute the duties of the presidency. He also suggests that he has inherited "inferior endowments from nature" and is "unpractised in the duties of the civil administration" which is in vein with the definition of *modesty* given by dictionaries. Furthermore, the verbs *to submit* and *to remain* underscore Washington's humility before the nation and its judgments: *Besides the ordinary objects **submitted** to **your** care, it will **remain** with **your** judgment to decide how far an exercise of an occasional power delegated by the fifth article of the Constitution is rendered expedient at the present juncture* [11].

Lexical means of implying modesty idea comprise reference to the past and to God. Reference to the past is carried out by naming the famous predecessors or events from the US history. Frequently mentioning the merits of other people in their speeches and saying nothing about their own achievements, presidents diminish their own importance for the country and show their subordination to the ideas of others which is a

direct signal of their personal modesty. President Eisenhower subordinates to his predecessors and their achievements by the noun *fathers* showing his adherence to the old principles and values hiding behind them the personality of the president: *At such a time in history, we who are free must proclaim anew our faith. This faith is the abiding creed of our fathers.* President Clinton appeals to his predecessors by the noun *founders* implying his personal insignificance: *Our Founders understood that well and gave us a democracy strong enough to endure for centuries, flexible enough to face our common challenges and advance our common dreams in each new day. Our Founders taught us that the preservation of our liberty and our Union depends upon responsible citizenship* [9]. Moreover, President Clinton dedicates a whole paragraph to the legendary Martin Luther King and his dream of a powerful state in which everybody is equal before the law underscoring that he is going to continue building up America according to these principles: *Martin Luther King's dream was the American dream. His quest is our quest: the ceaseless striving to live out our true creed. Our history has been built on such dreams and labors. And by our dreams and labors, we will redeem the promise of America in the 21st century* [8]. In President Obama's inaugural the state founders are indicated by a bigger number of words (*forefathers, ancestors, father or our nation*) which signifies his humility in the face of history: *The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth* [10].

Religion and faith play a decisive role in implicit expression of modesty. Religious modesty is observed throughout the whole speech of President Washington who worships the omnipotent God and shows his intention to abide by His decisions. The president uses the following names of God in his speech, each employed only once: *the Almighty Being, the Great Author, the Invisible Hand, the Parent of the Human Race*. In the second paragraph of the address resorting to religious power President Washington expresses the idea that the United States had been founded due to God's favor and that it could only continue so by humbly seeking His blessings. Consequently, he unites together with the whole nation under God's auspices urging everybody to bow to His decisions: *Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station, it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to the Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aid can supply every human defect. No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States* [11]. Supplication to God is the main means of representing modesty in President Eisenhower's speech who was the only president to write his own prayer for his inaugural ceremony emphasizing his dedication to the Almighty: *"Almighty God, as we stand here at this moment my future associates in the Executive branch of Government join me in beseeching that Thou will make full and complete our dedication to the service of the people in this throng, and their fellow citizens everywhere. Give us, we pray, the power to discern clearly right from wrong, and allow all our words and actions to be governed thereby, and by the laws of this land. Especially we pray that our concern shall be for all the people regardless of station, race or calling. May cooperation be permitted and be the mutual aim of those who, under the concepts of our Constitution, hold to differing political faiths; so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory. Amen"* [9].

In the prayer the verbs *to beseech, to pray* and *to permit* position the whole nation as a target of God's influence. Moreover, in the passage cited above the modal verb *may* reinforces a high degree of national inferiority. Besides, Eisenhower refers to God several times in the introduction, in the passage announcing principles of his government and in the concluding paragraph, showing that the nation is only an instrument in God's hands. The combination of reference to God with the verb *to beseech* indicating inferiority and the nouns *guidance, watchfulness, prayer* places God above the people creating an effect of humility of the whole nation.

To conclude, inaugurals express the idea of modesty explicitly and implicitly. It is manifested explicitly by the adjective *humble* which may characterize the president, the government, the nation, the human race and the anticipations of the future. Implicit means, reinforcing the ideas expressed explicitly, fall into grammatical and lexical. The grammatical means comprise pronouns, namely the meager number of the pronoun *I* against a large quantity of the inclusive *we*, and verbs which position the President and

the nation as targets of external influence. The lexical means refer to the past by naming the predecessors, their achievements and events from American history as well as supplication to God.

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