

Introduction

[People](#), [Barack Obama](#)



Introduction American presidential inaugural address is a very important speech with worldwide influence and long-lasting significance. It is delivered by the newly elected president on the inauguration day. The presidential inaugural address is a time for the president to set forth his vision for the country. Many great speeches have been delivered through the years and they attracted the attention of many political scientists, historians and many linguists as well. However the study of presidential inaugural address is mainly from political and stylistic perspective. Only a few were conducted from the pragmatic point of view. The main task of the address is to outline the main policies of the new government and win people's support. The president tries to show the new government in a favourable light and win the approval of the public. In order to achieve these goals the speakers often resort to language skills among other things. Among these language skills, politeness language can serve these purposes properly and effectively. Therefore the presidents and their speech writing teams often choose politeness principles as they are more likely to succeed with them. Politeness principle The politeness principle and its maxims belong to major concepts discussed in the field of pragmatics. Pragmatics is often defined as the study of language use and its users. According to Leech pragmatics " can be usefully defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations". Pragmatic theory helps scholars to understand what people want to achieve and how they use language to achieve those goals. This paper will take a closer look at the application of the politeness principle in the presidential inaugural addresses. I will discuss the roles of the participants, the context as well as the communication strategies used to get their

message across. The concept of politeness principle is a series of maxims proposed by Geoffrey Leech. He defines politeness as a type of behaviour that allows the participants to engage in a social interaction in a relative harmony. He suggested there are six different maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy. Perhaps the most thorough treatment of politeness was put forward by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. Their politeness strategy is one of the most influential ones. The basic notion of their model is face. They considered face as “ the public self image that every member of society wants to claim for himself”. They assume that all competent adult members of society are concerned about the image they present to the world. On the other hand they do recognise that other people also have similar concerns about their own images. According to Brown and Levinson, face consists of the related aspects — negative and positive face. The first is represented by the desire not to be imposed whereas the second signifies the need to be appreciated and approved. Even though people maintain one’s face continuously the face threatening acts are inevitable. Such act can damage the face of the addressee or the speaker by acting in opposition to the desires of the communicative partner. In order to avoid dealing with such face threatening acts politeness strategies were developed. According to Brown and Levinson there are four of them: bald on record, positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy and off-record indirect strategy. For my paper the most important strategy is positive politeness. It is mostly employed to minimize the distance between participants by expressing friendliness and interest in the hearer. Positive politeness strategy is approach based. It is characterized

by the expression of approval and appreciation of the addressee. Presidential inaugural address The inauguration of the president of the United States takes place every time a new presidential term begins. The element mandated by the Constitution is that the president makes an oath of affirmation. However over the years various celebrations have been added so that a day-long event was created. The new president delivers his address in which he outlines plans for the future term. For my analysis I have chosen two different inaugural addresses — John F. Kennedy in 1961 which is generally regarded as one of the best ever given and the most current one delivered by Barack Obama in 2009. The following information is presented to give the reader a brief idea about the context and time when the speeches were delivered.

1961 J. F. Kennedy The Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy is considered one of the greatest speeches in the twentieth-century American public address. Like other great communicators, he was someone who took word-craft very seriously indeed. The address is famous for its eloquence and for its call to duty. The young president spoke to the nation after a close, divisive election, and at a time when the American people were growing increasingly fearful of a long, drawn-out cold war. Yet instead of reassuring his audience by minimizing the dangers, Kennedy warned of a long, difficult struggle, emphasized differences between the United States and its enemies, and outlined the specific responsibilities and obligations of the United States and its citizens.

2009 B. Obama President Obama's Inaugural Address was a measured speech, sombre in places, hopeful in others. It was pragmatic and direct in addressing the current situation of the country he now leads. On the day he assumed the highest

office in the land, the speech was far more about those he was elected to serve than him himself. He tries to reassure the people that voted for him that despite obstacles he hopes that better times will come. He looks to the great American history for hope. The analysis In this part of my essay I would like to take a close look at the before mentioned addresses and conduct pragmatic analysis.

1. We are all one nation Many examples of positive politeness strategies can be found in all political speeches. For example by using one of the many ways to convey in-group membership, a speaker can claim the common ground with the audience. That's why they often use proper forms of address and inclusive pronouns to show their intimate relationship with the audience. By using them they make the audience feel included. 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. (B. Obama) Vice President Johnson, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, President Truman, reverend clergy, fellow citizens, we observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end, as well as a beginning—signifying renewal, as well as change. (J. F. Kennedy) Although forms of address are different from each other, one thing remains the same. They all address the public by forms of: my fellow citizens, my fellow countrymen or my fellow Americans. Some presidents even resort to using this form of address more than once throughout their address. Here is J. F. Kennedy addressing his fellow citizens almost towards the end of his speech: In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than in mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. (J. F. Kennedy) In all the examples American people are

addressed equally and wholly. This helps the speaker express his willingness to be part of the same community as the hearer, become one of its members and at the same time make the hearer feel included. Thus the hearer's positive face can be supported. Except for the in-group forms of address, the presidents develop a collective identity through the use of terms of inclusion, for example: we, our, and us is much more preferable than the non-inclusive terms: I, you and your which may be perceived as egoistic. Employment of inclusive pronouns can be found in numerous instances in both analyzed addresses: We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. (J. F. Kennedy) Here the former American president uses the inclusive we twice. By doing so he intends to put more emphasis on his words and make them sound much stronger. He also puts both sentences into contrast to make greater impact. To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge—to convert our good words into good deeds—in a new alliance for progress—to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. (J. F. Kennedy) This second example shows maximum use of inclusive pronouns. First Kennedy here not only includes the people of United States but also “ sister republics south of our border”. By the use of “ our good words” he not only means himself as the president but he wants to tell the sister republics that American people stand united behind him. The inclusive pronouns unite the speaker and the audience. The American president appears to be just one member among ordinary citizens. Secondly they can create a sense of unity. This practice minimizes the differences within the group and maximizes the differences between those within the group and the outsiders. This can be shown again

with Kennedy's address: Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty. (J. F. Kennedy) By the first part of the sentence the beloved president excludes every other nation in the world and creates the sense that the audience is one united group. The inclusive pronouns we and us thus distinguish American people from other population. From the point of view of the other nations then this we is exclusive — excluding them from the group. Barack Obama also aware of this strategy uses inclusive pronouns often: Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. (B. Obama) This example not only shows the extensive use of the collective we but also proves to be a good example of the "rule of three". Our nation... our economy... our collective failure represents the golden rule of three which belongs to the bases of any political speech. The rule of three is a powerful speechwriting technique that allows the speaker to express his concepts more clearly and completely. It helps with emphasizing the point and memorability of the message. 2. God bless us all Another wildly used strategy is to stay within the common ground. It is used to set up an intimate relationship with the audience and shorten the distance with the public. The usual way how to do so is to remind the American people of their "shared heritage" by reflecting fundamental principles of the society and reminding them of the great events and men from their shared history. Religion is one of those themes which occur most

often in public speaking. Many public speakers make great use of religion and Bible. Therefore referring to God can make the winning of the audience's acceptance and approval this much easier. Almost any president refers to God a number of times during his presidential inaugural address. This demonstrates how important the position of religion and God really is especially in the Western hemisphere. To explain this phenomenon we must look at the specifics of the culture the speaker is addressing. In this case two reasons might offer us a reasonable explanation: firstly as was already mentioned most of the people of the Western hemisphere are Christians and secondly the American people would probably never accept an atheistic president. Some speakers choose to praise God at the very beginning: For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago. (J. F. Kennedy)

While Kennedy uses the name of God couple of times within the first few minutes, Barack Obama didn't mention the God's name until the very last third of his speech: This is the source of our confidence: the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny. (B. Obama)

3. History made every day Barack Obama references God only a few times throughout the whole address. This can be explained partially by the context of the speech. He tries very hard to bring people of all religions closer which I think has to do with the current situation in the world and the fear of terrorism and anything foreign. However he makes good use of the American history and goes back in time a much too often during the address: For us, they fought and died in places Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sanh. (B. Obama)

Our founding fathers faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine,

drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. (B. Obama) By mentioning the important past of the United States that any hearer shares with the president also helps him to establish the common ground. The distance between the participants is much shorter. Other strong fundamental beliefs that are often times mentioned are “ freedom” and “ democracy”. It is common knowledge that many Americans value these two above all. They are proud of them and concerned with them at the same time. From history they believe to be the chosen ones to guide and restore the world peace. In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. (J. F. Kennedy) While exhibition of the great historical success and importance of America establishes the common ground it also helps in stimulating the pride and confidence in the nation. It unites people around the government and calls for their support.

Conclusion With all mentioned examples I hoped to show that positive politeness is a widely used strategy in the presidential inaugural address. By using the inclusive pronouns and establishing the common ground by mentioning the shared history and religion the president seeks to minimize the threat to the hearer’s face. This seems to be determined by the purpose of the speech. The newly elected president by showing friendliness and involvement wants to show every hearer the he or she is welcome and included. By minimizing the distance between them he creates better and harmonious relationship. They are used also to make the addressee feel good about him/her. The feeling of having something in common with the president of the United States and being included in the group certainly

helps the hearer feel more comfortable and important. By avoiding any controversial topics the president intends to avoid any conflict. It is important to mention that this essay is in no way exhaustive and more research needs to be done.

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