

## Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden: Political Rhetoric of Inaugural Addresses

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### Abstract

*The study presented herewith, entitled Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, Biden: Political Rhetoric in Inaugural Addresses, shows the results of linguistic and cultural research of the political discourse used in inaugural addresses of five recent US presidents and the political rhetoric they used to comment on “sensitive” and controversial issues, related to their political opponents. The author focuses on the specific use of modifying linguistic devices (PC language, dysphemisms and euphemisms) and also refers to other linguistic devices, neutralizing expressions, related to ethnic, religious, sexual and other phenomena. Special attention was paid to the euphemistic role of the pronoun “some”. The research by Zhao and Dong (2010) and Crespo-Fernández (2018) served as a theoretical framework on euphemisms as the basis for analysis; a comparative analysis and discourse analysis, as well as political and historical research, have been selected and the research methods. As a result of the research, the authors arrived at formulating a new principle in the use of the indefinite pronoun “some” in political speech aiming at easing tensions and harmonizing the divided society. Further attention was paid to the political affiliation of the US presidents and their view of domestic and international policy that affect their linguistic devices, and add to the iconicity of their speeches.*

**Keywords:** discourse analysis, euphemism, inaugural address, PC, political correctness, US presidency.

### Introduction

Despite the fact that neither federal law nor the Constitution requires an address at a presidential inauguration, the delivery of an inaugural address is a de facto requirement in order to become the president of the USA (Pagliarini 2011). It is also one of the most formal, and significant state ceremonies in the USA, a part of the “democratic process” (Hinckley 1990: 21), which accompanies peaceful transmitting the power from the predecessor to the

successor. This speech, held on January 20 (since 1937), is crucially important as the language of the chief political representative in the country shapes normative expectations of the political aims, tendencies and culture that will dominate his presidency. The tone and manner of delivery identify the forthcoming president as a personality and politician, define his attitude to the federal and national institutions, and to the American people. Inaugural addresses employ “sensitive language” (Western 2016; Baranova; Krikakina 2020), as the President-elect indicates major problems and issues (e.g. economic and international issues, race, class, gender, sexual orientation and civil rights), their potential source (often related to decisions made by his predecessor) and solutions (depending on the political affiliation of the president). Therefore, presidents often try to neutralize issues and ease tensions by politically correct (PC) language, and soften harsh or direct expressions by the use of euphemisms.

In this study, seven inaugural addresses, given by five US presidents (Democrats William Clinton, Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, and Republicans George W. Bush and Donald Trump), were subject to discourse analysis of linguistic means (especially to the use of the pronoun “some”), by which the speakers responded to negatives of the US economy and role of the USA as a world leader in economic and political affairs. Based on the research conducted by Pagliarini in 2011, we confirmed the hypothesis that euphemisms in inaugural addresses of two President-elects (Barack Obama and Joe Biden) of the research unit, not only comply with the well-known purposes identified by previous researches (Zhao; Dong 2010; BurrIDGE 1996), but possess one more crucial function: to ease political tensions and harmonize the divided society.

### **Brief history and nature of the US inaugural addresses**

The US inaugural address denotes an eloquent and powerful speech of the President-elect, classified as an oratory political genre, with a specific lexicon and discursive means. The first inaugural address was delivered by George Washington on April 30, 1789. The length of addresses varies from the laconic 133 words (George Washington, second inaugural address, 1793) to an unprecedented 8445 words (William H. Harrison 1841). Interestingly, he delivered the 1 hour 45 minute oration without wearing warm clothes in a snowstorm, and died of pneumonia one month later (Whitney, 2009). As for the manner of delivery, the addresses in the past were read to the Congress. Now they are broadcasted to the American nation and internationally. The address is read aloud; employing new technologies, such as

radio, television and the internet. Therefore, more attention has recently been paid to non-verbal language of the reader.

Regarding the type of discourse of inaugural addresses, Aristotle categorized this type of public speeches as “epideictic”, which, according to experts is, “a form of rhetoric that praises or blames on ceremonial occasions, invites the audience to evaluate the speaker’s performance, recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present, employs a noble, dignified style, and amplifies or rehearses admitted facts (Aristotle in Pagliarini 2011: 29). Campbell and Jamieson (1990) outline four key features that differentiate inaugural addresses from other versions of this rhetorical form:

1. Inaugural addresses “unify the audience” by recreating a “mutual covenant” that reconstitutes the “audience as ‘the people’ and constitute[s] the citizenry as a people in some new way” (1990: 34). They contend that a key element of inaugural addresses is the necessity of the people serving a “witnessing role” to the ceremonial rite of passage.
2. Inaugural addresses “rehearse national values” and “venerate the past” (1990: 36-37).
3. The addresses “set forth the political principles that will guide the new administration” (1990: 39).
4. The addresses must “enact the presidential role” by demonstrating that the new president “appreciates the requirements and limitations of executive functions (1990: 42).”

The choice of topics and words in inaugural addresses is crucial. Therefore, presidential rhetoric has been subject to extensive research. One of the earliest studies analysing inaugural addresses was done by John McDiarmid (1937) who first analysed inaugural discourses and how they create the “official vocabulary” of the United States (McDiarmid 1937: 79). The discourse of addresses reveals “individual’s underlying philosophy” (Burke 1945) and indicates “a particular political ideology” (Weaver 1953), which leads to understanding political reality (Brock 2005; Zarefsky 2004) and specifically the Executive branch and its prerogatives (Hart, 1987: 202) and, in fact, shapes public policy (Zarefsky 2004; Dulebová 2012). Structurally, several researches (Gronbeck 1994; Medhurst xxi) have examined the discourse and structure of the US inaugural addresses from functionalist point of view, i.e., how presidents have used rhetoric to their advantage.

In terms of the content, the addresses usually start with or contain expressions of gratitude to the previous president (and the First lady; Trump 2017) and summarize key points of the political platform of the President-elect. They often point out the high standard and traditions of the US democracy. McDiarmid (1937) and Kinnier (2004) agree, the inaugural addresses “consistently convey the message that America has the best system of government,” and puts forward high moral principles. On the other hand, Stein analysed the “changing dynamics of the tone of inaugural addresses over time”, breaking down the inaugurals into three groups: 1) Washington through Buchanan, the modest, classic public servant; 2) Lincoln through Taft, the prosaic government executive and 3) Wilson to present, assertive, theatrical, leader-preacher. Stein contends that the third phase of inaugural addresses was witnessed a transition from describing government policy to attempting to inspire the public’s behaviour via rhetoric (Stein 1997).

To conclude, inaugural addresses represent much more than a formal opening presidential speech, they introduce the political rhetoric and “culture” of the forthcoming election period and denominate key points of the political program. In doing so, they stylistically employ both direct and indirect, figurative language, containing figurative language, for example metaphors, (spring for a new start in Clinton’s line spring reborn in the world’s oldest democracy (Clinton 1993); democracy’s front porch for the Capitol; [Democracy] ...is a seed upon the wind, taking root in many nations (G. W. Bush 1989) and dark hour for the economic crisis (FDR 1933), ...rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace...; ...the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms... (Obama 2009). Other tropes include alliterations, e.g. “...the American story, a story of flawed and fallible people...; ...America’s faith in freedom and democracy was a rock in a raging sea... (G. W. Bush 2001); dramatic repetitions, questions and answers, irony and paradox (Old truths have been relearned; untruths have been unlearned; F. D. Roosevelt 1937), to name a few. Both linguistic and non-linguistic means are devised to set impression of the new president and his presidency as a personality and politician, suggest his attitude to institutions and the balance of power and control over these.

### **Linguistic and cultural aspects of political euphemisms and political correctness: state of research**

According to 2021 edition of Merriam Webster, a rudimentary definition of euphemism (derived from the Greek word *euphēmos*, which means "auspicious" or "sounding good") denominates “the substitution of an agreeable or

inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant”. Euphemisms can take different forms, but generally they all involve substituting a word or phrase considered offensive and coarse (e.g. dang or darn vs. more vulgar damn or damned; God vs. gad, gadzooks, gosh; or a softening phrase, e.g. let go vs. fired) (Merriam Webster 2021). Dysphemism (coined in 1884) is the antonym of euphemism. It is the substitution of a disagreeable, offensive, or disparaging expression for an agreeable or inoffensive one (Merriam Webster 2021), for example stealing used instead more palatable and less serious pinching or replacing.

Political euphemisms were studied by many experts (Zhao, Dong 2010; BurrIDGE 2018). They were created in political life and serving political purposes, is a tool for political leaders to control information transmission, they have two main social functions: disguising or cheating function and persuasive function (Zhao, Dong 2010). Among politically motivated euphemisms are: freedom fighters vs. terrorists, active defense vs. attack, to be underinformed or speaking less than truth vs. to lie, negative growth vs. recession. In the past, political euphemisms were used to ease political tension, e.g. Truman euphemistically named Korean War as “police action”; Vietnam War became known as “Vietnam Conflict”; US invasion into Grenada was called “a rescue mission”, invasion into Panama was also called “Operation Just Cause” and Iraqi War (2003) was euphemistically denoted “Operation Iraqi Freedom”.

The category of political euphemisms partially semantically overlaps with the category of PC (BurrIDGE 2018), politically correct language (the phrase was first used in 1934) in a way it also adapts and diverts “the truth” in order to neutralize, ease or mild negative connotations. Table 1 shows the disparagement of seven regularly used expressions:

Table 1: Disparagement of “truth”: Dysphemisms, politically “incorrect” phrases, (PC) and euphemisms

Expressions referring/avoiding/reinforcing references to one’s:	Corresponding dysphemistic variant (if available)	Politically “incorrect”, now dated phrase	(PC) Politically correct, now preferred phrase	Corresponding euphemistic variant (if available)
Age	<i>Geezer</i>	<i>Old</i>	<i>Elderly</i>	<i>In his/her golden age</i>
Appearances	<i>Crippled</i>	<i>Handicapped</i>	<i>Disabled</i>	<i>Differently abled</i> <i>Challenged</i> <sup>1</sup>
Race	<i>Negro, Nigger</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>African-American, Black</i>	-

Source: author, based on Merriam Webster 2021.

In order to understand the significance of modified language in political discourse, we often need to go beyond rudimentary definitions. Zhao and Dong (2010) suggest, if a euphemism’s semantic meaning’s deviation of degree with a range from 1 to 10, which a greater number refers to a greater degree of deviation, the above-mentioned political euphemism expressions should be marked with a 10, while some ordinary expressions, such as “overweight” and “fat,” can only be marked as 1. Both euphemisms and PC expressions share certain imprecision or vagueness of expression. It was George Orwell who first pointed out two characteristics of political discourse in *Politics and the English Language* (1946), the obsolescence and vagueness of figure of speech, typical for both euphemisms and some PC language (e.g. disabled vs. differently abled).

Some pronouns may also be considered political euphemisms alter “the truth” in a way they avoid direct specification of the doer of action. The utterance Some deny our information is on the scale from 1 to 10 certainly 10 whereas the utterances The Republicans deny our information or Donald Trump denies our information would score much lower.

In conclusion, both PC language, euphemisms and some pronouns replace direct expressions with implied, obscure and vague ones that reinforce a positive aspect of the described characteristics, or neutralize its negative aspects. Decoding their message plays quite an essential role in demystify-

<sup>1</sup> Ladau, E. *The discourse invites many discussions*, e. g. <<https://www.cdrnys.org/blog/disability-dialogue/the-disability-dialogue-4-disability-euphemisms-that-need-to-bite-the-dust>> [13. 3. 2021].

ing the connotation of political discourse, especially when serving pragmatic political purposes.

### **Five US Presidential inaugural addresses: discourse analysis**

In this section, the seven most recent inaugural addresses of five US presidents were subjected to discourse analysis, with a special emphasis on their use of the indefinite pronoun “some” as a euphemism. Excerpted words and phrases will be explicated in terms of their modifying, disguising or neutralizing functions. The research by Zhao and Dong (2010) and Crespo-Fernández (2018) served as a theoretical framework for the analysis.

#### ***Description of the research corpus***

The subject of research is formed by seven inaugural addresses of five recent US presidents: Democrats William Clinton, Barack Obama and Joe Biden and two Republicans, George W. Bush and Donald Trump.<sup>2</sup> These presidents represent the post-Cold War era and thus form a homogenous unit. Table 2 shows research-related data, regarding their years of presidency:

Table 2: Years of service, political affiliations and major issues/-achievements

<b>President/year of birth/ interesting footnote</b>	<b>In office</b>	<b>Major political issues/ achievements</b>
<b>William Jefferson Clinton</b> • Dem., 42 <sup>nd</sup> President • b. 1948 (“Baby Boomer”)	1993 to 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lied under oath</li><li>• Faced Post-Cold War era, Communism collapse and its effects</li><li>• War against Serbia</li></ul>

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<sup>2</sup> Speeches given by Clinton, G. W. Bush and Obama were obtained from: *Yale Law School Avalon Project*. <[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/inaug.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/inaug.asp)>. [3. 2. 2021]. The speech given by Trump was obtained from: <<https://www.govinfo.gov/features/presidential-inaugural-addresses>> [13. 3. 2021]. The speech given by Biden was obtained from: <<https://www.govinfo.gov/features/presidential-inaugural-addresses>> [20. 4. 2021].

<b>George Walker Bush</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rep., 43<sup>rd</sup> President</li> <li>• b. 1946</li> </ul>	2001 to 2009  Re-elected 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopted No Child Left Behind Act</li> <li>• 11/9, War in Afghanistan, in 2007 he launched a surge of troops in Iraq</li> <li>• 2008 financial crisis</li> </ul>
<b>Barack Hussein Obama II</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dem., 44<sup>th</sup> President</li> <li>• b. 1961 (the first Afro-American president)</li> </ul>	2009 to 2017  Re-elected 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Killing of Osama bin Laden</li> <li>• Supported LGBT Americans</li> <li>• Ordered military interventions in Iraq and Syria</li> </ul>
<b>Donald John Trump</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rep., 45<sup>th</sup> President</li> <li>• b. 1946</li> <li>• populist</li> <li>• protectionist</li> <li>• isolationist</li> <li>• nationalist</li> </ul>	2017 to 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrew the U.S. from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Iran nuclear deal</li> <li>• Imposed import tariffs that triggered a trade war with China</li> <li>• Shocking ignorance on numerous subjects.</li> <li>• Lost the 2020 presidential election to Biden but refused to accept it</li> </ul>
<b>Joseph Robinette Biden Jr.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dem., 46<sup>th</sup> President</li> <li>• b. 1942</li> <li>• Served in the Senate as Vice-President</li> </ul>	2021-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 for the US COVID-19 recovery and from the ongoing recession</li> <li>• Withdrew of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan</li> </ul>

Source: author, adopted from various sources.

Inaugural addresses as a specific genre were selected as they introduce not only the personality and the political platform of the president, but also the political discourse and “political culture” of the President-elect. The selection of the recent five presidents secures a view on the most recent changes in political discourse, in the use of euphemisms or, direct expressions and in the use of political correctness. Attention was paid to verbal language exclusively. The method of research lies on discourse analysis and interpretation of phrases, that refer to negative, emotionally charged or direct expressions and that were replaced by political euphemisms and by politically “corrected” expressions, especially by the pronoun “some” and its variants (somebody, something, sometimes, etc.).



### Research data

Based on discourse analysis, expressions and phrases that use euphemisms and PC language instead of direct expressions were excerpted from the selected seven inaugural addresses. Except for Donald Trump, all the selected presidents tried to avoid direct confrontation and used very balanced, politically correct discourse. For example, each President-elect mentioned the need for a change; however, they conceal possible unpopular steps under euphemisms “renewal”; and “revitalisation” (Clinton 1997), “a new commitment” (Bush 2001), “challenges” and “work to be done” (Obama 2009), “changes starting here and now” (Trump 2017) and “righting wrongs” (Biden 2021).

In order to avoid direct confrontation, three of the selected presidents, the Republican George W. Bush, Democrats Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, used the pronoun “some” as a euphemism with various purposes. Table 3 shows how the US President-elects varied in their use of euphemistic pronoun “some”:

Table 3: The use of pronoun “some” by G. W. Bush, Obama and Trump in their inaugural addresses.

President	1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> inaugural address	The use of pronoun “some”	Connotative meaning(s)
William Clinton	January 20, 1993	-	
	January 20, 1997	-	
George W. Bush	January 20, 2001	-	
	January 20, 2005	1) <i>Some</i> have unwisely chosen to test America’s resolve, and have found it firm.	Terrorists (Saudi Arabi, Afghani, Al-Qaeda)
		2) <i>Some</i> , I know, have questioned the global appeal of liberty—though this time in history, four decades defined by the swiftest advance of freedom ever seen, is an odd time for doubt. Americans, of all people, should never be surprised by the power of our ideals.	Terrorists (Saudi Arabi, Afghani, Al-Qaeda)

		3) <i>Some</i> have shown their devotion to our country in deaths that honored their whole lives—and we will always honor their names and their sacrifice.	(Policemen, soldiers, firefighters, may also mean secret service)
Barack Hussein Obama II	January 20, 2009	1) Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of <i>some</i> , but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered.	Criticism of the previous Republican government, also indicates collective responsibility.
		2) In reaffirming the greatness of our nation we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the <i>path for the faint-hearted, for those that prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame</i> . Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things — <i>some</i> celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor - who have carried us up the long rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.	Criticism of the wealthy minority, possibly the European aristocracy of the past. However, it may also refer to the previous Republican government, Republican tax-cuts and, in general the affluent in the United States.
		3) Now, there are <i>some</i> who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short, for they have forgotten what this country has already done, what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage. What <i>the cynics</i> fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply.	Republicans, Obama's opponents, Donald Trump in person.

	January 20, 2013	1) <b>Some</b> may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires, crippling drought and more powerful storms.	Republicans, Donald Trump, and opponents of the Kyoto protocol
<b>Donald J. Trump</b>	January 20, 2017	-	-
<b>Joseph R. Biden Jr.</b>	January 20, 2021	1) I know speaking of unity can sound to <b>some</b> like a foolish fantasy these days. I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new.	Political opponents, Republicans, Donald Trump, supporters of Donald Trump and those who doubt the result of 2020 presidential elections.

Source: author

Table 3 shows only three presidents (George W. Bush and Democrats Barack Obama and Joseph Biden) using the pronoun “some” in order to avoid direct confrontation of the referent. Donald Trump and William Clinton abandoned this strategy and employed a different scope of linguistic devices.

## Research findings and discussion

With regards to the mission of inaugural addresses, each speaker uses a balance of expressive (expressing a point), as well as poetic types of discourse (Javorčíková; Šipošová 2017: 14) characteristic of figurative language and rhetorical figures, that in scope and manner of use, exceed metaphors, imagery, or tropes of ordinary speech. We have already mentioned several examples of figurative language speakers use in order to elicit positive feelings and avoid negative impressions. Each of these tropes inevitably contains aspects of imprecise, euphemistic language, altering reality and showing negatives in a more positive light (Pavlíková 2018; Štefančík 2020; Pondelíková 2021; Molnárová, Rošteková 2021).

In this study, the indefinite pronoun “some,” used as a euphemism, was examined from the pragmatic and functionalist point of view. Previously referenced research conducted by Zhao and Dong (2010) concluded that political euphemisms are created in political life to serve political purposes,

and that they have two main social functions: 1) disguising or cheating function, and 2) persuasive function (Zhao, Dong 2010). Crespo-Fernández (2018) expanded on this concept, and suggested three aims of political euphemisms: 1) to refer to socially disadvantaged groups or address delicate subjects without sounding insensitive (in this, Crespo-Fernández' explanation is identical with PC language; noted by author); 2) to criticize their political opponents in a socially acceptable way (e.g. to call them “unwilling” instead of non-cooperative; noted by author) and 3) to purposely conceal from the public unsettling or controversial topics (this function is identical with Zhao and Dong's disguising and cheating functions; noted by author). In the following part, selected excerpts from seven inaugural addresses are analysed in order to see how President-elects deviate from the original meaning of the word in order to achieve pragmatic goals, suggested by Crespo-Fernández, Zhao and Dong.

### ***Political euphemism “some” attempting to address delicate subjects***

In his second inaugural address, George W. Bush used the indefinite pronoun “some” in a euphemistic way twice.

1. Some have unwisely chosen to test America's resolve, and have found it firm.
2. Some, I know, have questioned the global appeal of liberty—though this time in history, four decades defined by the swiftest advance of freedom ever seen, is an odd time for doubt. Americans, of all people, should never be surprised by the power of our ideals.

In these two references, Bush was referring to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, that occurred during his first term in office and shook the world. In this, Bush was indirectly pointing at the “terrorists” (Saudi, Afghani, al-Qaeda); however, with the Afghani War being in progress since 2021, he did not want to dramatize his speech and international relations by naming specific nations. Therefore, he also changed the direct expression “terrorists” for less-politically loaded phrase “tyrants” (“pretensions of tyrants“, Bush 2005) in his speech.

### ***Political euphemism “some” attempting to conceal facts***

George W. Bush also used indefinite pronoun in a more concealing way: “Some have shown their devotion to our country in deaths that honored their whole lives—and we will always honor their names and their sacrifice”.

Here, Bush is obviously referring to almost 400 brave policemen, soldiers, fire-fighters who perished in the 9/11 catastrophe. However, the pronoun “some,” may also indicate soldiers and members of the secret service who lost their lives in the Afghani war. Originally, the war was considered “just” and the US president Bush was believed to be “chosen by God” “to lead a global war of good against evil”, therefore the War on Terror became a religious duty in the eyes of the public (Jacobson 2010: 586). The initial rhetoric of the war revealed its ideological character hidden behind the euphemistic name ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ (2001–14)”. Bush, in his speeches, called it by many euphemistic and metaphorical expressions, such as “Crusade”. However, the war soon turned into one of the longest and most controversial conflicts in which the United States was ever involved, and the Bush administration was criticised for never having considered an alternative (Connah 2020). Given the high number of soldiers having lost their lives in Afghanistan (over 60.000, Connah 2020), the President could not have omitted this issue from his speech. However, he avoided direct confrontation by the use of the euphemistic pronoun “some”.

### ***Political euphemism “some” attempting to criticise political opponents***

Barack Obama used the pronoun “some” three times. Twice, it refers to his political critics and opponents:

1. 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. Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered.
2. Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short, for they have forgotten what this country has already done, what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage. What the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply.

In the first example, by using the pronoun “some”, Obama avoided direct reference to the previous Republican Administration, and also calls attention to the collective guilt of the nation, in avoiding unpopular decisions, such as tax increases and budget cuts. In his second use of “some”, Obama is first intentionally vague, however, in the post-reference (“the cynics”), he is more critical and specific; pointing directly to the critics of his political and economic platform and ambitious plans, such as the Medicare health plan. Both references (“some, “the cynics”) refer to the critics of his first

presidency. At the same time, he was obviously critical (using the expressions “greed and irresponsibility”).

In his second inaugural address, Obama again uses the indefinite pronoun “some” as a euphemism:

Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires and crippling drought and more powerful storms.

In this, he obviously refers to the US withdrawal from the internationally supported Kyoto protocol binding emission reductions in 1997 (now signed by 192 countries), during Clinton’s administration. Obama was also reacting to George W. Bush, who repudiated the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 and called it “an unfair and ineffective means of addressing global climate change concerns”.

***Political euphemism “some” attempting to harmonize the society and to avoid tensions***

It is our argument, that the purposes of political euphemisms suggested by Zhao, Dong and Crespo-Fernández, after close reading and analysis of the selected seven inaugural addresses, possess one more function, that, in the light of recent events (2020 elections) as well as previous controversial elections (e.g. dubious victory of G. W. Bush) and varied political opinions on spending, taxation, health programmes and many other issues, divided the USA more than ever before. It is the harmonizing function, attempting to ease or avoid tensions between opposing parties, and to stress common features, communality and the sense of unity in the “divided house”.

Obama’s rhetoric “suggests the dawning of a new ideological era in American political thought”, Pagliarini points out (2011: 14). Obama used the indefinite pronoun “some” not only to criticise his political opponents, as was suggested in 3.3. He also used it to avoid direct confrontation with his political opponents (He could have easily replaced the pronoun by reference to the Republicans.) to avoid widening the gap between political parties and their adherents. By this, he attempted to reinforce a sense of a shared heritage among all Americans, appealing to their sense of unity, suggested by the US motto: *E pluribus unum*.

The inauguration of Barack Obama was “historic and precedent setting” (Pagliarini 2011) in many regards. His address set the harmonizing and calming tone, asking the public to end “petty grievances” and put “aside childish things” that have long divided American citizens. Obama’s first and foremost task is to unite a divided America, split on issues such as Trump’s Administration, the Covid pandemic and its solutions, and Ameri-

can foreign policy. The same request for cooperation is reinforced in the final lines of Obama's speech, stressing equality and communality of all the US citizens: "You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country's course. You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time — not only with the votes we cast, but with the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideals." (Obama 2013).

Biden, in the same peace-making way as Obama, avoided direct confrontation with his political opponents, especially with his predecessor, Donald Trump. Instead, he spoke about the nation that is going to be "tested" and the need to "heal a broken land". The harmonizing tone was especially evident in his lines, referring to "some ... [to whom his political solutions may sound like a foolish fantasy these days].

"I know the forces that divide us are deep and they are real. But I also know they are not new" (Biden 2021). Biden clearly does not want to increase tensions by addressing Trump's followers directly, especially, in the light of the final dramatic days of Trump's presidency. Biden reinforces this peaceful and all-embracing message in one of the final lines of his speech: "I've just taken a sacred oath each of those patriots have taken. The oath first sworn by George Washington. But the American story depends not on any one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us. We are the people who seek a more perfect union. This is a great nation, we are good people. And over the centuries, through storm and strife, in peace and in war, we've come so far. But we still have far to go." (Biden 2021).

Political linguists Pagliarini and Brock agree that the language employed by all Presidents reflects their ideology, understanding of political reality and the manner in which people understand the entire system of government. It is our assumption, which we tried to prove through research, that the rhetoric of selected presidents reflects their overall political culture and view of their forthcoming policy. Especially Barack Obama and Joseph Biden, who delivered very conciliatory speeches, trying to unify the US society. Immediate responses by the media (Clapman 2013) to Obama's second inaugural address confirm it: "...while not directly addressing Republicans, President Obama invoked images of a country working together". Kall, editor and co-author of *I Do Solemnly Swear: Presidential Inaugural Addresses of the Last Five Decades*, agrees, pointing out Biden's aim to "unify a very fractured country" and to "unite the country in the backdrop of a global pandemic, racial tensions and the second impeachment of his predecessor" and (Kall 2021). Therefore, the mission Obama is translating through his words, has to be articulated without tensions. On the other hand, some political analysts doubt that Biden's attempt to unite the divided frac-

tions of American society will succeed, because the divisions are too deep and fundamental (Dulio 2021).

## **Conclusion**

The present research sought to find out how the US President-elects after 1993 differ from each other in their use of euphemisms, political euphemisms and PC language from the linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic perspectives. The research has shown that euphemisms and politically correct words, and their hybrids were employed not only to 1) disguise political reality, and 2) to name phenomena which are sensitive, but also 3) to harmonize tensions in the society. In spite of this, scholars investigated the first two phenomena. The third one has not been academically analysed, and we believe it expands the interpretation of political euphemism and broadens the debate on the issue.

Harmonizing and tension-easing function is of key importance nowadays; as American society is divided as it has never been before; a fact well-proven by recent, close results of presidential elections. Thus, President-elects in their first formal and ceremonial speeches cannot afford to be confrontational. On the other hand, they need to point to problems and their sources in a way that clearly indicate their intentions to improve, change and fix them, in other words, “to right wrongs”. Such a political lexicon adds to the function of the president as a peace-maker, ice-breaker, negotiator and mediator between political parties and opponents.

Research of political euphemisms, especially those used in the most formal and ceremonial situations by chief representatives of the country, is of utmost importance, because it prevents erosion of language and the loss of sensitivity. As George Orwell suggested by the use of Newspeak in his anti-totalitarian novel 1984, it came as *déjà vu*, when the Germans lost their sensitivity to political discourse and did not recognize the original meaning of the NSDAP abbreviation, pointing at the Democratic nature of the party. Therefore, it is of key importance that public speeches of the decision-makers of the world are constantly and perpetually analysed, and the hidden meanings and implications are revealed; not only for professional political analysts but also in academic and general life (Pecníková, Slatinská 2016). The world of academia, including foreign language studies, needs to cultivate linguistic sensitivity and analytical and reading skills (Kolečán-Lenčová 2020, Hanesová 2014; Zelenková, Hanesová 2019) in order to prepare future professional, citizens and voters for *res publica* issues. That will



enable them to disclose hoaxes, fake and manufactured news, and perhaps adjust their voting behaviour in a more objective and democratic way.

This article is the outcome of the project VEGA 1/0118/20 (Cultural and Educational Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic) entitled Dyslexia as a linguistic-cognitive disorder and its symptoms in developing reading literacy in mother and foreign (English) Tongue.

This article is the outcome of the project VEGA 1/0538/21 (Cultural and Educational Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic) entitled Kultúrna pamäť európskych veľkomiest (Cultural Memory of European Capitals).

This article is the outcome of the project KEGA 008UMB-4/2022 (Cultural and Educational Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, of the Slovak Republic) entitled University education as a gateway to thinking: integration of reading, academic and critical skills as a precondition to intellectual capital of universities and internationalisation of education.

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