First and Second Inaugural Addresses of Modern and Traditional U.S. Presidents: An Analysis of Self-Presentational Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the self-presentational strategies modern and traditional U.S. presidents employed in their first and second inaugural addresses. Specifically, we examined the presidents' use of the strategies of ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, ingratiation, and supplication. We predicted that modern presidents would use more ingratiation than would their traditional counterparts in the first but not the second inaugural address. This prediction derives from an analysis of the president's dependency on the public at the time of the inaugural address. In particular, the president is not as dependent on the public at the time of the second inaugural as compared with the first inaugural. We also predicted that modern presidents would use more self-promotion than would traditional presidents in the second but not the first inaugural address. And, finally we predicted that modern presidents would use more exemplification and intimidation than would traditional presidents. Our results supported several predictions.

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1.0   Introduction

Research has shown that as the U.S. presidency has changed, so have the presidents' motive profiles (Whitehead & Smith, 2001) and self-presentational strategies in their speeches (Smith, Whitehead, Melo, Correa, & Inch, 2014; Whitehead & Smith, 1999). Specifically research has contrasted self-presentational strategies of modern and traditional presidents (e.g., Jones, 1964; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Jones & Wortman, 1973) in their first inaugural and state of the union addresses in terms of the use of ingratiation, exemplification, self-promotion, ingratiation, and supplication (Smith et al., 2014).

Traditional presidencies are those from 1789 to the early 1930s, and modern presidencies are those from the 1930s (Franklin Roosevelt) to the present (e.g., Barbour & Wright, 2012; Greenstein, Berman, & Felzenberg, 1977; Nichols, 1994). The transition included many changes to the office regarding an increase in visibility, bureaucracy, and unilateral policy-making capacity (e.g., Greenstein, 1978, 1988; Pfiffner, 1994; Shaw, 1987). Presidential speeches have evolved so that modern presidents speak "to the public" more than did their traditional counterparts (Tulis, 1987). In both first inaugural addresses and state of the union addresses, modern presidents used more ingratiation, exemplification, and intimidation than did traditional presidents (Smith et al., 2014). Thus, modern presidents want to appear likable, moral, and strong.

As indicated, previous research focused on the self-presentational strategies in the Presidents' first inaugural and state of the union address (Smith et al., 2014). The purpose of the present study was to examine the similarities and differences in the U.S. Presidents' use of self-presentational strategies in their first and second inaugural. Researchers have found that the situation can influence self-presentational strategies (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978) specifically in presidential speeches (Smith et al., 2014). The inaugural address is a traditional speech given by every United States president. It has been described as an extension of the oath of office (cf. Campbell & Jamieson, 1990).

There are important situational differences between the first and second inaugural addresses that may impact the presidents' use of self-presentational strategies. At the second inaugural, the president has already served one term and has been elected to a second term. Researchers have noted significant differences between the first and second inaugural. These range from a reduction in the excitement surrounding the second inaugural (Hesse, 2013) to the implications of the outgoing president being present at the first, but not the second inaugural (Fallows, 2004). These differences may impact the use of self-presentational strategies.

The self-presentational strategy of ingratiation involves statements that are designed to increase the likelihood that the speaker is liked or judged attractive (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982). Presidents employ this strategy for a variety of reasons including generating positive feelings among Washington policy-makers, as well as the American public who have voted or may vote for the president. The latter motivation is reduced for modern presidents in their second inaugural addresses. Thus the president is not as dependent on the public at the time of the second inaugural when compared to the first inaugural. From the perspective of the ingratiator's dilemma, as dependence on the target decreases, the motivation to ingratiate also decreases.

We predicted that modern presidents used more ingratiation than did traditional presidents in the first inaugural address and not in the second inaugural address. By the second inaugural, the modern president is less dependent on the public and thus needs to ingratiate less. U.S. presidents have typically followed George Washington's precedent in not seeking a third consecutive term. FDR was the only president to break this tradition. The 22nd amendment to the Constitution made President Washington's decision for a two-term presidency the law of the land.

Second, we predicted that modern presidents would use the self-presentational strategy of self-promotion more than would traditional presidents in their second inaugural than their first inaugural

address. The self-presentational strategy of self-promotion includes rhetoric designed to increase the likelihood that the speaker is judged as competent, whether with a general ability or specific skills (cf. Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986). The first inaugural honors the former president as well as the president-elect. Presidents may not temper their use of self-promotion in the second inaugural as they may in the first because the former president is not present at this ceremony. Support for this prediction comes from previous findings (Smith et al., 2014) showing that modern presidents used self-promotion more than did traditional presidents in their state of the union addresses than in their first inaugural. The previous president attends the first inaugural, but not the state of the union. Thus, in the present study we predicted that in the second inaugural modern presidents used more self-promotion than did traditional presidents.

Exemplification is the self-presentational strategy of including statements designed to increase the likelihood that the speaker will be judged as moral and possessing integrity (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Gardner & Avolio, 1998). Intimidation is the self-presentational strategy of including rhetoric designed to increase the appearance of strength, including invoking fear through threats (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982). We expected to replicate the previous finding of (Smith et al., 2014) that modern presidents use more exemplification and intimidation than do traditional presidents in their speeches. With the increased visibility and bureaucracy of the modern presidency, it will be as important for modern presidents to appear moral and strong going into their second term, as their first.

And finally, supplication is the self-presentational strategy of appearing weak, or helpless (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982). Supplication is not a strategy that leaders utilize often, if at all (e.g., Leary, 1989). We expected to replicate the (Smith et al., 2014) finding of no differences in the use of this strategy between modern and traditional presidents. We predicted that regardless of whether the inaugural is the first or second, neither modern presidents nor traditional presidents will want to appear weak.

2.0   Method

Smith et al., (2014) provided the raw scores for the use of the five self-presentational strategies in the U.S. Presidents' first inaugural addresses. These raw scores were then standardized for this sample. For each measure, the number of self-presentational images in the speech was divided by the total number of words in the speech, multiplied by one thousand. These scores were then standardized, with an overall mean of 50 and standard deviation of 10. Two different raters scored each of the U.S. President's second inaugural address for evidence of each of the five self-presentational strategies. The inter-rater reliability was 95%. Two researchers reviewed these ratings, and resolved any discrepancies.

The definitions for the self-presentational strategies of ingratiation, self-promotion, supplication, intimidation, and exemplification were those described by Jones (1964), Jones & Pittman (1982) and Jones & Wortman (1973). For ingratiation, statements in which the president engaged in other-enhancement, or promises of favor-doing and conforming to the opinions of others were scored, along with statements designed to make the president appear likeable. Statements of self-promotion included those in which the president described himself as competent and effective. Statements of supplication included those in which the president appeared weak or dependent. Statements of intimidation included threats, and references of power. And finally, statements of exemplification included the president calling for sacrifices and contributions from the audience, and also stated that he himself was doing the same, and was moral and worthy.

The scoring procedure was adapted from that employed by Donley and Winter (1970). The sentence was the unit of scoring. If one sentence contained two self-presentational strategies, both were scored. If consecutive sentences contained the same strategy, the strategy was scored once. If consecutive sentences contained the same strategy, but a second strategy was also included, the original strategy was counted twice.

We had scores for 17 U.S. Presidents who gave both a first and second inaugural speech. The traditional presidents were those from George Washington through Woodrow Wilson; the modern presidents were those from Franklin D. Roosevelt through Barack Obama.

3.0   Results and Discussion

The scores for each self-presentational strategy were analyzed by a 2 (traditional or modern) x 2 (1st or 2nd inaugural address) mixed analysis of variance. The analysis of ingratiation yielded a significant interaction between modern/traditional presidency and whether the speech was the 1st or 2nd inaugural address, $F(1, 14) = 4.72$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$. Analysis of the simple effects of modern/traditional at levels of 1st or 2nd inaugural address indicated that for the first inaugural, modern presidents ($M = 55.15$) used more ingratiation than did traditional presidents ($M = 45.99$), $F(1, 14) = 3.95$, $p < .07$, whereas for the 2nd inaugural address there was no significant difference between traditional ($M = 52.32$) and modern ($M = 47.02$) presidents, $F(1, 14) = 1.12$, ns.

On exemplification there was a significant main effect of modern/traditional, $F(1, 14) = 19.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .58$. Modern presidents used more exemplification ($M = 58.08$) than did traditional presidents ($M = 47.02$). There were no significant effects on the measures of self-promotion, intimidation, or supplication.

This study found similarities and differences in the self-presentational strategies of modern and traditional presidents in first and second inaugural addresses. We predicted and found that modern presidents used more ingratiation than did traditional presidents in the first inaugural address, and not in the second inaugural address. This finding is consistent with the analysis of the inaugurals in terms of the dependence of the president on the public. Specifically, the modern presidents' need to appear likeable to their constituents is greater in the first than second inaugural address because they are more dependent on them.

We also predicted that modern presidents would use self-promotion more than would traditional presidents in their second inaugural. We did not find this effect. The present finding, however, is consistent with previous research showing no difference between modern and traditional presidents in the use of self-promotion in inaugural addresses (e.g., Smith et al. 2014).

Consistent with predictions, we found that modern presidents used more exemplification than did traditional presidents in both first and second inaugural addresses. This finding replicates and extends prior research showing that modern presidents use more exemplification than do traditional presidents. Our finding of no difference on supplication is as predicted, and consistent with previous research (e.g., Smith et al. 2014). Presidents do not want to appear weak. Finally, we did not find that modern presidents used more intimidation than traditional presidents. This finding may reflect the subset of traditional presidents who were elected for a second term. Many of these were generals or war time presidents.

4.0   Conclusion and Policy Implications

The present study found that modern and traditional presidents differed in their use of self-presentational strategies in their first and second inaugural addresses. This study joins others (e.g., Smith et al. 2014) in demonstrating that the self-presentational strategies of U.S. Presidents in their speeches are affected by the purpose and context of the speech. It points to the importance of analyzing the situation of the presidential speech for a better understanding of the meaning and content of the speech. There are implications for the way that presidents present policy and initiatives. Self-presentational strategies allow for a consideration of the presentation in dramaturgical terms.

Presidents need to consider these strategies when making policy presentations. With the increasing use of social media and other evolving communication technology, U.S. Presidents communicate more frequently with the public than ever before. Future research needs to further examine how situational requirements impact the self-presentational strategies of U.S. Presidents in their communications.

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