

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2021.27.3.8>**КОНВЕНЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ТЕМЫ ПОБЕДНЫХ РЕЧЕЙ РОССИЙСКИХ ПРЕЗИДЕНТОВ**

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

Автор анализирует традиционные темы речей-объявлений о победе на выборах. Речь о признании поражения и объявлении победы - это взаимный ритуал в политике США, в котором оба кандидата в конце выборов подтверждают результат, придают легитимность процессу и начинают новый политический цикл. Из-за глобализации политической жизни ритуал победной речи закрепился во многих странах мира. В статье проецируются традиционные темы победных выступлений, выделяемых в США, на дискурс российских президентов. Хотя такие речи носят ритуальный характер, они, тем не менее, приобрели своеобразие из-за особенностей личного характера президентов России. Автор приходит к выводу, что подобные темы носят универсальный характер и повторяются в победных выступлениях президентов России.

**Ключевые слова:** риторика; глобализация; коммуникация; победная речь; ритуальный дискурс; повторяемость; призыв к единству; благодарность.

**CONVENTIONAL TOPICS IN VICTORY SPEECHES OF RUSSIAN PRESIDENTS**

Research article

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**Abstract**

The author analyses conventions of electoral victory speeches. The concession and victory speech is a reciprocal ritual in the US politics, in which both candidates at the end of an election agree on the outcome, lend the legitimacy of the process, and start the political transition. Because of globalization of political life the ritual of victory speech is being spread onto many countries of the world. The article projects conventional topics of American victory speeches onto the discourse of the Russian Presidents. Though of a ritual character, they nevertheless have acquired a personal touch of the Russian Presidents. The author comes to the conclusion that such topics are of universal character and recur in the Russian Presidents' victory speeches.

**Keywords:** rhetoric; globalization; communication; victory speech; ritual discourse; recurrence; call for unity; gratitude.

**Introduction**

Communication is a social process, a circular interaction comprising a sender of information, its recipient and the message *per se*. Considering its trajectory, the vertical communication has been gaining importance in modern mass society moving from top to bottom. For those seeking to take control over masses, communication is an extremely effective tool. Within a period of less than one generation political, social, and cultural life has changed dramatically, so have the style and pace of rhetoric.

When one hears the rhetoric of modern public figures, he/she may assume it is following certain patterns, while covering a particular topic. Even "spontaneous" speech, ex. campaign debates adheres to pre-set formats. It applies to the varieties of presidents' political discourse, even to those which are traditionally inconsistent with any ritual, or ritualized discourse: not only to inaugural speeches, State of the Union Address, but also to press conferences, interviews, etc. The semantic meaning of such speeches seems next to non-existent as they merely represent a set of symbols to convince the public that the situation is under the speaker's control.

Linguistic dictionaries and reference books define the general concept of speech as a type of communicative activity of a person using language means to communicate with other members of a speech community. Besides speech implies both a process of speaking (language activities, oral speech including) and its written products or outcomes stored in memory. Nowadays its genres are defined for each type of speech performance. Literary criticism describes "genre" as "a historically developing type of literary work that is novel, poem, ballad, etc.; genre as a theory concept generalizes the features of a more or less general group of pieces of work" [6].

Speaking about the classification of discourse regarding a particular genre, V.I.Karasik concludes that "genre-stylistic categories of discourse allow the addressee to attribute this or that text to a certain area of communication on the basis of prevailing ideas about the norms and rules of communication, about the conditions of relevance and types of communicative behavior" [2, P.191]. These categories establish the nature of the texts in terms of to what extent they correspond to the functional types of speech (style, genre canon, cliché, variability, degree of compression). In this paper, we base on the definition of the speech genre of V.I.Karasik: "The genre canon is a stereotype of the generation and perception of speech in specific recurring circumstances" [2, P. 192].

Speeches of politicians addressed to the public can be categorized as ritual and informative genres. In ritual genres, the phatic replaces informativity, and the form of communication, which is insignificant, subordinates the verbal components of

the text [1, P. 178]. Ritual genres cover inaugural addresses, anniversary speeches, traditional speeches of politicians, which primarily convey the ideas of integration, or unity of the people.

One of the main characteristics of the ritual is the confirmation of identity, the belonging of people to a single community. Thus ritual can be defined as “a manifestation of sign behavior observed in a whole class of self-organizing systems — from animal communities to various forms of human social life” [7]. Both at the biological and cultural level, he presents the ritual as a tool through which the exponent creates structures and maintains his or her living space.

According to V.I.Karasik, the ritual is a sequence of symbolically significant actions fixed by tradition. He points out that the communicative events, which are considered ritual, in many cases are of a cyclical pattern, e.g. New Year’s address by the president, military oath, initiation into students, etc [3, P. 157-158]. Moreover, the functions of a ritual involve, firstly, making the information about an event widely known, secondly, integrating and consolidating the participants of the event into a single group, eventually mobilizing them to perform certain actions or develop a specific attitude to something and, finally, consolidating the communicative action in a specifically defined form of a predominant character. The summative, integrative and mobilizing functions single out a certain event, but do not turn it into a ritually significant one. It is the fixing function that turns something into a ritual.

### **Theoretical basis of the research**

The American election campaign is often perceived as a succession of rituals. Among them, for example, are the debates of competing candidates of the same party or acceptance speech of the nominee at the party congress. Therefore, both American voters and the media assess candidates mainly by how successfully they go through such rituals [9, P. 177]. The final ritual is concession and victory speeches at the election night. They are not a must, however, from the point of view of democratic tradition, they are an important moment when the participants of the just-ended election campaign “confirm the result and take the first step to overcome the confrontation that arose during the election campaign” [10].

The first comprehensive analysis of victory speech pattern (as well as concession speech pattern) was done by Ruth A. Weaver [14] on the basis of American presidential elections within the period of 1952 till 1980. She singled out six-seven recurrent topics (depending on whether it was the first or the second term of presidency). Paul Corcoran continued the research of the rhetoric of defeat and victory by extending Weaver’s work to other countries and examining the role the mass media play in the process. He admitted that he was surprised there had been almost no changes which made him treat such speeches as a subgenre of rhetoric because of so many clichés [10].

Subsequent researchers examined the reciprocal ritual of later years [11], [12] extending a list of conventional topics up to 9 or 10 of them. Researchers from different countries started to apply the pattern to their presidential campaigns [13]. Russian sociolinguists also started with the victory speeches of American presidents, either looking into rhetoric of a president [9] or comparing such speeches within a period of time [4]. Further research into this subgenre proved that the same recurring pattern can be found in many countries of the world [5].

In a victory speech we can single out the following conventional topics:

- 1) announcing victory;
- 2) mentioning contact with the losing candidate;
- 3) positively assessing the rival;
- 4) expressing gratitude to the supporters;
- 5) calling for unity;
- 6) highlighting the importance of democracy;
- 7) emphasizing the exceptional role of the USA (a country);
- 8) setting goals for the future presidency term;
- 9) mentioning the results achieved (on re-election for the next term);
- 10) God and prayer.

The procedure includes the following steps:

- The candidates refrain from making statements until all polling stations are closed;
- The losing candidate is the first to contact the winner;
- The winner publicly declares his/her victory after the losing candidate publicly confirmed the defeat.

The speech itself and the procedure form an integrated whole.

Regarding its length, a victory speech is fairly short, on average consisting of 900-1200 words — depending on a language, however it can be notably short, for example, 202 words (V.Putin, 04 March 2012) and even 168 words (V.Zelensky, 21 April 2019).

We argue that the procedural steps and conventional topics of the reciprocal ritual of victory and concession speeches having spread over all regions of the world, have become universal due to globalization, that covers the political sphere as well.

### **The Russian presidents’ victory speeches**

The object of our study is the speeches of the Russian presidents at the moment of election victory and its declaration (victory speeches) after presidential campaigns. The subject is the substantive topic of these speeches. The speeches of V.V.Putin winning the presidential election in 2000, 2004, 2012, and 2018, and D.A.Medvedev (2008) are under survey. We excluded the elections of 1991 and 1996 as they lack the procedural part. The method of dividing the text, extracting recurrent topics and a comparative analysis of these topics was applied to analyze the texts. In our previous work [4] we indicated that the reciprocal ritual is a principle integrated into the discourse and expressed ambivalently — ontologically and procedurally.

The procedural steps in the Russian election campaign are similar to the mentioned above. Candidates also wait for the closure of polling stations. Sometimes the contact with the winner is reported by media or losing candidates confirm such a contact. For example:

2018: P.Grudinin, CPRF, press conference: “*Я абсолютно убежден, что нынешний президент победил / I am totally convinced that the incumbent president has won.*” [henceforth the translation is done by the author]

We should mention the changes in how a victory speech is delivered. The results of the 2000 election campaign announced, Vladimir Putin did not deliver a particular speech: he answered a few questions of journalists in passing at the election night, later the news conference was held. He started the news conference by announcing his victory tentatively, thanked his supporters and spoke positively about his rivals. In 2004 Vladimir Putin publicly announced his victory before the press conference which was to be held after the votes were preliminarily counted, (a gap in numbers allowed not to wait for the final results of the Central Election Commission), and it sounded highly official. The first victory speech to be delivered at a mass rally was made by D.Medvedev in 2008. The ritual was continued in the 2012 and 2018 election campaigns by V.Putin who announced his victory at mass rallies at Manezhnaya Square, Moscow, at night after the preliminary counting.

Considering the conventional topics, neither of the Russian presidents after announcing victory ever mentions any contacts of the losing candidates with him. It might be explained by the number of candidates participating in the elections: from 4 to 12 registered candidates have participated in election campaigns since 2000. The gratitude not only to his supporters, but to all voters who participated in the elections, is present in each of the presidents' speeches as well as the other topics – the call for unity and the need of teamwork.

2004: “... хочу поблагодарить всех без исключения: и тех, кто голосовал за действующего президента, т.е. за вашего покорного слугу, и тех, кто выбрал других кандидатов. / ... I want to thank everyone, without exception: those who voted for the incumbent president, i.e. for your humble servant, and those who chose other candidates.”

2008: “Я хотел поблагодарить всех, кто проголосовал за меня. Я хотел поблагодарить всех, кто голосовал за других кандидатов... — I wanted to thank everyone who has voted for me. I wanted to thank everyone who voted for other candidates ...”

2018: “Спасибо, что у нас такая мощная, многомиллионная команда. / Thank you for being such a powerful, multi-million team.”

A call for unity is present in all statements:

2012: “И мы призываем всех объединиться вокруг интересов нашего народа и нашей Родины. / And we urge everyone to join in around the interests of our people and our homeland.”

2018: “Очень важно сохранить это единство <...>, очень важно привлечь на свою сторону и тех, кто мог голосовать и за других кандидатов. / It is imperative to maintain this unity <...>, it is essential to win over those could have voted for other candidates.”

The importance of democracy was also mentioned:

2004: “... все демократические завоевания нашего народа будут безусловно обеспечены и гарантированы / ... the democratic gains of our people will be, no doubt, protected and guaranteed.”

2008: “...Я благодарю всех граждан, которые пришли сегодня на избирательные участки. Это говорит о том, что мы живем в демократическом государстве, а наше гражданское общество становится эффективным, ответственным и активным. — I thank all the citizens who came to the polling stations today. This suggests that we live in a democratic state, and our civil society is becoming effective, responsible and active”.

Neither president dwells on Russia's exceptionalism. They refer to “великая Россия/great Russia” in 2008, 2012, and 2018, but these words denote love of a human for his/her country rather than its superiority over other states.

These speeches being made after re-elections, V. Putin mentions the achieved:

2004: “... небольшие, но все-таки положительные сдвиги, которые были и в экономике страны; все-таки мы обеспечили достаточно стабильный и высокий рост экономики за последние годы. Стабилизировали ситуацию в социальной сфере и без всяких сомнений укрепили наше государство / ... small but anyway positive changes achieved in the country's economy; nevertheless, we have ensured a fairly stable and high economic growth in recent years. We have stabilized the social sphere and, without any doubt, strengthened our state.”

2018: “Мы показали, что нам действительно никто ничего не может навязать. Никто и ничего. / We have demonstrated that nobody can actually impose anything on us. Nobody and not a thing.”

However they speak about the goals for the future:

2004: “... мы не остановимся на достигнутом <...> Мы сделаем все для того, чтобы обеспечить стабильный рост экономики нашей страны <...> Это только необходимое условие для того, чтобы решить главную задачу – обеспечить рост благосостояния наших граждан / <...> we won't be satisfied with what has been achieved <...> We will do everything to ensure stable economic growth of our country <...> This merely is a necessary condition to take on the major task — to ensure the growth in prosperity of our citizens.:

2004: “... мы на внешней арене будем стремиться к тому, чтобы гарантировать национальные интересы Российской Федерации, но, ни в коем случае не будем скатываться к агрессивным методам отстаивания наших интересов и какой бы то ни было конфронтации / ... in the external scene we will strive to ensure the national interests of the Russian Federation; but in no case will we slip into aggressive methods of upholding our interests or in any kind of confrontation.”

2008: “<...> двигаться вперед по тому плану, по которому мы шли эти годы. — move forward according to the plan that we have been following these years”.

2012: “Мы будем работать честно и напряженно. Мы добьемся успехов. / We will work hard and honestly. We will succeed.”

2018: “Мы не будем руководствоваться в ходе нашей работы какими-то текущими, конъюнктурными соображениями. Мы будем думать о будущем нашей великой Родины, о будущем наших детей и, действуя так, мы,

безусловно, обречены на успех.  
 / We will not be guided by any current momentary deliberations in the course of our work. We will think about the future of our great Motherland, about the future of our children, and acting in this way, we are certainly doomed to success.”

The topic "God and Prayer" is to be listed in the American genre of victory speech. However the speeches of the winners in other countries present different options. In more secular states (for example, France), a victory speech usually ends with a peroration in honor of the country, which is characteristic of the Russian presidents as well:

2012: “Слава России! / Glory to Russia!”

2018: (chanting) “Россия! Россия! / Russia! Russia!”

Table 1 – Recurrence Pattern

Year	Winner	Conventional Topics
2000	Vladimir Putin	1; 3; 4 + answers to reporters' questions
2004	Vladimir Putin	1; 4; 5; 9; 6; 8
2008	Dmitry Medvedev	8; 9; 4; 10; 1; 6; 3
2012	Vladimir Putin	1; 7; 4; 9; 5; 10
2018	Vladimir Putin	4; 9; 5; 8; 10

Speaking about some specific features, we should mention that the outgoing presidents cross-introduced their successor in office (Putin – Medvedev in 2008 and Medvedev – Putin in 2012) and announced their victory.

Another feature of the “Putin's” style is his personal address to the audience. The Russian President tends to ask the audience provoking a response: “Они не пройдут? / Shall they not come? – The crowd: *Нem/No*”, which has become characteristic of his speeches at mass rallies.

### Conclusion

The clarity of phrases and the prescriptive procedure of communication inherent in the presidential discourse are fundamental differences between institutional discourse and personal discourse. Nevertheless, admittedly that it is strongly influenced by the personality of a political leader and the specific historical situation [8].

Postelection concession speeches occur worldwide: in South America, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Australia, and they more and more frequently follow the formal courtesies and media-driven framing devices of American presidential elections though they are less frequent in nations with numerous parties or a parliamentary system where a coalition of parties often forms a governing majority.

The analysis has revealed a different degree of recurrence and universality of the conventional topics in presidential victory speeches in Russia but the reciprocal public ritual of recognizing a defeat and declaring a victory has become an indispensable part of presidential election campaign here. As in other countries it marks (at least officially) the cessation of a fierce, occasionally brutal, struggle of the candidates, their willingness to recognize the election results, and their call for unity.

### Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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