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## **Bragging in Political Discourse and its Manifestation on the Linguistic Level**

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### **Abstract:**

Bragging is inseparable part of people's everyday life. Bragging has no age, gender, ethnicity, social status, profession or religious beliefs, it is everywhere and with anybody. All of us brag either consciously or unconsciously, only difference is in its level of intensity and the way it is manifested on verbal level. When bragging, primary intention of self-promoter, especially in political discourse is to have an impact on his/her listeners by means of beautifully crafted and emotionally charged language. Phenomenon of bragging, which is very widespread among politicians, serves as an effective instrument to successfully manipulate, manage and monitor the audience. One might brag using extremely direct language without any camouflage and the other might brag in a very self-effaced and cautious fashion. Real self-promoter knows how to do it artfully and genuinely, so that not to irritate and evoke negative feelings among listeners leading to communication pitfall.

**Keywords:** Bragging, self-promotion, speech act, political discourse, self-representation.

### **Introduction**

Bragging is very complicated and comprehensive phenomenon. Its thorough investigation requires involvement of various fields, autonomous as well as hybrid disciplines, such as: psycholinguistics, pragma-linguistics, cognitive linguistics, behaviorism, philosophy, language and culture, sociolinguistics, neurology etc. However, this paper deals with only some of the above named disciplines and examines phenomenon of bragging in the prism of pragma-linguistics, particularly as a type of speech act, also, in the prism of psychology to define what factors prompt people to start bragging and of course in the frame of linguistics to see by means of which linguistic techniques is braglogue expressed on verbal level.

Relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that our life is overwhelmed by self-promoting and self-representative statements either online, on virtual platforms or during face-to-

face communication. Politics is intertwined with people's routine life. We listen to different political speeches stated on parliament sessions, pre-election campaigns, political debates, a lot of politicians are interviewed on live stream, plenty of articles are printed in newspapers and posted online on latest political issues every day, moreover, any minute people can have an access to politicians' social accounts where they feel free to express their points of view. Usually, politicians are prone to bragging, it is very characteristic for their speeches. What is more, it is very efficient and common way to manipulate the audience who is the recipient of politically motivated bragalogues. Though, target of self-promoting political speeches is not solely the attending audience but the "implied audience" as well, which represents a huge mass of people sitting behind the screens.

Besides, paper provides interesting hypotheses on how bragging is perceived in modern world, has people's attitude changed towards braggart people or not, if yes, then in what way? Have they become more loyal to the act of self-promotion or conversely, more aggressive when listening to someone with the goal of constructing a favorable self-image through positive statements about oneself. Additionally, we will distinguish between different types of bragging, in particular, those types which are frequently used in political discourse, show examples pertinent to these types and what is the most important, we will provide tips how to become masters of artful bragging and how to know when to "toot your own horn without blowing it".

### **Bragging/its determinant factors and types**

Bragging is psychologically determined phenomenon which at its final point is verbalized and reflected on language level. According to Merriam-Webster, Britannica, Macmillan dictionaries, bragging is defined as: „a pompous or boastful statement“, “to talk about yourself, your achievements, your family, etc., in a way that shows too much pride”, „to talk about your achievements or possessions in a proud way that annoys other people“ or etc. At first glance and especially taking into consideration above given definitions, there is nothing likable in the act of bragging but more you get closer to this phenomenon, more confused you become either feel annoyed or excited when listening to someone speaking enthusiastically and passionately about his/her accomplishments.

What provokes the act of Bragging? Actually, this is the question which is easier to ask than answer. Pursuant to the article “Science reveals why we brag so much”, process of talking about ourselves, whether in a personal conversation or through social media, triggers the same sensation of pleasure in the brain as food or money. About 40% of everyday speech is devoted to telling others about what we feel or think. Group of Harvard University neuroscientists conducted

brain imaging and behavioral experiments and uncovered the reason why do we brag and the answer is because it is extremely rewarding process at the level of brain cells and synapses. Particularly, the act of bragging was accompanied by spurts of heightened activity in brain regions belonging to the meso-limbic dopamine system, which is usually associated with the sense of reward and satisfaction from food, money or sex (Hotz).

Irene Scopelliti, Professor of Marketing and Behavioural Science, when making her speech in TEDx Talks, said that one might brag either to make other people feel miserable about their own lives or another possibility is that braggart person is fundamentally insecure and brags because seeks social approval. She has also introduced the term – Empathy Gap, which usually appears when self-promoters significantly overestimate the extent to which their listeners are happy for them when they brag and at the same time, when they significantly underestimate how much they're annoyed by their bragging. She believes the fact when interlocutors interact with each other actively, does not guarantee that psychological distance between them decreases, on the contrary, psychological distance between them might increase leading to creation of empathy gap.

In addition, we can add several more factors which provoke the act of bragging, they are: inferiority complex, narcissism, egocentrism, spiritual hunger and lack of genuine, real-life relationships, willingness for self-demonstration, desire to compete with others, longing for audience manipulation in order to gain public recognition and esteem, especially if you are a public figure such as a politician.

As for Bragging Types, based on the prospective of our study, we will mainly focus on Humblebragging, which is very subtle, discreet and heavily camouflaged form of self-promotion. Humblebrag is so well recognized phenomenon of modern communication that in 2014, the Oxford English Dictionary listed humblebrag as an official word. What is humblebrag? Per Cambridge dictionary, humblebrag is “something you say which appears as if you are complaining or embarrassed, but is really a way of telling people about something that you are very proud of”. For example: „I am so tired of being the only person that my boss could trust to train the new employees” or “I can’t believe they all thought of me to nominate for this award and want me to give a talk in front of thousands of people”. In the first example, speaker brags indirectly in the light of complaining and in the second example, speaker represents himself/herself on behalf of others. Some scientists consider that this type of bragging is more irritating than direct form of bragging as is deprived of sincerity and genuineness.

Another common type of bragging which is widespread in political discourse and stands in opposition with humblebragging and is called Direct type of bragging. Unlike humblebragging, it

is very ostensible, vivid and does not require additional efforts to read between lines. This type of bragging is very characteristic for political speeches. It is common for politicians to brag about their party, accomplishments and success they have achieved or brag about their connections with some late public figures, which were once widely prominent. Also, politicians do brag a lot about their home country and nation, as well as about their personal skills and talented nature that helped them to climb on the top of their career ladder. Sometimes, direct type of bragging becomes very hyperbolized and might evoke aggression among listeners.

### **Bragging in the prism of Speech Act Theory**

The desire to be viewed positively is a main objective of human behavior. That is why, people strive for creating positive image of themselves through the help of linguistic expressions, moreover, they intend to carry out action of impacting on their listeners as a result of uttered words and statements.

According to Austin when people utter an utterance, it is not always to describe something. Instead, by uttering utterances, they actually do something. Speech acts are those acts of making statement or question, giving commands or order, refusing, complimenting, apologizing etc. Yule acknowledged that by performing speech acts, people do not merely say something using the language out of the blue. Instead, they have intention and force behind the utterances they utter and those utterances may affect the behavior of the hearer. (Rahmayani and Dwiyuliana 276).

Bragging serves the same function, it intends not only to construct favorable self-image but to perform the act of influencing on its recipients, in particular, to make them feel excited about their accomplishments and success. Similar to other speech act types, bragging represents social interaction when speaker verbally expresses specific speech intention. Number of different scholars revealed different speech act classifications which were originated from Austin's. The most common classification belongs to Searle, he categorized five different types of illocutionary acts: assertive force, directive force, commissive force, expressive force, and declarative force (Rahmayani and Dwiyuliana 277). Based on our research, bragging might be associated with Expressives- "by performing speech acts with expressive force, speaker wants to show what he/she feels about particular situations. Expressive force expresses psychological state such as likes and dislikes, joy, sorrow, pain, and many others"(Rahmayani and Dwiyuliana 277). Representatives- "speech acts with assertive force is used to state what the speaker believes to be the case or not the case. Yule said that assertive force is used to represent the world as the speaker believes it is (Rahmayani and Dwiyuliana 277). Directives- "performing speech acts with directive force means that the speaker wants to get someone to do something" (Rahmayani and Dwiyuliana 277). In

practical part of our research I will demonstrate political bragging examples in relevance with above named types of speech act force.

### **Bragging as a positive phenomenon**

Muhammad Ali states: “It is not bragging if you can back it up”. Nowadays, people have become more sympathetic towards the phenomenon of bragging than earlier and many of them, especially young generation think that it’s not bragging if you’ve earned it. It seems like politicians share the same idea as they brag too much.

Peggy Klaus in her book “Brag! The art of tooting your own horn without blowing it” uses synonymous words such as self-expression, self-promotion for bragging. She defines bragging in the following way: “BRAGGING“ - is very individual form of communication and self-expression. A good self-promoter sneaks up on you, grabs your attention, wins you over – without your even knowing he or she is doing it. They exude a contagious energy, coming off as confident about where they have been and where they are going. They know their stuff. Before even uttering a word, they take the emotional temperature of an audience, whether facing one or hundreds. They are exceptional storytellers, continually work at keeping their stories fresh. They are able to think on their feet, because they are always well-prepared. They are masters at turning negatives into positives, are often funny, even self-deprecating at times. But most important, and this is key, they express themselves best by being themselves” (Klaus 125).

Moreover, she introduces to us bragging dictionary. Proper awareness of this notions will help us to perform effectively in the role of self-promoters. In her dictionary you will find:

“*BRAG*” - to talk about your best self (interests, ideas, accomplishments) with pride and passion in a conversational manner intended to excite, admiration, interest and wonder, without pretense or overstatement – in other words, without being obnoxious. “*BRAG BITES*” – snippets of impressive information about one’s best self, expressed in a brief, quotable manner. They function as memory insurance so that people remember something compelling about you. They can be dropped into the conversation as single gems or woven together to create longer bragologues. “*BRAGOLOGUES*”- ranging from thirty second elevator pitch to a three-minute monologue, information about one’s self that is conveyed in a conversational, storylike fashion that’s memorable and elicits interest, excitement or admiration. “*BRAG BAG*” – a collection of all the information about one’s best self that can be easily accessed: accomplishments, passions, and interests – the colorful details that describe who one is personally and professionally. “*BRAG BOMB*” – a complete failure in tooting one’s own horn, typically a result of misreading one’s audience, bad timing, and/or lack of preparation. “*BRAG NAGS*” – friendly advice on how to

deliver your bragging with style. *“Bragging Buts”* – all the excuses and issues that are cited as reasons for not bragging. (Klaus 167- 185)

Peggy cites words stated by Dizzy Dean –“It’s not bragging if you done it” (1) and this statement serves as a leitmotif upon your journey of reading her book. By breaking stereotypes such as “The job well done speaks for itself”, “humility gets you noticed”, “I don’t have to brag, people will do it for me”, “Bragging is simply a four letter word” she makes us perceive bragging from positive angle adding that bragging is an art and provides tips how to brag artfully: 1. Be your best, authentic self; 2. Think about to whom you are tooting; 3. Keep it short and simple; 4. Talk with me, not at me; 5. Be able to back up what you say; 6. Know when toot; 7. Keep bragologues and brag bites current and fresh; 8. Be ready at a moment’s notice; 9. Say it with meaningful and entertaining stories; 10. Use it all: your eyes, ears, head and heart etc. (Klaus 191-193)

### **Representation of the act of bragging in political speeches on linguistic level**

What are characteristic features for political discourse? Anybody who has even once listened to political speeches will be able to respond to this question. They are: rhetoric, colorful language, emotional attachment, contradiction, glorification of party, creating enemy images, bragging etc. There is even saying: „Master the art of bragging and become president“. We will provide several examples of political bragging stated by prominent political figures of all time and describe through what linguistic techniques is it performed before the audience.

Donald Trump is famous as one of the most braggart politicians and the fact he became the president of USA, indicates that he effectively managed to manipulate electorate of the country by means of his political campaign, where political speeches take the core place and where bragging prevails very much.

"I've got to be the cleanest, I think I'm the most honest human being, perhaps, that God has ever created" (Omnia 2022).

“My administration has accomplished more than almost any administration in the history of our country”(Associated press 2018).

Both examples belong to representative speech act force where bragging is performed directly, without any camouflage. In the first example, Trump uses first person pronoun “I” thrice and superlative forms -est/the most twice to emphasize on his superiority and excellence. In the second example, he uses first person singular possessive determiner “my” and irregular comparative form of adjective –more- to show off the success of his administration.

39th president of the United States Jimmy Earl Carter states: “We'll win because we are the party of a great President who knew how to get reelected—Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And we are the party of a courageous fighter who knew how to give'em hell—Harry Truman. And we're the party of a gallant man of spirit—John Fitzgerald Kennedy. And we're the party of a great leader of compassion—Lyndon Baines Johnson, and the party of a great man who should have been President, who would have been one of the greatest Presidents in history—Hubert Horatio Hornblower—Humphrey” (MCamericanpresident 2010).

Jimmy Carter is less egocentric person and instead of singular, 1st person pronoun “I”, he uses plural 1st person pronoun “we” five times to demonstrate unity and teamwork of his party. He brags on behalf of those famous politicians, whose party he represents and embellishes them with adjectives “great 2” (uses thrice); “galant”; “courageous”. Furthermore, Carter uses idiomatic expressions, such as: “give smb hell”, “man of spirit” and makes his speech more expressive and linguistically manipulative. Similar to Trump, he uses the superlative suffix “est” (greatest). As for speech act, it belongs to expressive speech act force.

Barbara Charline Jordan who was the first Southern African-American woman elected to the United States House of Representatives brags in humble and discreet manner: “When -- A lot of years passed since 1832, and during that time it would have been most unusual for any national political party to ask a Barbara Jordan to deliver a keynote address. But tonight, here I am. And I feel -- I feel that notwithstanding the past that my presence here is one additional bit of evidence that the American Dream need not forever be deferred” (Educational Video Group 2009).

In the beginning, she speaks about herself in 3rd person pronoun that who would think Barbara Jonson would be ever asked to deliver a keynote address. Afterwards, Barbara uses 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun three times and repeats one and the same phrase “I feel” for several times to enforce the pace and expressiveness of the speech with superlative form of adjective “most”. This example might be associated with directive speech act force as the speaker wants to get someone to do something, particularly, encourages her listeners to never give up and max out to reach their ultimate goals.

Boris Johnson brags about his home country: “This is an incredible country, our amazing country, second biggest contributor to NATO, country that is admired, that is loved around the world, country that guarantees security not just of the people in this country, but helps through our alliances to guarantee the security across the world, that's what the UK does.” (Conservatives 2019).

He embellishes his motherland with adjectives “amazing” “incredible”, repeats the word “country” five times and unlike above given examples, uses passive voice which undoubtedly makes his speech catchy and demonstrative. Also, superlative form of adjective “biggest”. As for Speech act type, it belongs to expressive speech act force.

### **Conclusion**

Bragging is universal phenomenon. It has no gender, no age, no social background. It is inseparable part of everyday life. All of us brag either consciously or unconsciously. It is a type of speech act, which is represented through representatives/assertives/expressives/directives. Common background (cultural, religious, societal) is important in order to correctly interpret bragging and not to perceive it as impolite, self-aggrandizing, obnoxious and irritating phenomenon.

Nowadays, bragging is not as annoying or surprising as it used to be in the past. Point is, you should know how to brag artfully and how to set up effective bragologue. Though bragging content differs, all of them serve one and the same function, that is to influence on listeners and promote ones’ best self. Usually, politicians tend to brag directly without any camouflage and being humble. Through this way they easily brain-wash, manipulate, manage and monitor their audience. Good politicians know when/how /with whom to “toot their horn” in order to avoid communication pitfalls.

As for linguistic manipulation in political discourse, it is successfully achieved by means of figurative language (idiom), first person pronouns (singular or plural), repetition, comparison, frequent use of adjectives, superlative form of words, passive voice etc.

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