

FACE-SAVING STRATEGIES IN HILLARY CLINTON'S 2016 CONCESSION SPEECH

Antonia ENACHE¹
Marina MILITARU²

Abstract

The present paper looks into Hillary Clinton's 2016 Concession Speech, delivered the next day after unexpectedly losing the American Presidential Elections to the Republican candidate, Donald Trump. While the belated speech is emotionally charged to a large extent, we attempt to show in our analysis that the idea of defeat is actually not accepted by the speaker (a feature deeply embedded in the American unconscious, highly competitive and victory-driven); Clinton is forced by circumstances to face loss and turn it into an opportunity to salvage her political persona. Hence, we will aim to prove in our paper that the 2016 Concession speech is at the same time an instance of inspirational discourse, and a discourse imbued with awareness of defeat and consequent face-saving strategies.

Keywords: elections; presidency; speech; face loss

1. Introductory remarks

Hillary Clinton represents a prominent figure in American political and social life, whose long-standing political career is marked by a significant number of achievements. "When Hillary Clinton was elected to the US Senate in 2001, she became the first American first lady to ever win a public office seat. She later became the 67th US Secretary of State in 2009, serving until 2013".³ Perhaps most importantly, in 2016 she became the first woman in US history ascending to presidential nominee of one of the two major political parties, and also the first former first lady to run for presidency. We are fully aware that this approach pays tribute to the "rhetoric of the first" as described by Diane M. Blair (Blair, 2015: 1-15); according to the author, the media coverage pioneering, ground-breaking women receive can be interpreted as controversial since, while highlighting the uniqueness, courage and novelty their undertaking entails, the underlying interpretation goes towards the unlikelihood, if not impossibility of their success.

¹ Antonia Enache, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, antonia.enache@rei.ase.ro

² Marina Militaru, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, marina.militaru@rei.ase.ro

³ <https://www.biography.com/people/hillary-clinton-9251306>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

That being said, the fact remains that Hillary Clinton did break the *glass ceiling* (a metaphor we shall return to in section 2.2 of our paper) in several outstanding ways.

However, despite the remarkable professional successes, she has always been, and remains to this day, a controversial figure, a person inclined to spawn polarization and even dissent in public opinion. “Starting with her time as first lady of Arkansas, she has been an object of admiration and derision. She has been the subject of political hagiography and political polemics, both before and after the publication of her political memoirs, and every aspect of her life has been examined and re-examined at length” (Lockhart et al, 2015: vii).

The purpose of the present paper does not allow an in-depth analysis of Hillary Clinton’s personal and professional life; nevertheless, we will mention that she did run for President of the US in November 2016, but lost to her Republican opponent, a former real-estate developer and reality TV star with no previous political or military experience⁴. The outcome of the elections was a surprise to most, since the latest opinion polls had shown a “modest but persistent edge⁵” for the Democratic candidate⁶. It is generally believed that Trump’s victory capitalized on recently accelerating nationalistic trends displayed worldwide, as well as on “an explosive, populist and polarizing campaign that took relentless aim at the institutions and long-held ideals of American democracy”⁷.

2. The Concession Speech and its implications for Hillary Clinton

On the American political arena, a concession speech represents an instance of discourse delivered by the candidate who has lost the elections, and there are a few elements it traditionally includes. Firstly, it extends congratulations to the winner, while also expressing the willingness to support them further in their undertakings dedicated to the well-being of the nation. Secondly, there are people to thank, among which the loser’s campaign staff alongside whoever else the speaker may deem necessary. It is important, throughout the speech, to convey the image of a good loser, capable of selflessness and fair play, since the image put forward at this crucial point will impact one’s political career long-term⁸.

⁴ <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/11/13587532/donald-trump-no-experience>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/us/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-president.html>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/31/us/politics/early-voting-trump-clinton.html>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/us/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-president.html>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

⁸ <http://capitolweekly.net/art-concession-speech/>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

Concession speeches appear to be particularly difficult to deliver, since the idea of defeat in itself is rejected by the American unconscious, riddled with an ingrained mentality of constantly pursuing success and winning at all costs. Therefore, although technically, failure has to be acknowledged according to circumstances and political protocol, in fact concession speeches continue to emerge as future-oriented, directed towards salvaging the political persona of the orator and turning their ill-fate into a prerequisite for future success.

If we try to find potential causes for Hillary Clinton's surprising 2016 failure, there are several reasons that appear to be likely, considering the national as well as the global context. Firstly, we must make room for the *erosion of power* phenomenon, whereby potential electors experience at some point a certain reluctance to vote for the same party / political faction / person several times in a row. The extent to which the ruling party / administration / politician sees their power erode goes hand in hand with a phasing out of their moral authority and of the confidence citizens place with them. In this case, taking into account the eight previous years of Democratic administration, alongside a certain degree of deception amongst some social categories, it seems understandable that, at some point, people should vote for change (although, and this may appear unfair to someone unfamiliar with the American electoral system, Hillary did in fact win the majority in the popular vote. "Despite Trump winning the electoral votes, Clinton won the popular vote by almost three million more votes. Outside of Obama's 2008 presidential election victory, Clinton currently holds the record for winning the most votes than any other presidential candidate in US history".⁹) In addition, one cannot ignore the recent nationalistic tendencies on the rise worldwide. One can easily see that, in recent years, a wave of surging nationalism has been sweeping throughout Western democracies, reshaping their politics in striking ways: from the UK's vote to exit the EU in June 2016, to Trump's victory in November 2016 and to the nationalist parties rising in popularity across Europe. While economists identify the underlying causes of this shift in factors ranging from globalization and technological innovation to unemployment and the rising income divide, political scientists point to the cultural chasm stemming from immigration as well as ethnic, racial and sexual diversity¹⁰. It is widely believed that Trump's campaign capitalized on the emotional resources supplied by nationalist impulses, skilfully combining them with an "unpredictable brand of populist politics".¹¹ Last but not least, we have to take into account *dealignment*, a phenomenon whereby "partisanship, or loyalty to one party, among the electorate has reduced over the last half-century" (Lilleker, 2006: 67). Thus, while voters in the past used to have

⁹ <https://www.biography.com/people/hillary-clinton-9251306>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

¹⁰ <https://www.nature.com/news/researchers-baffled-by-nationalist-surge-1.21110>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

¹¹ <https://www.nature.com/news/researchers-baffled-by-nationalist-surge-1.21110>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

strong, lifelong political allegiances, nowadays, “voter loyalty is far more flexible and can shift between elections”¹². In this context, Trump is seen to have prevailed not only due to the structure of the US electoral college, which “gives outsized influence to Republican-leaning rural areas over Democratic urban centres”¹³, but also because “some of his predominantly white supporters voted for President Barack Obama, a Democrat, in past elections”¹⁴.

For Hillary Clinton’s political persona, losing the elections represents a serious threat to her *positive face*, as we shall attempt to show in section 2 of our paper. Positive face is inherently linked to *identity* and *consensus*¹⁵ – thus, by extending Brown and Levinson’s framework beyond the impact strictly deriving from face-threatening acts and taking into account the broader historical context, we can see that Clinton’s very *identity* is impacted. If we see identity as a construct presenting two main dimensions: an inner one, defining how one feels about oneself, which is in reality impossible to know, and an extraneous one, a social construct embedding all the characteristics one wishes to present to others, we can say that the social identity Hillary Clinton presented to the world, which also lay at the basis of her political persona, dwelled on two main aspects:

- Former First Lady, wife of former Democratic president Bill Clinton; here, we can broaden our approach by pointing out the characteristics she derived from her status as former First Lady: a devoted life partner, capable of support (standing by her husband throughout his scandal-riddled terms of office) and, above all else, capable of forgiveness – these are qualities highly emotional in nature, that the candidate had arguably hoped to capitalize on in the elections campaign – although there are voices claiming that “Bill Clinton’s well-publicized personal failings were often identified as Hillary Clinton’s political liability.” (Blair, 2015: 8). Thus, while her husband’s name might have been, for her, a source both of political support and of enhancing her emotional appeal, on the other hand there also exists the downside: the implied doubt as to who would, in fact, be running the White House (Blair, 2015: 8).
- Continuator of the American dream come true (triumph of the impossible) of her predecessor; the way things had looked on the American political arena in the past years, it seemed only natural that a woman should follow

¹² <https://www.nature.com/news/researchers-baffled-by-nationalist-surge-1.21110>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

¹³ <https://www.nature.com/news/researchers-baffled-by-nationalist-surge-1.21110>, accessed on August 27, 2018.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Paul Chilton, *Politeness, Politics and Diplomacy*, 1990, retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249712772_Politeness_Politics_and_Diplomacy, accessed on September 3, 2018.

in the footsteps of her unlikely predecessor and take the broken pattern of WASP American presidents to the next level, pursuant to the *rhetoric of the first* mentioned in the introductory part of our paper, but also to the *rhetoric of viability* (which takes into account the real chances of a candidate perceived as different from the norm). In this respect, previous attempts by women to get closer to presidency¹⁶ had at the time been interpreted as having a merely symbolic importance (as they were trying to make a point about women's rights), but were seen as devoid of significant political importance, as these women did not have a real chance to win. According to Diane M. Blair, tapping into the emotional potential generated by the *metaphor of the first* (in this case, the first woman in US history to become presidential nominee of a major political party and, perhaps more importantly, the first "viable" woman candidate, with a real chance at winning) leads to a painful paradox: "While culturally, we may admire the "pioneering spirit" of these women's efforts, such a discursive frame also plays into anxieties over what we might perceive as radical change and transformation in the political process" (Blair, 2015:3).

We can see that both of these characteristics are highly emotional in nature and aim, therefore, likely to trigger an equally emotional response from potential electors. Furthermore, while the former characteristic highlights some of the politician's personal human qualities, helping her stand out due to her own merit, the latter is more nation-oriented, giving the candidate the aura of serving a higher purpose. We are no longer referring to a presidential candidate with a number of positive individual qualities; what we have is a person devoted to a greater aim – that of steering the nation into a positive direction, ridding it of all the injustices and prejudices of the past centuries.

3. Face-saving strategies in Hillary Clinton's Concession Speech

The *face* theory begins with the works of Erving Goffman, who defined it as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman, 1967: 213). In this respect, *face* is primarily a social construct, materializing in the image a person wishes to present to others. Goffman's widely acclaimed work was taken further by Brown and Levinson's theories, "the most fully elaborated work on linguistic politeness" (Grundy, 1995: 33). Thus, in their 1978 research (*Universals in language usage: politeness phenomena*), reissued in 1987 (*Politeness: some universals in language usage*), they suggest that every human being has a *face*, a property comparable to one's image and self-esteem. Face comes in two varieties:

¹⁶ For more information on previous attempts by US women to run for president, refer to <https://www.thoughtco.com/women-who-ran-for-president-3529994>, accessed on September 3, 2018.

on the one hand, there is *the positive face*, which translates into a person's wish to be admired, respected, understood, well thought of, treated as a friend, confidant or member of the same group or community. In other words, the concept of *positive face* dwells on *harmony* as well as *mutual respect and understanding* amongst people. By contrast, negative face describes our wish not to be imposed on or bothered by others. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61-63). Thus, the essence of *negative face* resides in personal *privacy* and *freedom*. In other words, an individual's positive face mirrors their desire to be sociable and connected, whereas their negative face reflects territoriality. Consequently, by widening the scope of our discussion, we can say that the positive face (and the related positive politeness strategies) are *community-oriented*, and the main threat to one's positive face is *rejection* (by others/ the community/ the group), while the negative face (and the respective negative politeness strategies) are *individual-oriented* and the primary threat a person's negative face risks is *imposition*.

Brown and Levinson contend that our face is put at risk and potentially threatened in most *encounters*. However, we can extrapolate and say that our face is put at risk in most human *situations*, as the respective concept transcends the borders of linguistics into adjacent domains (sociolinguistics, sociology, rhetoric, psychology, communication, political studies etc.). Since *face* also covers personality traits like image, social prestige, dignity and reputation, it goes without saying that not only linguistic encounters, but also complex situations run the risk of threatening a person's face. An instance of significant social failure, such as losing the elections, poses a serious threat to the candidate's positive face, since it challenges the positive social value the respective individual claims for themselves, their expectations from others, it shatters the person's emotional investment (the deeper the investment, the more aggrieving the threat) and it makes the respective candidate feel rejected by the community. Therefore, any situation involving failure translates into significant face loss – the greater the failure, the greater the loss.

It is to this situation that Hillary Clinton must respond. In the following section of our paper, we shall attempt to highlight two ways in which she tries to counterbalance the enormous face loss she has been exposed to, restoring the positive traits of her political persona, regaining legitimacy and persuading her audience that the possibly crushing disappointment she is exposed to can be rationalized and turned into material for possible future success.

Subchapter 2.1. The Covert Expression of Scepticism

Throughout the concession speech, we find instances where streaks of scepticism (and even pessimism) surface, despite the arguably optimistic, inspirational message the orator attempts to convey. This rhetorical strategy aims to highlight the speaker's taking a distance from the outcome of the elections, and also acts as a

warning that things may not go well in the future; also, we can grasp the underlying implication that, had the ballot result been different, had she won, things might have been better for the people. It is for this exact reason we believe the covert expression of scepticism functions as a face-saving strategy: the rhetor attempts to present herself with dignity and honor, she acknowledges her loss – although various interpretations have hovered as to why she did not deliver the concession speech right away, but the following morning. “While she phoned Trump to officially concede, she did not appear in front of her supporters at the Javits Center¹⁷ in New York, instead letting her campaign manager John Podesta make a brief appearance under that massive glass ceiling so many had thought she was going to shatter”.¹⁸ The most common explanations have been either that she was so sure she would win she did not have a concession speech ready, as she had only drafted the victory speech, or that she was so distraught from the loss she could not risk allowing everyone to see her in that state. Whatever the case, the loss doubtless posed a serious threat to her public image; as a consequence, the implicit message that naturally ensues from her speech is that the electors have made a mistake and, had she won, the future would have been a brighter one.

Ex.1. I hope that he will be a successful president for all Americans. This is not the outcome we wanted or we worked so hard for, and I'm sorry we did not win this election for the values we share and the vision we hold for our country¹⁹.

Two main ideas stem from the extract above:

- In this context, the speaker expressing *hope* for the future (more precisely, hope that the opponent will be a successful president for all Americans) seems, on the one hand, to shed doubt on the likelihood of this course of events and, on the other hand, to imply that the opponent may represent only the interest of those who have voted for him;
- The speaker also implies that her values and vision for the country are better than Trump's, which is not surprising; on the contrary, it is a common strategy in political campaigning, capitalizing on positive, self-assertion strategies (whereby a candidate will resort to anything that boosts their image in order to gain political capital; the ammunition they provide

¹⁷ “A Convention Center made largely of glass” (<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/hillary-clintons-history-talking-glass-ceilings/story?id=43255845>), yet another symbol-conveying choice in her campaign.

¹⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2016/11/09/hillary-clinton-idnt-give-her-concession-speech-on-election-night-now-we-see-one-reason-why/?utm_term=.bc0867d1ed41, accessed on September 4, 2018.

¹⁹ The full transcript of Hillary Clinton's 2016 Concession Speech can be accessed at <https://www.vox.com/2016/11/9/13570328/hillary-clinton-concession-speech-full-transcript-2016-presidential-election>, viewed on September 5, 2018.

covers a wide array of potential “assets”, ranging from rational arguments relying on concrete facts and figures to “emotional outbursts of argument-free self-assertion” (Enache & Militaru, 2013: 60). Also, the orator taps into the endless resources of the Manichean distinction good-evil (Enache & Militaru, 2013: 60), whereby in the *either/or* situation any competition entails, the only sensible choice is always the speaker. All situations are black and white, with nothing in-between; against this simplistic background (required by the rules of the political game), anything other than choosing the speaker is a blatant mistake – hence, the scepticism conveyed.

Ex. 2. Now, I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday someone will – and hopefully sooner than we might think right now²⁰.

The “glass ceiling” metaphor the speaker resorts to in the extract above is known to describe mainly the invisible barrier preventing a certain minority, usually women, from going up in some form of social hierarchy, usually work-related. Thus, in the most widely known acceptance of the term “the glass ceiling” is not simply a barrier for an individual, based on the person’s inability to handle a higher-level job. Rather, the glass ceiling *applies to women as a group* who are kept from advancing higher because they are women²¹. In other words, the glass-ceiling metaphor translates into an unspoken form of discrimination against women, characterised by two main features: it is group-oriented, rather than individual in nature, affecting more or less all the members of the given community, and it is highly unjust, since it prevents well-deserving individuals from reaching social positions they are fully entitled to. It is in no way surprising that Hillary Clinton would resort to this metaphor to boost her political capital and enhance potential feelings of regret amongst the electorate, for several reasons. Firstly, as was mentioned in section 1 of the present paper, being a woman with all the merits and sacrifices attached stands out as a primary feature of her campaign. Secondly, her winning would have been perceived as the natural continuation of the Obama Democratic administration, where Obama himself was an enthusiastic supporter of women’s rights. Thirdly, we could assume that we are also dealing with an indirect attack against the winner, as Donald Trump is a known womanizer; in this context, seeing women solely as sexual objects, or objectifying them, runs counter to seeing them as individuals endowed with merit and professional qualities, worthy of the appropriate reward (promotion in the workplace). Hence, in the above, Clinton admits to not have been able to fully eliminate this overriding form of social

²⁰ The full transcript of Hillary Clinton’s 2016 Concession Speech can be accessed at <https://www.vox.com/2016/11/9/13570328/hillary-clinton-concession-speech-full-transcript-2016-presidential-election>, viewed on September 5, 2018.

²¹ http://www.feminist.org/research/business/ewb_glass.html, accessed on August 14, 2018.

injustice; furthermore, while expressing, yet again, hope that this might happen, she in fact questions the likelihood, an insinuation deepened even further by the implication that, at present, we might envision that as a remote possibility (*sooner than we might think right now*).

One more aspect needs to be highlighted before concluding the present section of our paper. Significantly, the "glass ceiling metaphor" has been a constant icon for Hillary Clinton, not only throughout her presidential campaign, but even beforehand; the most commonly known reference was made in 2008, in her (then) concession speech whereby she suspended her campaign for Democratic presidential nomination in favour of subsequent winner Barack Obama; she then made the famous statement that "although we weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it, and the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time.²²" The candidate was famously referring to the 18 million people who had voted for her; moreover, it is important to specify that she did keep her word, as she did take the "glass ceiling" one step closer to collapse, by running on behalf of the Democratic party in 2016 and coming very close to winning. In this respect, we believe she did contribute in a significant way to the consolidation of the American dream.

To conclude our analysis of the present section, we can say that the ironic dimension attached to the covert expression of scepticism also serves to highlight the speaker's ability to detach herself from the recent loss, at least on the surface, and present herself as an objective observer of reality. This acts as a legitimacy generator and helps build up a more reliable political persona for herself.

Subchapter 2. 2. Emphasizing the importance of the community as against the individual -

Placing the interests of the community at large above your own represents one of the most commonly used strategies of political rhetoric. Aside from displaying an aura of selflessness, it also translates into the ability to compromise, a feature that, in this particular case, seems to be in line with Clinton's long-standing public image. What is more, the importance of belonging to a community, of putting its interests before one's own and actively supporting its well-being appears to be in harmony with the doctrine of civic nationalism²³, whereby the most important feature of fitting in a community is the individual's degree of *commitment* to the respective social group. Thus, group membership inherently entails a pro-active stance and participation; in this

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/07/hillaryclinton.uselections20081>, accessed on September 4, 2018.

²³ Keck, A., "One Nation: Cosmopolitanism and the Making of American Identity from Madison to Lincoln", New Jersey, 2008: 15, retrieved from <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/24709/PDF/1/play/>, accessed on September 4, 2018.

respect, relinquishing your own interests to the benefit of the group is seen as the only thing to do in situations challenging to the self.

Since losing the elections constitutes an instance of strong personal loss, the speaker attempts to save face by highlighting the fact that, in her view, the community overrides the individual in terms of importance and priority. Thus, on the one hand, she appears to bow before commonly upheld democratic ideals (decision of the majority, respect for the electoral system, the peaceful transfer of power etc.). On the other hand, she does what is expected of her: she acknowledges that selflessness and sacrifice represent pillars of any political persona claiming to represent others and, most importantly, of anyone who is supposed to appear in the public eye as a role model and source of motivation for others. In this respect, at least in theory, Clinton's image appears to benefit from her positive qualities, turning her into an inspirational figure: a woman advancing in politics, former First Lady capable to stand by her husband despite huge costs to personal life and ego, as we have said in section 1 above. Successful wife, mother and politician, superwoman in other words, the ability to see compromise as a feature inherent to personal success appears to be deeply ingrained in the mental mapping of this politician.

Ex. 3. (a) Our campaign was never about one person, or even one election. It was about the country we love and building an America that is hopeful, inclusive, and big-hearted.

(b) We have seen that our nation is more deeply divided than we thought.

(c) But I still believe in America, and I always will.

(d) And if you do, then we must accept this result and look to the future. Donald Trump is going to be our president. We owe him an open mind and the chance to lead.

(e) Our constitutional democracy enshrines the peaceful transfer of power²⁴.

The extract above can be divided in fragments according to the main idea they convey, as follows: in fragment (a), Clinton emphasises that the country comes before the individual – in this respect, running for President emerges as a selfless act benefitting the community rather than a self-serving step in her own career; moreover, by tapping into the endless resources of nationalism, the speaker flatters the electors, appealing to their positive face. Extract (b) serves to put forward the speaker's pessimism – we can see, therefore, that this pessimistic touch is something Clinton is not willing to relinquish, a feature present throughout her concession speech, mainly to validate her own political persona – in this case, by mentioning the country's division, the speaker yet again seems to distance herself

²⁴ The full transcript of Hillary Clinton's 2016 Concession Speech can be accessed at <https://www.vox.com/2016/11/9/13570328/hillary-clinton-concession-speech-full-transcript-2016-presidential-election>, viewed on September 5, 2018.

from the course of events, this detachment transforming her from an active participant into a more passive one. However, in this case, passivity is blame-free and does not represent a transgression of participation as proof of nationalism, as in this case, passivity is not something the speaker has chosen for herself, therefore is not evidence of idleness or lack of interest. By contrast, passivity has been enforced upon the speaker against her will and greatest efforts; therefore, she can now take one step back and allow herself to become a spectator rather than a main actor. This stance is reinforced in fragment (c), where she also raises the stakes by bringing back the idea of nationalism, only, from a more distanced perspective. Scepticism returns in fragment (d), where, as a remote spectator, Hillary Clinton acknowledges, albeit reluctantly, her opponent's victory. The implication of *we owe him an open mind* seems to be that one's natural instinct would be to give him no chance at all; thus, by fighting this prejudice and encouraging her voters to do the same, the speaker aims to gain credibility, to uphold her supporter base (although she did announce that she would not run for office again²⁵, she remains an outstanding politician and a prominent public figure on the American political arena) and to show that she is a good loser despite the fact that her loss seems all the more bitter, considering that opinion polls predicted she would win. Finally, in extract (e), she makes the shift from the particular to the general, stating one of the underlying principles of American democracy (*the peaceful transfer of power*). Although the peaceful transfer of power is not stipulated as such anywhere, it represents a cornerstone of American democracy, its roots going back into the past to the 1800s, more precisely to the 17th of February 1801, when Thomas Jefferson was elected the third president of the United States. "The election constitutes the first peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another in the United States".²⁶

"The first ever peaceful transition of power after bitterly contested popular elections fought by principled partisans occurred in America, in the «Revolution of 1800», after elections that gave the Republican party led by Thomas Jefferson control over both the presidency and Congress. Both the Republicans and their opponents, the Federalist party, believed that the fundamental principles of democracy were at stake in the conflict between the two parties".²⁷ Therefore, the above-mentioned Revolution established the underlying principles of functioning democracies, also shaping a respectable, legitimate role for political parties coming to power alternatively. Accepting the outcome of an election, however unpleasant it may turn out to be, defines any democratic regime nowadays. Although the American republic was considered the first "emerging democracy" of the modern world, its experience is closely similar to that of later-emerging democracies²⁸. Hillary Clinton's choosing to resort to this particular tenet to apply in the current

²⁵ https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2018/05/07/hillary_clinton_i_will_not_run_for_president_again.html, accessed on September 4, 2018.

²⁶ <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/thomas-jefferson-is-elected>, accessed on August 25, 2018.

²⁷ <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/zvesper/chapter1/>, accessed on August 25, 2018.

²⁸ <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/zvesper/chapter1/>, accessed on August 25, 2018.

situation serves a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, reference to an important, historic moment from the past serves her image and enhances her credibility, as the appeal to tradition is an impactful rhetorical strategy on the American political arena (Enache, 2017: 117-118). On the other hand, the reference reinforces her folding before the wish of the majority, which in this new light is not only a difficult test of selflessness and sacrifice she has passed, but also a stance fully in line with the long-standing American democratic tradition.

Ex. 4. I count my blessings every single day that I am an American, and I still believe, as deeply as I ever have, that if we stand together and work together with respect for our differences, strengthen our convictions, and love for this nation, our best days are still ahead of us²⁹.

Two ideas can be inferred from the extract above. Firstly, the speaker attempts to put an optimistic spin on things: *count my blessings, our best days are ahead of us*. However, the adverb *still* conveys an aura of doubt, acting like a conventional implicature trigger, where "conventional implicatures are associated with specific words and result in additional conveyed meanings when those words are used" (Yule, 1996: 45). The orator thus appears to imply that the recent developments make a good outcome seem less likely than before. Secondly, she invokes national identity as a legitimizer (in other words, we can infer that identity arises in spite of all diversity and, even more so, identity includes a call to embrace diversity; in this respect, she also capitalizes on the dichotomy *unity – diversity* (whereby acceptance of diversity, of *the other* and of personal differences represents a prerequisite for, and inherently leads to unity). For unity to be real, for the community to function appropriately, the gap between *self* and *other* must be bridged, generating a conflict-free environment based on mutual acceptance and respect. Identity (*I am an American*), depicted as a person's or a group's sense of self (Huntington, 2005: 21) aims, in this context, to underpin the overpowering importance of the group as against the individual, with everything this dichotomy entails (selflessness, sacrifice, moral values, creed, participation, commitment).

Moreover, if we understand Hillary Clinton's persona, as well as her post-elections public appearances, in a larger historical and cultural context, that "continues to perpetuate powerful patriarchal barriers and constraints to women presidential candidates" (Blair, 2015: 1), then we might more clearly understand why she would resort to the all-encompassing American identity (rather than rely on the exclusive support of the social groups she directly represents) in order to uphold and reinforce her legitimacy even in times of loss. A comprehensive approach to identity must therefore include the sense of self, but also difference, communication and heterogeneity.

²⁹ The full transcript of Hillary Clinton's 2016 Concession Speech can be accessed at <https://www.vox.com/2016/11/9/13570328/hillary-clinton-concession-speech-full-transcript-2016-presidential-election>, viewed on September 5, 2018.

4. Concluding remarks

In our paper, we have looked into Hillary Clinton's 2016 Concession Speech, delivered one day after losing the US Presidential elections to her Republican opponent, Donald Trump. We have briefly discussed the presidential candidate's political profile, her professional history, as well as some of the factors that might have led to her surprising loss. In our analysis of the speech whereby she acknowledges the loss and concedes to her antagonist, we have focused on the ways in which she attempts to rationalize her loss, to save face and turn the powerful setback into a means towards gaining political capital. We believe this speech to be of particular interest on the American political arena, due to the importance of Hillary Clinton's profile and candidacy, which represented a breakthrough in more ways than one.

References and bibliography

- Blair, D. M.** 2015. 'Hillary Clinton's "18 Million Cracks" – The Enduring Legacy of the Presidential Glass Ceiling', in Lockhart, M. and Mollick, K. (eds.), *Hillary Rodham Clinton and the 2016 Election – Her Political and Social Discourse*, London: Lexington Books: 1-14.
- Brown, P.** and **Levinson, S.** 1987. Politeness: some universals in language usage, Cambridge: C.U.P.
- Chilton, P.** 1990. Politeness, Politics and Diplomacy, retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249712772_Politeness_Politics_a_nd_Diplomacy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249712772_Politeness_Politics_and_Diplomacy), accessed on September 3, 2018.
- Enache, A.** 2017. Discursive Practices in Barack Obama's State of the Union Addresses, Saarbrucken: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Enache, A.** and **Militaru, M.** 2013. Political Communication, Bucureşti: Editura Universitară.
- Goffman, E.** 1967. Interaction ritual: Essays in face-to-face behavior, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Grundy, P.** 1995. Doing Pragmatics, New York: Hodder Headline Group.
- Huntington, S. P.** 2005. Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity, New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks.
- Keck, A.** 2008. One Nation: Cosmopolitanism and the Making of American Identity from Madison to Lincoln, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Lilleker, D. G.** 2006. Key Concepts in Political Communication, London: Sage Publications.
- Lockhart, M.** and **Mollick, K.** 2015. *Hillary Rodham Clinton and the 2016 Election – Her Political and Social Discourse*, London: Lexington Books.
- Yule, G.** 1996. Pragmatics, Oxford: OUP.

Internet sources

- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/09/hillary-clinton-concession-speech-full-transcript>
<https://www.biography.com/people/hillary-clinton-9251306>, accessed on August 27, 2018.
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/11/13587532/donald-trump-no-experience>, accessed on August 27, 2018.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/us/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-president.html>, accessed on August 27, 2018.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/31/us/politics/early-voting-trump-clinton.html>, accessed on August 27, 2018.
<http://capitolweekly.net/art-concession-speech/>, accessed on August 27, 2018.
<https://www.nature.com/news/researchers-baffled-by-nationalist-surge-1.21110>, accessed on August 27, 2018.
<https://www.thoughtco.com/women-who-ran-for-president-3529994>, accessed on September 3, 2018.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2016/11/09/hillary-clinton-didnt-give-her-concession-speech-on-election-night-now-we-see-one-reason-why/?utm_term=.bc0867d1ed41, accessed on September 4, 2018.
<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/hillary-clintons-history-talking-glassceilings/story?id=43255845>, accessed on September 4, 2018.
http://www.feminist.org/research/business/ewb_glass.html, accessed on August 14, 2018.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/07/hillaryclinton.uselections20081>, accessed on September 4, 2018.
https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2018/05/07/hillary_clinton_i_will_not_run_for_president_again.html, accessed on September 4, 2018.
<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/thomas-jefferson-is-elected>, viewed on August 25, 2018.
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/zvesper/chapter1/>, viewed on August 25, 2018.

The authors

Antonia Enache is an Associate Professor with the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. She holds a PhD in Philology from the University of Bucharest (2006), an MA in European and International Relations and Management (University of Amsterdam, 2001) and an MA in Applied Linguistics (University of Bucharest, 1998). She is the author of several books in the field of political communication and has made numerous contributions to specialized scientific journals. Her main areas of interest include applied linguistics, political communication, economics, business communication and translation studies.

Associate Professor **Marina Militaru**, PhD, is the author of many articles on political communication and English methodology. Among the books she has published as coauthor we mention *Verbal versus nonverbal în comunicarea politică* (2016) and *Political Communication* (2013). She currently teaches Business English at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies.