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## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS IN BACCALAUREATE SPEECHES

The study analyzes the communication patterns and strategies used by university Presidents in Baccalaureate speeches addressed to graduates of Harvard and Yale universities between 2018 and 2023. The epideictic genre of Baccalaureate speeches constituting the academic-administrative discourse, is an important part of the tradition in American universities. Baccalaureate services are currently interfaith in nature, featuring music, prayers, hymns, and speeches from faith and campus leaders. Methods used include both content and corpus analysis, interpreting quantitative and qualitative findings. Baccalaureate speeches, meditational and encouraging in nature, contain key themes including personal transformation, social responsibility, resilience, and embracing uncertainty. The speeches emphasize values like perseverance, flexibility, and service, often referencing contemporary cultural issues such as decline in social engagement and loneliness. Rhetorical devices, such as intertextuality, negation, humor, and question-based constructions for argumentation (ethos, logos, pathos), are actively used to engage the audience. The speeches mention precedent proper names, including famous university alumni and faculty, influential leaders in civil rights, religion, and culture, the quotes from their addresses, works, or statements, as well as key historical and contemporary events. Academic leaders often employ irony, self-deprecating humor, puns, satire, and personal anecdotes. The analysis shows that they use a combination of various devices in their speeches, which allows them to effectively achieve their goals and maintain active interaction with the audience. Baccalaureate speeches highlight the inclusive, intergenerational, interfaith, and intercultural aspects of universities, positioning them as key promoters of diversity, creativity, and ensuring a sense of safety within their communities. Further analysis could explore the translational potential of Baccalaureate speeches across cultural contexts, reinforcing their role in shaping global educational and leadership communities. The identified rhetorical strategies can also enhance leadership development programs, helping leaders navigate today's complex global challenges.

**Key words:** discourse analysis, rhetorical strategies, communication patterns, Baccalaureate speeches, intertextuality, negation, humor.

**Introduction and context.** In the typology of institutional discourse which reflects the communication of public institutions, an administrative-academic discourse (AAD) is distinguished based on institutional-communicative parameters, particularly, the goals and participants of the communication. The chief academic administrators of the prominent universities of the USA and UK employ the system of genres to address the students and graduates, faculty and stakeholders [Molodcha]. The communication patterns, strategies and values of the university leaders identified in Commencement speeches for graduates, Convocation Speeches for freshmen, Official Statements and Remarks on different matters, ROTC Speeches have been previously investigated by e.g. A.R. Brandebury, J. Partch & R. Kinrier, E. Korolyova, etc. Research into the rhetor-

ical strategies used in Baccalaureate speeches addressed to the graduates of the top universities like Harvard remain underexplored.

The Baccalaureate Service, honoring college graduates, typically takes place in university chapels, symbolizing a connection between educational institutions and their religious origins. Etymologically, the term "bachelor" originates from the Latin words "bacca", or "berry", and "laureus", "laurel", referring to the laurel wreaths with which new graduates were crowned in European medieval ceremonies [Merriam Webster]. The Baccalaureate service originated at Oxford University in 1432 when bachelors had to deliver a Latin sermon as part of their academic requirements. The first recorded Baccalaureate ceremony in North America was at Harvard in 1642. By the 19th century, Harvard seniors began inviting the president

to speak, a tradition that continues today. Although rooted in Christian principles, modern Baccalaureate services are typically interfaith and they include music, prayers, hymns, and addresses from faith leaders, concluding with blessings and a musical postlude, blending solemnity and tradition with youthful celebration [Cipriano].

The purpose of the research is to identify the rhetorical strategies and communication patterns used by academic administrators in Baccalaureate speeches (**BS**) addressed to the graduates. The study examines speeches delivered between 2018 and 2023 at Harvard and Yale universities to highlight the unique features of this genre and offer insights into the power dynamics and values prevalent in modern academia.

The paper integrates key concepts from discourse analysis, genre theory, rhetoric, and pragmatics. Discourse is seen as a social practice shaped by and shaping institutions, with its meaning dependent on both intra-textual and extra-textual contexts [Fairclough : 1995]. Genre, as a stable type of utterance, refers to a form of speech (oral or written) shaped by specific human activities. It reflects the unique conditions and goals of those activities through content, language style, and, most importantly, its structural composition [Bhatia; Fairclough : 2005]. The research refers to Aristotle's Rhetoric's three persuasive appeals – logos, pathos, and ethos, Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory's emphasis on social 'face' needs, and pragmatics speech acts conveying direct and indirect [Duffy; López-Ferrero & Bach; Searle]. Methods include content and corpus analysis, utilizing the Voyant analytical tool. Both quantitative and qualitative findings form the conclusions and implications of the study.

**Findings.** Baccalaureate addresses classified as oral epideictic genres convey meditational, encouraging and transformative messages. Content analysis conducted using the Voyant analytical tool revealed the core themes of these speeches emphasizing:

**Transformation and growth:** Each speech focuses on personal and collective transformation, discussing how college has equipped graduates to embrace and drive positive change. In Harvard's BS (2018) the university President encourages ongoing transformation post-college period. This is suggested with the help of humanities – "...com-

mitment to the transformative power of a liberal arts and sciences education" [1].

**Connection and togetherness:** Yale's BS (2023) discusses combatting loneliness through community and service. Graduates are reminded of the importance of relationships, underscoring that these bonds will have lasting significance beyond academic achievements. Yale's address particularly emphasizes the impact of community involvement, referencing Robert Putnam's "Bowling Alone" to discuss social decline in American communities and promote engagement as an antidote to loneliness. "*And we feel lonely. Surveys indicate the alarming prevalence of these feelings. 60% of Americans, including a full 75% of younger people like yourselves, now struggle with loneliness...*" [5]. "... *Our civic and social lives form the mortar of American society – and a pillar of public health*" [5]. "Engagement" and "responsibility" are offered as a solution for the mentioned problem. Both Harvard and Yale emphasize the responsibility graduates have to use their education in service to the world.

**Embracing uncertainty and resilience to crisis:** The leaders of academia highlight resilience in adapting to unforeseen circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic for the Class of 2021 and 2022. "*Despite what the past 441 days have served up, you have endured. You have fulfilled your requirements, completed your work, and finished what you started. On our campus, across the country, and around the world, you have adapted to unexpected circumstances.*" [2]. The young people should remain flexible and open to "serendipity" and unexpected career paths, encouraging exploration rather than rigid planning. Endurance, perseverance, flexibility, and patience are stated to be vital qualities for future success. "*You have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and patience, both skills that will serve you well as you prepare for life after Harvard.*" [4].

To engage ethos, pathos and logos arguments which are used in epideictic rhetorics to influence, inspire, persuade the audience, the BS include such device as **intertextuality**. Intertextuality is viewed mainly as an "implicit or explicit connection to another text by using distinctive, common or recognizable elements of the referenced text", "interconnectedness between different texts" [Allen; Hutcheon]. Umberto Eco poetically writes,

“books always speak of other books, and every story tells a story that has already been told” [Allen : 194]. It is natural and obligatory for the authors to incorporate different texts [Hutcheon : 39]. The research shows that intertextuality also appears as a narrative and rhetorical strategy integrating different elements to reach a regulating goal.

Intertextuality in Baccalaureate addresses is manifested engaging a) precedent proper names (of figures, places, events) that have acquired significant status on the university’s campus and international significance [Vasko et al.]; b) contemporary and cultural vernacular; c) stylistic devices like quotes, allusion, humor, repetition, quesitives, imperatives, directives, negation.

**Precedent proper names:** The addresses contain references to significant figures, places and events: a) Harvard’s famous alumni and faculty, e.g. a poet Jorie Graham, a musician Rubén Blades, a psychiatrist and Harvard professor Arthur Kleinman who is known for his research on the intersection of culture, mental health, and global health, the Dean of Harvard College Khurana, etc.; b) well-known civil rights, religious and cultural leaders (Martin Luther King Jr., John Dewey, T.S. Eliot, Jean Jacques Rousseau); c) famous events like World War I, Civil Rights Movement, the March for Our Lives movement as well as campus events like Commencement, Harvard’s first Black Health Matters Conference, Harvard Art Museum, Hasty Pudding, a theatrical club in Harvard. These references ground the speeches in a broader social context, linking the graduates’ journeys to historical struggles for justice, equality, creativity and enjoying life.

**Use of Contemporary and Cultural Vernacular:** Each address includes terms relevant to current social, political, and technological trends, such as “swiping right,” “driverless cars,” and “post-truth.” This modern vocabulary resonates with graduates’ experiences and underscores the relevance of advice in contemporary life. The analysis of the vernacular style in BS identified informalities, colloquialisms, slang, nonce words and idiomatic expressions like – “Gonna”, ‘wanna’, “Y’all”, “lit” (exciting or excellent), “Kick the bucket”, “Hey, what’s up?” “That’s awesome!”, “Snowpocalypse”, “Snowmageddon”. Academic administrators mention popular TV shows, music, or local events. Vernacular language fosters a sense

of identity and belonging while making communication more relatable and expressive.

**Quotes and allusions.** The speeches contain direct and indirect quotes (allusions) of notable figures from different knowledge spheres to lend weight and authority to messages on service, justice and transformation. “*Given the nature of this ceremony, it seems appropriate to close with words of a Talmudic. And they are the reflections of a great scholar, who said, “I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues, but most from my students” [2].*” “*Thursday’s Commencement speaker, John Lewis, caught “on fire” – the exact words he used – when he was a student just about your age, and the injustice of segregation came to seem no longer tolerable*” [1].

**Humor** in speeches inspires the audience and helps track their active presence. Chief academic administrators use irony, self-deprecating humor, puns, satire, personal anecdotes. Puns conveying playfulness: “*That concludes the aerobic exercise portion of our program*” [5]; Satire: “*... more Americans are bowling, but fewer in organized leagues*” [5].

**Repetition and alliteration** (the repetition of initial consonant sounds in nearby words to add a rhythmic quality to the text to draw attention to specific parts of the speech). *Alliteration:* e.g., “*Scary, hopeful, and glorious*” – repetition of initial consonant sounds for emphasis; “*semi-sober impatience of youth*” – repetition of the “s” sound in “*semi-sober*”; “*swiping left and swiping right*” – the repetition of “sw” adds a rhythmic flow to the description of dating apps.

**Question-constructions (ellipsis questions, rhetorical questions, quesitives)** used in Baccalaureate addresses refer to rhetorical brevity and simplifying the perception of ideas, conveying compressed thoughts and invitation to meditate [Chikogu & Akpere]. “*Why is Yale here? What is our purpose?*” [5]; “*... So, I have a question for you—where has the time gone?*” [2]; “*How many of you have reconsidered what truly matters to you? How many of you have become bolder and stronger, willing to stand up for equality and justice, eager to defend the truth?*” [3].

**Directives and imperatives:** Directly addressing the graduates (“you” and “please”) and using imperative phrases (“*connect, love, and live*”) reinforce the speeches’ call to action, making the guid-

ance feel personalized and immediate. “*Do not hesitate to connect... Do not hesitate to love*” [3]; “*Please take the time to thank them as well*” [3].

**Negation** is a grammatical and semantic device that involves using specific words or structures to deny, reverse, or contradict the meaning of a sentence or phrase. Typically, negation is formed by negative words such as ‘not,’ ‘no,’ ‘never,’ and ‘nothing,’ serving a variety of linguistic and rhetorical functions [McCawley]. The current research has revealed a broad range of negation types in BS employed by academic leaders to fulfill different communicative functions, including: a) denying or rejecting a statement: “*Nobody says, ‘I want to be Kafka’s character.’*”; b) emphasizing a more specific meaning: “*It’s not just that you could make it better; you had to.*”; c) introducing uncertainty or softening an objection: “*It’s not about you; it’s about a broader theme.*”; d) defining limits or refocusing the scope of discussion: “*It’s not just about your passions; it’s about purpose.*”; e) creating irony or humor: “*This is more suited for ‘bacchanalia’ than a sober event*” [1].

The analysis also demonstrates that often it is the *combination of devices* that is employed by academic strategists. In the following example we see the combination of negation (1), irony (2), hyperbole (3): *So don’t mourn what you are leaving behind this week (1) – if these years at Harvard prove to be the time of your life, then you are selling yourself short (2; 1). It only gets better from here... (3).*

### Conclusion and implication

The genre of Baccalaureate addresses is a rich blend of intertextual references, stylistic devices, and rhetorical strategies that serve to inspire, motivate and unite diverse audiences. The speeches

not only celebrate past accomplishments but also aim to inspire transformation, resilience and social responsibility, encouraging graduates to embrace their roles as future leaders. Chief academic administrators of Harvard and Yale balance serious themes with light-hearted commentary to keep the audience engaged. Both intellectual rigor and emotional resonance is reached through a mix of arguments (ethos, logos, pathos) conveyed by the broad repertoire of intertextuality means, negation types, humor, repetition, question constructions, directives and imperatives. Through the use of proper names, allusions, quotes, humor, slang, and personal anecdotes, speakers create a bridge between historical precedent and the contemporary moment.

The intertextuality, present in Baccalaureate speeches, particularly through references to historical figures and events, renowned institutions, and diverse knowledge sectors, shared cultural and intellectual references, draws the picture of the intergenerational, interfaith, interdisciplinary and intercultural context of the ceremony. The findings underscore the role of universities as agents and leaders in promoting diversity, fostering creativity, and ensuring a sense of safety within their communities. The universally significant themes of resilience, social responsibility, and transformation resonating across cultures and educational systems can motivate further analysis to explore the translational potential of speeches in various cultural contexts, thereby reinforcing the role of global educational and leadership communities. The identified strategic rhetorical patterns can be integrated into leadership development programs to foster skills and values that are essential for guiding organizations and communities in today’s complex and interconnected world.

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#### КОМУНІКАЦІЙНІ СТРАТЕГІЇ ПРЕЗИДЕНТІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ У БАКАЛАВРСЬКИХ ПРОМОВАХ («BACCALAUREATE SPEECHES»)

Дослідження аналізує комунікаційні патерни та стратегії, які використовують президенти університетів у бакалаврських промовах (Baccalaureate speeches), адресованих випускникам Гарвардського та Єльського університетів у період з 2018 по 2023 роки. Епідейктичний жанр бакалаврських промов є важливою частиною традиції в американських університетах. Ці служби зазвичай міжконфесійні, включаючи музику, молитви, гімни та виступи релігійних лідерів. У дослідженні використовуються методи контент-аналізу та корпусного аналізу, зокрема інструменти Voyant tool. З'ясовано, що бакалаврські промови медитативного та надихаючого характеру містять ключові теми, такі як особиста трансформація, соціальна відповідальність, стійкість і прийняття невизначеності. Промови підкреслюють цінності як наполегливість, гнучкість і служіння суспільству, а також звертаються до сучасних культурних проблем, зокрема зниження соціальної взаємодії та самотності. Риторичні прийоми, такі як інтертекстуальність, заперечення, гумор, конструкції з запитаннями для аргументації (етос, логос, пафос), активно використовуються для залучення аудиторії. У промовах згадуються прецедентні власні назви, зокрема відомі випускники та викладачі Гарварду, впливові лідери у галузі громадянських прав, релігії, культури та цитати з їхніх праць чи звернень, а також ключові історичні та сучасні події. Академічні лідери часто використовують іронію, самоіронію, каламбури, сатиру та особисті анекдоти. Аналіз показує, що вони часто застосовують комбінацію різних прийомів у своїх промовах, що дозволяє їм ефективно досягати своїх цілей і підтримувати взаємодію з аудиторією. Бакалаврські промови акцентують увагу на інклюзивних, міжпоколінневих, міжконфесійних та міжкультурних аспектах університетів, позиціонуючи їх як основних

рушійв різноманіття, креативності та забезпечення почуття безпеки в їхніх спільнотах. Подальший аналіз може дослідити можливості перекладу бакалаврських промов у різних культурних контекстах, підкреслюючи їх роль у формуванні глобальних освітніх та лідерських спільнот. Виявлені риторичні стратегії також можуть покращити програми розвитку лідерства, допомагаючи лідерам орієнтуватися в складних глобальних викликах сьогодення.

**Ключові слова:** дискурс-аналіз, риторичні стратегії, комунікаційні патерні, Baccalaureate Speeches, інтертекстуальність, заперечення, гумор.