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Analysis of the Right to Equality in the US Inaugural Presidential Speeches

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US political basis relies on the fundamental rights of the Declaration of Independence (equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness), which stem from Enlightened ideas. The question to be answered here is how the different US presidents have understood and expressed "the right to equality" in their inaugural addresses, where they present their thoughts and objectives for their term of office. Our analysis model focuses on the significance of this concept analyzed with the aid of computer tools such as NVivo and Sketch Engine, and based on the cognitive semantic constructs as expressed by US presidents, identifying the *categorization* and the **connotative** associations of this right (CARs). The results of the analysis will allow the observation of what type of lexical categories (codes) these CARs are expressed through, in addition to providing the opportunity to count, describe and illustrate them. Moreover, the results will allow the development of the expression of each CAR in the corpus to be studied according to the parameters of internal variation observed: the president involved, their ideological tendency, communicative skills, socio-political profile, and historical framework.

Keywords: political discourse; corpus; CARs; semantic-cognitive analysis; lexical-syntactic representation

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Análisis del derecho a la igualdad a través de discursos de toma de posesión en Estados Unidos

La política de los Estados Unidos de América se basa en los derechos fundamentales de la Declaración de Independencia —derecho a la igualdad, la vida, la libertad y la búsqueda de la felicidad— que además tienen su origen en las ideas ilustradas. La pregunta que pretendemos responder aquí es cómo los diferentes presidentes estadounidenses han entendido y expresado "el derecho a la igualdad" en sus discursos inaugurales, donde exponen los pensamientos y objetivos que prevalecerán en su mandato. Nuestro modelo de análisis se centra en la significación de este concepto, que se estudia a partir de su significado y con la ayuda de herramientas informáticas como NVivo y Sketch Engine, a través de los constructos semánticos expresados por los presidentes estadounidenses, e identificando la categorización y las asociaciones connotativas de este derecho (CARs). Los resultados del análisis permitirán, en primer lugar, observar mediante qué tipo de categorías léxicas (códigos) se expresan estos CARs, además de brindar la oportunidad de contabilizarlos, describirlos e ilustrarlos. Estos resultados permitirán estudiar el desarrollo de la expresión de cada CAR en el corpus de estudio en función de los parámetros de variación interna observados: cada presidente, su tendencia ideológica, sus habilidades comunicativas, su perfil sociopolítico y su marco histórico.

Palabras clave: discurso político; corpus; CAR; análisis semántico-cognitivo; representación léxico-sintáctica.

1. Introduction

The basis of US political system relies on the fundamental rights of the Declaration of Independence, equality being the first, and possibly the most convoluted, of them. The first fundamental truth that "all men are created equal," referring to men's equality (note that only *men* are to be treated equally), is an axiomatic idea proposed and affirmed before no other right. The four concepts —equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness— are conventional abstract terms with a standard or denotative meaning that is well known and familiar to all speakers. However, the conceptual frame or construct of ordinary terms has sometimes proved to be quite convoluted in the development from etymology to its application (Giménez-Moreno and Ivorra-Pérez 2017; Giménez-Moreno 2020; Giménez-Moreno and Llàcer 2024). This research will explain that "equality" and "equity" come from the same Latin origin. However, throughout history, "equality" has remained within the semantic frame of moral justice and "equity" within that of legal justice. It will also be shown that the common semantic-cognitive construct of these two terms, unified in that of "equality" (as it is referred to in the Declaration of Independence), has both moral (i.e., "a sense of

sameness before the eyes of God"), affective (i.e., "a sense of empathy and compassion"), and socio-cultural connotations (i.e., "the respectful and impartial treatment of citizens"). The intricacy of the equality concept leads us to consider that each speaker can configure and express their own variant of these constructs according to their own goals and intentions. In this sense, the primary purpose of this research is to show how in their inaugural addresses US presidents from the 18th century to the present day have understood and expressed this fundamental right enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, paying due attention to the intricacies of its meaning and possible semantic changes over time.

As a second objective, the semantic findings will allow possible relations to be ascertained between the presidents' theoretical objectives and their actual policies in terms of the socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious circumstances of each president's historical situation. The decision to compile a corpus of inaugural (first) addresses by the 45 US presidents –time span of different periods in office- was taken in order to determine the relationship between the political, economic, and social situations in each case and the evolution of the concept of equality throughout US history.

The study's theoretical background, therefore, offers a brief synthesis of the context within which this fundamental right arose in American society, followed by two sections on the significance and distinctive nature of the genre of inaugural presidential addresses and the lexical-semantic magnitude of the target concepts. The analysis methodology is designed to allow corpus analysis tools such as Sketch Engine and NVivo, to recognize the references associated with equality in the 45 presidential inaugural addresses considered here. The process comprises the identification, codification, and categorization of references into the cognitive and connotative associations linked to this right (CARs).

The results of this analysis first enable the identification of the type of lexical categories (codes) through which these CARs are expressed, in addition to counting, describing and illustrating each category. Moreover, the results allow the study of the development of the expression of each CAR in the corpus according to its parameters of internal variation (i.e., each president, ideological tendency, socio-political profile and socio-historical context).

2. The foundations of the US socio-political system: enlightenment and revolutionary concepts

During the 18th century, Americans (used in this paper to refer to citizens of the US) receive European ideas, but they use them to express their own needs in the prolonged crisis of the Revolution and national formation. The assumption of urgency caused by first the political and then the military conflict, especially after the end of the French and Indian War (1763), denotes an essential difference between the European and the American Enlightenment. The conviction of a historical crisis comes late to the European Enlightenment and then only when the battle of ideas has assumed political

dimensions: "In America, by way of contrast, the Enlightenment *begins* in the political arena, where it unleashes the earliest recognitions of stress and disjuncture" (Bercovitch 1995, 384; italics in the original).

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States are both political documents of major importance. The Declaration of Independence (1776), written by a committee is mainly the work of Thomas Jefferson —together with Benjamin Franklin— is one of the most extraordinary representations of the North American Enlightenment. Precision lies in the rhetorical form of the Declaration of Independence and not in the intellectual influences upon it. As Robert Ferguson contests: "[I]f the language of self-evidence and of equality seems to come from John Locke's *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), it can be found just as easily in Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698) and, by the 1770s, everywhere in colonial America" (1994, 126). Reference in the Declaration to "the pursuit of happiness" is reminiscent of writers in the Scottish Enlightenment such as Frances Hutcheson and David Hume. However, the general preoccupation of this document relates to moral philosophy and the political writings of John Adams, George Mason, and James Otis through its skillful combination in a proficiently unified text of English common law, Whig political theory, and the constitutional writings of colonial America. It is this blend that makes the Declaration a masterpiece of political literature.

As Sacvan Bercovitch (1995, 367) notes, the early Republican text completely interpenetrates language, belief, power, and points of view: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created *equal*; that they are endowed by the Creator with inherent and certain inalienable rights; that among these are *life*, *liberty* and the *pursuit of happiness*"(italics added).[1] Truth and its holders share self-evidence and, hence, a common security from the challenge, while belief in the former implies acceptance of the latter, so that they appear as one truth invested in a unified leadership.

The first fundamental truth enumerated by Jefferson refers to the equality of men, an axiomatic idea that is proposed and affirmed before no other inalienable rights. And it was Jefferson who introduced a crucial modification to the draft of the democratic American philosophy in that he modified the traditional triad of "life, liberty and property" in the natural rights legitimized by the English Enlightenment to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This latter right, having replaced the Lockean formula of "property," became inalienable in the sense that Jefferson considered that, since the right to the property was a result of an agreement between leaders, it was not a natural right, that is, it was not inherent to the human condition, and nor did it precede any form of social organization.

[1] From *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. A. A. Lipscomb and A. E. Bergh (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903).

All in all, the Declaration of Independence stands as a communal autobiography in which the nation is constituted and constructs itself through the writing, of the document itself such that the secular text remains redressed in the same halo that the sacred text. As the Declaration itself becomes an icon of national culture, its principal creator [Jefferson] becomes a separate source of interest; the tensions, inherent assertions made in the consensual document must be considered (Ferguson 1994, 19).

3. The singularity of inaugural presidential addresses and the lexical-semantic magnitude of the target concept

Political discourse comprises a wide range of communicative genres and roles which are dependent upon political circumstances, agendas, ideological perspectives, and institutional protocols. However, most of the speeches considered here coincide with their primary goal: convincing people to change their beliefs by strengthening or weakening those they currently hold (Ilie 2010a, b). This multifaceted objective involves the interrelation of many human factors, and has subsequently aroused the interest of academics and researchers from a variety of disciplines, resulting in the persuasive strategies and the rhetorical complexity of political discourse being investigated from a wide range of inter- and multidisciplinary perspectives. Most experts in such areas, for example, Ericson (1997) and Kubát and Čech (2016), agree that one political genre that is considered to stand out due to its extraordinary expectation and impact is the inaugural presidential address, in that "as the first formal presentation of a new president [it] plays highly persuasive and ideological functions in the political scene of a country" (Biria and Mohammadi 2012). However, the notoriety of this genre reaches beyond its rhetorical and persuasive impact.

In this genre, the intricate relationships between language, power, and ideology (Wodak 1989) stand out, and it pushes speakers to resort to a biased and manipulative use of language in the very limited time frame they have available to them. Therefore, these speeches are short and focused but quite revealing and eloquent statements of the president's mentality and his (all US presidents to date being male) conception of fundamental values and principles. As Liu (2012, 2409) underlines: "Inaugurals are of great significance because of what they reveal about the fundamental political values, particular political principles, and enactment of a presidential persona." To this end, then, they become speeches with unique opportunities to study the particular meaning and value that each president confers on the fundamental principles of American society.

The pioneering, and most renowned, studies of this type of discourse have focused on classical rhetorical strategies. For example, Ryan (1993) explored how presidents have used their addresses to empower themselves in office. His methodology focused on conventional oratory criteria such as *vox populi*, *elocutio*, *inventio*, and *actio*. Although the present study does consider these foundational insights, our approach is based on Genre Analysis theory (Swales 1990) in order to study the specific features of this type of political speech. Following this framework, Liu (2012, 2409-2411) analyzed thirty-

five inaugurals and observed that the majority reflected a similar structure, which included, among other things, the following moves: a formal salutation, announcing entering office, making pledges and promises, arousing patriotism, announcing political principles, and appealing to religious power. In addition, the genre is characterized by other particularities. For example, Čech (2014) observed that political and historical circumstances, such as wars and financial crises, notably influence the style of inaugural addresses. That said, their lexical richness, thematic concentration and textual activity have varied over time (Kubát and Čech 2016).

The interrelation between the linguistic evolution of this genre and the historical evolution of American society is evident in multidisciplinary studies. Ericson (1997) discussed how emerging cultures in the US have been influencing inaugural speeches, and Mohammadi, Abdi, and Eisazadeh (2020) have observed how each president's Democratic or Republican bias influences his expression of US global affairs through the use of strategies such as polarization, generalization, hyperbole, positive self-representation, and negative other-representation. Such findings demonstrate the multidisciplinary scope of this genre in various areas of linguistics and socio-political communication sciences.

The term "equality" has also had a singular trajectory in American English. According to the major dictionaries and corpora (i.e., COCA-*Corpus of Contemporary American English*, COHA-*Corpus of Historical American English* and the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*), the root of the term "equality" is in the Latin term "aequus" meaning "even" or "fair" and developed in the more common Latin word "aequalitas." However, it is from this same root that the term "equity" also arises, which developed into the Latin word "aequitas" and started to be used in English in the 14th century in translations of fragments of the Bible and within the same semantic frame as other socio-political and religious terms such as "righteousness" and "judgment." While equality and equity are used synonymously in many contexts, they in fact have a particular semantic difference: "*Equality* means the state of being equal, and *equity* adds the element of justice or fairness; it is possible that 'equal' treatment does not produce 'equity' when conditions and circumstances are very different." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary: italics in the original). Throughout history, equality has remained within the semantic frame of moral justice, and equity within that of legal justice. In fact, equity is mentioned in association with legal issues in many articles of the US Constitution, as a constituent part of the concept of "social, political and legal equality" together with essential terms such as "laws," "crime," "security" or "rights."

Equality entered English from the French term *equalité* and spread between the 15th and 16th centuries, especially in socio-cultural environments. In fact, it often appears in works by well-known authors of this period, such as in the plays of Shakespeare. In these uses of the term, its meaning connotations are moral (i.e., "sense of sameness and similarity before the eyes of God"), affective (i.e., "sense of empathy, compassion and consideration") and socio-cultural (i.e., "fair, respectful and impartial treatment of all

humans"). In this sense, the semantic frame of equality includes terms such as "race," "ethnicity," "gender," "sexual orientation," "emigration," "cultural diversity," etc. This cognitive-semantic duality is of great significance in interpretating the uses of the target term in inaugural speeches.

4. Methodology

As stated above, the main purpose of this study is, first, to show how the US presidents have understood and expressed in their inaugural addresses the right to equality that is present in the Declaration of Independence —from George Washington (1789) to Joe Biden (2021)— paying due attention to the possible semantic changes over time in the meanings of the words referred to as codes or categories. A subsequent objective is to discuss the possible relations between the use of these concepts and the particular president's communicative intentions, ideologies, and policies given the socio-political, economic, cultural, and religious circumstances they were living in at that particular historical period.

To address these issues, the comprehensive corpus entitled "The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents" (accessed March 2022) from the database of The Avalon Project (Yale University) was employed which includes 45 sub-corpora used here.[2] The corpus was edited and contrasted with other prestigious sources such as the multimodal corpus of "Famous Presidential Speeches" from the Miller Center (University of Virginia, accessed March 2022), and Halford R. Ryan's 1993 compilation *Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*, published by Praeger.[3] It is worth noting that the addresses of each president differs in length and wordage, that is the total number of words and the number of codes appearing in each. This preliminary finding is interesting when comparing the lexical density of the individual discourses and the number of references to the rights under study here.

Regarding the methodology, the model of analysis is based on lexical field and semantic frame theory (Fillmore 1985; Fillmore and Atkins 1992; Fillmore and Baker 2011) and corpus linguistics theory and applications. Although the systematic and rigorous groundwork involved in analyzing qualitative data is usually time-consuming and labor-intensive, corpus analysis methods are widely used in linguistics (McEnery and Hardie 2012; Biber, Conrad, and Reppen 1998), and they have been used in previous studies on US presidential inaugural speeches, such as in Luo's study of their keywords employed (2011) and Widiatmoko's work on their speech act taxonomy (2017). Following in this same line, our corpus was, in the first phase, analyzed with the help of the corpus analysis tool Sketch Engine. This software was used at the lexical level to generate a list of keywords ranked by their keyness, and to study collocations

[2] Yale University. "The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents." *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*. Lillian Goldman Law Library: Yale Law School: New Haven. [Accessed March 9, 2022].

[3] University of Virginia. "Famous Presidential Speeches." *The Presidency / Presidential Speeches*. Miller Center. [Accessed March 5, 2022].

and concordances. Manual methodologies were also used in this first stage in order to add significant additional data, such as the presidents' political and ideological adscription and notes on the particular historical period.

In the second phase, the corpus was analyzed from a cognitive semantic perspective with the help of NVivo, particularly to identify target categories and references. For this research the statistical measures adopted in NVivo have been leveraged. NVivo showed the potential of richly annotated language corpora for research of the socio-cultural context and changes over time that are reflected through language use, as reflected in studies that demonstrate how, at different historical moments, various concepts fluctuate across distinct semantic fields (Krzyżanowski 2016). Among the advantages of the NVivo corpus tool are its use of a lemmatizer and a POS tagger and the option to eliminate stop words, which facilitates searches and enhances the efficiency of the findings. Moreover, NVivo has a mixture of qualitative and quantitative analysis features: in particular, it can compute inter-coder reliability and use cluster analysis to examine text or coding similarities.

Our analysis is based on foundational research focused on identifying lexical semantic and cognitive structures, referred as mental models (Lehrer and Kittay 1992), ideational units (Anderson and Demetrius, 1993), discourse-conceptual configurations (Krzyżanowski, 2010), and cognitive constructs (Bondi 2014). In this approach, we simplify and unify these structures under the term "connotations" associated with a constitutional right (CARs), similar to parallel studies on the right to liberty (Giménez-Moreno and Llàcer 2024). These CARs are expressed in the speeches through related meaning structures or "theme nodes," as they are called in applications such as NVivo. The study, therefore, focuses on our central theme node of equality, which is represented through a series of lexical structures or "codes." The process of coding these lexical structures allows the identification and quantification of the target fragments or references associated with this constitutional right in the speeches that make up the corpus. These references can vary considerably in length: from a single word to a set of clauses.

As such, then, the analysis model covers the lexical and the cognitive-semantic dimensions of the target right (equality) in the corpus in order to identify the CARs involved in their meaning, in addition to counting, describing and illustrating them. In the final interpretive phase of the process, the results from the second phase allow the internal variation of the corpus to be studied in terms of the different speakers/presidents, their ideological tendency, their communicative skills, their socio-political profile, the historical framework, etc.

5. Results and discussion

In this section we present the results of the appearances of the right to equality in the description and categorization of coded references as well as the contrastive description of results of "equality" according to the individual presidents. We found that the total

number of coded references for the right to equality (and its synonyms) that appear in 44 files (out of the total of 45) amounts to 830 times.

5.1. Description and categorization of coded references associated with "equality"

Within this discursive genre, the semantic and meaning construct corresponding to the "right to equality" is based on a series of notions established by the pioneering and most charismatic presidents and ideologists of the US and which became rooted in American society through statements such as Jefferson's comment in the first inaugural address stating his commitment to: "Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations"(1801). A first approach to the corpus reveals that the semantic-cognitive construct of "right to equality" in this genre primarily means nowadays equal justice and protection for all men and women of whatever ideology, religion, political tendency, race and culture, which constitutes one of its central semantic categories or CARs. Another essential CAR is the commercial, peaceful and fair treatment of foreigners "to yield exact justice to other nations and maintain the rights of our own; to cherish the principles of freedom and of equal rights wherever they were proclaimed" (John Quincy Adams 1825). In the corpus, the notion of equality also seems to be inexorably linked to religion and to the US government: "We believe that all men are created equal because they are created in the image of God" (Harry Truman 1949); "all men equal in His sight" (Dwight Eisenhower 1953); "All are equally entitled to the fostering care and protection of the Government" (James Polk 1845). Thus, the right to equality, God and the US President/Government are part of the same mental construct in this genre.

At the lexical-syntactic level, the equality construct is identified and codified through expressions such as "all/my/our (fellow) citizens," "my fellow Americans," "our fellow men," "every citizen," "my countrymen," "the people of America," "and one great family." On some occasions, this right is highlighted by adding emphasizers such as "My fellow citizens generally" (John Quincy Adams 1825), "each individual American citizen" (William H. Harrison 1841) or "the rights of a fellow being" (James Polk 1845). The most frequent syntactic structures in these references are: (a) the noun "equality" preceded by a modifier (e.g., "All citizens, whether native or adopted, are placed upon terms of precise equality," James Polk 1845), the adverb "equally" followed by a verb in the past participle (e.g., "as equally incorporated with and essential to the success of the general system," James Madison 1809), and the adjective "equal" followed by a noun which generally refers to a fundamental right or principle (e.g., equal laws, equal right, equal principles, equal honor, equal prosperity, etc.), as in "equal and impartial regard to the rights, interest, honor, and happiness of all the States in the Union," (John Adams 1797) and "If formed on equal and just principles, it cannot be oppressive," (James Monroe 1817).

Reference to the semantic construct "right to equality" appears in the corpus both explicitly and implicitly, the latter in mentions of some of the legal, socio-political,

attitudinal and emotional constituents inherent in the concept at the semantic-cognitive level. For example, John Adams (1797) implicitly introduces this node into his speech when speaking of "a love of virtuous men of all parties and denominations" and Lyndon Johnson (1965) when declaring, "We are all fellow passengers on a dot of earth," the implication inherent in "of all parties and denominations" and "We are all fellows" being that we are all equal travelers with the same common destiny. The relevance of the right to equality is even implicitly reinforced through antonymic constructions (e.g., Benjamin Harrison's "they ought not, by premeditation or neglect, to be left to the risks and exigencies of an unequal combat" (1889) and Lyndon Johnson's "So let us reject any among us who seek to reopen old wounds and to rekindle old hatreds" (1965).

In a more detailed analysis of the dimensions and categories covered by this node in the corpus, it was observed that impartiality is the most salient concept associated with equality, with 424 references. In fact, the presidents themselves use equality as a synonym of or alternative term for "impartiality," as explicitly perceived in the words of John Adams (1797): "an equal and impartial regard to the rights, interest, honor, and happiness of all the States in the Union," but also implicitly in those of Joe Biden (2021): "Let's begin to listen to one another again, hear one another, see one another, show respect to one another." These references typically cover each and every citizen of America, but this mental construct is also frequently included in fragments that refer to a specific group of citizens who are in unequal conditions (e.g., unemployed Americans in "The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country," Donald Trump 2017).

In this sense, the analysis reveals that the peculiarities of this lexical-semantic construct are many, and its evolution is intricate. For instance, it was observed that in certain historical periods this node triggers both an explicit and an implicit semantic-cognitive association between certain inherent concepts and segments of society who are in a situation of legal or socio-political inequality. For example, equality in the sense of social equilibrium, of doing justice and dignifying citizens who are treated unfairly solely because of the natural conditions of birth is found in references to gender and ethnic inequalities, mostly with respect to female and Afro-American citizens, in periods of controversy in the 18th and 19th centuries (e.g., the "right of suffrage" defended by John Adams in 1797 and by John Tyler in 1841 or "the power of self-help in both races" mentioned by James Garfield in 1881 based on Thomas Jefferson's vindication of social justice, as in his defense of a "due sense of our equal right to the use of our own faculties, to the acquisitions of our own industry, to honor and confidence from our fellow-citizens" in 1801). Similar references, though, are also found in the 20th century, for example: "Justice requires us to remember that when any citizen denies his fellow, saying, 'His color is not mine'" (Lyndon Johnson 1965); "We believe that all men have a right to equal justice under law" (Harry Truman 1949); "We reject any insinuation that one race or another, one people or another, is in any sense inferior or expendable" (Dwight

Eisenhower 1953); "to ensure at last that as all are born equal in dignity before God, all are born equal in dignity before man" (Jimmy Carter 1977), as well as in the 21st, for instance: "We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens," (George W. Bush 2001); "They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction" (Barack Obama 2009).

Equality as the inclusion of aboriginal tribes, indigenous citizens, and immigrants is also expressed in the inaugural addresses. For example, regarding native Americans John Adams (1797) called for "a spirit of equity and humanity toward the aboriginal nations of America"; John Quincy Adams (1825) pledged "to extend equal protection to all the great interests of the nation; to promote the civilization of the Indian tribes"; James Polk (1845) stated that (whether immigrant or American nationals) "All citizens, whether native or adopted, are placed upon terms of precise equality"; and later James Buchanan (1857) made clear that settlers "After becoming citizens they are entitled, under the Constitution and laws, to be placed on a perfect equality with native-born citizens."

This node also includes the sense of equality as tolerance and broadmindedness in, for example, the treatment of citizens of different ideologies and religions as equals (e.g., "we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions" (Thomas Jefferson 1801). In this nuance, the fight for equality is very often linked to the fight against prejudice and injury. For example, Thomas Jefferson (1801) defines a wise Government as that "which shall restrain men from injuring one another" and James Buchanan (1857) reminds us that "This sacred right of each individual must be preserved." More contemporary presidents have also appealed to this meaning of equality in line with their political profiles (e.g., "When you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice" (Donald Trump 2017), but in this case, prejudice is more closely related to the idea of patriotic nationalism, and not so much to a favorable reception of immigrants from southern countries.

The notions of compassion, generosity, and moral responsibility are also a recurrent component of equality's cognitive construct, as can be seen in references to vulnerable social segments or those from less favored and poor classes. Thomas Jefferson (1801) encourages citizens with these words: "we shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned," adding later that "will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate [X] would be oppression." James Monroe (1817) asks his audience: "Who has been deprived of any right of person or property?" William H. Harrison (1841) also highlights the "condition by which thousands of our most indigent fellow-citizens by their industry and enterprise are raised to the possession of wealth" because as James Polk (1845) later makes clear: "The burdens of government should as far as practicable be distributed justly and equally among all classes of our population." More recent presidents have also appealed to this notion of equality in defense of "those who cannot free themselves

of enslavement to whatever addiction—drugs, welfare, the demoralization that rules the slums" (George H. Bush 1989).

This complex node also includes the notions of unity, integration, and fraternity, especially when in reference to equality between citizens of the different states of America, and particularly in periods of conflict: "Amidst the violence of excited passions this generous and fraternal feeling has been sometimes disregarded" (Martin Van Buren 1837). In this sense, most presidents in the 19th century (e.g., James Monroe, John Quincy, William Harrison and Abraham Lincoln) overtly claimed the socio-political unity of the country (e.g., "We are not, we must not be, aliens or enemies, but fellow-countrymen and brethren" (Abraham Lincoln 1861)). However, for other socio-cultural and economic reasons, such as at the outbreak in the Southern states of white racist riots against the Afro-American fight of for the Civil Rights, later presidents also called for equality in reference to the fraternal integration of certain states (e.g., "We are one nation and one people" said Lyndon Johnson in 1965). They have even used diverse types of rhetorical figures to express this dimension of the concept: "It would be a solecism in language to say that any portion of these is not included in the whole" (William Howard 1909).

Another salient cluster of nuances is when the construct comprises the notions of protection, security, and equal opportunity, especially in reference to equality between economic and commercial sectors. For example, James Polk (1845) said: "Justice and sound policy forbid the Federal Government to foster one branch of industry to the detriment of another, or to cherish the interests of one portion to the injury of another portion of our common country." Soon after, Franklin Pierce (1853) stated: "If in the course of their growth we should open new channels of trade and create additional facilities for friendly intercourse, the benefits realized will be equal and mutual."

The joint conceptualization of all the CARs included in this node following the analysis of all references to it allows us to understand the vibrant and multifaceted semantic nature of the concept of "right to equality" in the presidential inaugural addresses, and the particular characterization that this concept has in the American constitution and society. The cognitive construct of the "right to equality" includes seven main CARs: (a) the legal impartiality of all American citizens, (b) the defense of justice and social dignity in terms of race and gender, (c) the inclusion of indigenous and immigrant citizens, (d) tolerance and the absence of prejudice in the face of ideological and religious diversity, (e) compassion, generosity, and moral responsibility towards the most vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of society, (f) unity, integration, and fraternity among the citizens of the different states of America, protection, and (g) security and equal opportunities among the various economic and business sectors.

It was the pioneering ideologues who inculcated this construct as a magnanimous and quintessential symbol of singularity, distinction, and virtue in the identity of American citizens, as well as in their promotional image abroad, commanding "the highest praises of foreign nations, and secured immortal glory with posterity" (John

Adams 1797). The American constitutional ideology makes the president responsible for the preservation of this distinctive semantic construct of equality, so beneficial for both domestic policy (e.g., "There still remains one effort of magnanimity, one sacrifice of prejudice and passion, to be made by the individuals throughout the nation" (John Quincy Adams 1825) and foreign strategy (e.g., "Equal and exact justice should characterize all our intercourse with foreign countries" (James Polk 1845). This is how this ideal construct of equality has been being recomposed, expanded and made more sophisticated over 230 years, becoming a concept of great relevance in this communicative genre, and in American society as a whole.

5.2. Contrastive description of results of "equality" by president

The cognitive-semantic analysis of our corpus, conducted with the help of the NVivo software, revealed the results in Table 1.[4]

Table 1. Inaugural Addresses - Corpus Analysis

President Inaugural Address	Year	Party	Mentions of equality
1: George Washington	1789	I	6
2: John Adams	1797	F	18
3: Thomas Jefferson	1801	D-R	12
4: James Madison	1809	D-R	7
5: James Monroe	1817	D-R	22
6: John Quincy Adams	1825	D-R	15
7: Andrew Jackson	1829	D	5
8: Martin Van Buren	1837	D	13
9: William H. Harrison	1841(a)[5]	W	69
10: John Tyler	1841(b)	I	4
11: James Polk	1845	D	63
12: Zachary Taylor	1849	W	2
13: Millard Fillmore	1850	W	40
14: Franklin Pierce	1853	D	29
15: James Buchanan	1857	D	19
16: Abraham Lincoln	1861	R-UN	35
17: Andrew Johnson	1865	D-UN	5

[4] In the column 'Party', "I" stands for independent, "F" for Federalist, "D-R" for Democrat-Republican, "D" for Democrat, "W" for Whig, "R-UN" for New Republican, "R" for Republican.

[5] (a) refers to presidents who died during their office, and (b) to those who took on the office.

President Inaugural Address	Year	Party	Mentions of equality
18: Ulysses Grant	1869	R	8
19: Rutherford Hayes	1877	R	10
20: James Garfield	1881(a)	R	21
21: Chester Arthur	1881(b)	R	0
22: Grover Cleveland	1885	D	22
23: Benjamin Harrison	1889	R	19
24: William McKinley	1897	R	25
25: Theodore Roosevelt	1905	R	8
26: William Howard	1909	R	27
27: Woodrow Wilson	1913	D	10
28: Warren Harding	1921	R	22
29: Calvin Coolidge	1925	R	30
30: Herbert Hoover	1929	R	23
31: F. D. Roosevelt	1933	D	11
32: Harry Truman	1949	D	10
33: Dwight Eisenhower	1953	R	29
34: John Kennedy	1961	D	12
35: Lyndon Johnson	1965	D	14
36: Richard Nixon	1969	R	8
37: Gerald Ford	1973	R	4
38: Jimmy Carter	1977	D	10
39: Ronald Reagan	1981	R	20
40: George H. Bush	1989	R	23
41: Bill Clinton	1993	D	19
42: George W. Bush	2001	R	12
43: Barack Obama	2009	D	17
44: Donald Trump	2017	R	24
45: Joe Biden	2021	D	28

In reference to "equality" and its synonyms we found that William Harrison (W) (1841) was the president who made most references (69), followed by James Polk (D) (1845) with 63, Millard Fillmore (W) (1850) with 40 and Abraham Lincoln (R_UN) (1861) with 35. It is interesting to note that the historical context for each of these four presidents was the conflict between the Northern and Southern states of the US—both economic (diverse economic and sometimes antagonistic systems in the North

and the South) and social (the issue of slavery), as well as political (power balance between territories and new states)—the solutions to which started in 1820 with the Missouri Compromise, followed by the Indian Removal Act of 1930, and then with the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, only a few years before the Civil War broke out in 1861. President James Polk (D) (1845) followed the path of the Jacksonian Era, while Millard Fillmore (W) (1850) belonged to the Whigs, a party which appeared in the 1830s during the Second-Party System (1828-1854) as a result of a split in the National Republicans (D_R party).[6] Whigs opposed many of the Jacksonian policies, introduced by President Andrew Jackson (D) in 1828. There is a noticeable rise in mentions of equality in William Harrison (W) (1841) (69) compared to the previous president, Martin Van Buren (D) (1837) (13), which might be related to the racial bias of the original Democratic Party of the 19th century, which strongly influenced the Jacksonian Era before the Civil War, especially when compared with the Whigs, who were far more liberal in this sense in that same period.

On the other hand, in the Third-Party System (1858-1894) Abraham Lincoln (1861) inaugurated the dominance of the new Republican Party (R_UN), which decided on the abolition of slavery as one of its essential policies, in contrast with the Democratic Party, whose support came mostly from the southern states.[7]

We also noted a great rise in mentions of equality in the speech of Calvin Coolidge (R) (1925) with 30 items, preceded by the 22 items in Warren Harding (R) (1921) and succeeded by the 23 in Herbert Hoover (R) (1929), all these republican presidents holding office during the Fourth-Party System, also called the Progressive Era. One reason for this increase may be that when the Third-Party System was dominated at the federal level by the New Republican party, during the 1870s and 1880s, after the Civil War and the Reconstruction, white democrat lawmakers at both state and local levels in the South passed strict racial segregation laws, known as the "Jim Crow laws," which made African Americans into second-class citizens. Republicans were supported more by the Northern states after World War I and at the peak of the Harlem Renaissance–an artistic, social, and cultural movement promoted by the Afro-American community in the US, especially in New York, within which black people called for equality in terms of rights and treatment by US artistic, cultural, and political institutions.

Other presidents with more than 20 references to equality in their inaugural speech are: James Monroe (D_R) (1817) (22), the start of his tenure coming at the end of the First-Party System and during the Era of Good Feelings (1816-1824) that immediately followed the Second War of Independence (1812-1815); James Garfield (R) (1881a) (21), at the end of the Third-Party System, a period known as the Gilded Age, when the dominant New Republican party had its biggest opponent in the

[6] Jacksonian Era was characterized by several advances in the democratization of elections, rotation in office jobs, and the failed abolishment of the National Bank.

[7] The political eras of the US refer to a model of American politics used in history and political science to periodize the political party system that exists in the US.

more conservative Southern Bourbon Democrats, who were not very happy with the recent abolition of slavery.

On the other hand, there is a notable decrease in references in Theodore Roosevelt (R) (1905) (8) compared to his predecessor William McKinley (R) (1897) (25). This could be related to the beginning of the Progressive Era, right at the end of the Third-Party System and the Gilded Age (1880s-1890s), in which the Robber Barons made their fortunes, inequality increased to an outstanding degree and social problems regarding working conditions began to be felt intensely in the US.

We also observed a notable decrease in Woodrow Wilson (D) (1913) (10) from William Howard (R) (1909) (27), as well as between Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) (D) (1933) (11) and Harry Truman (D) (1949) (10) as compared to Herbert Hoover (R) (1929) (23). Curiously enough, in all these cases of decreased mentions of equality there is a Democrat president —Wilson, who held power in a period of cultural "modernity," right before World War I, FDR who shouldered the heavy burden of the Great Depression after the Stock Exchange Crash in 1929, and Harry Truman's presidency (D) (1949) closely followed World War II. Each of these three Democrat presidents succeeded Republican presidents, namely, William Howard (R) (1909) and Herbert Hoover (R) (1929) who both continued with liberal policies (especially antislavery) after the re-orientation of the old Republican party in Abraham Lincoln's new Republican (R_UN) party, which defined itself on the eve of the Civil War by its non-racial bias. Later on, we observed a dramatic increase in Dwight Eisenhower (R) (1953) (29) during the 1950s —succeeding Harry Truman (D) (1949) (10) right after World War II— when the US saw a cultural revolution driven by rapid industrial development and the consequent phenomenon of consumerism, and when welfare systems experienced huge growth and national support. The Fifth-Party System (1932-1974) was first dominated up to the 1960s by the Democratic Party and then more by the Republicans. Previously we found an astonishingly similar relation with the low numbers in Wilson and FDR, in the references decrease in Jackson (D) (1829) (5), at the beginning of the North-South conflict and in coherence with the southern racial bias of the Jacksonian Democratic party.

When we get to the Sixth-Party System (1980-), we can observe that the paradigm of equality mainly splits along a more partisan way of looking at issues in the two main parties. There is a strong division based on their different perspectives about social, economic, and cultural issues, race and ethnicity and the appropriate size of the federal government. Also, from the start of the 1990s, there is an important turn in globalization and issues of identity. This might explain the number of mentions in Ronald Reagan (R) (1981) (20), George H. Bush (R) (1989) (23), Donald Trump (R) (2017) (24), and Joe Biden (D) (2021) (28), but for different reasons. Republicans appeal more to a sense of unity against an external enemy, such as international terrorism, whereas Democrats are more guided by questions of identity and the defense of human rights in US territories.

Other low numbers of mentions of equality might be attributable to the fact that some of the presidents involved originally came into office as vice-presidents, such as John Tyler (I) (1841b) (4) after William Harrison (W) (1841a); Chester Arthur (R) (1881b) (0) after James Garfield (R) (1881a), and Andrew Johnson (D_UN) (1865) (5), following Abraham Lincoln's murder (all related to the racial bias of the early days of the Democratic party19th-century); and finally Gerald Ford (R) (1973) (4), who became president after Richard Nixon's resignation, forced by the Watergate scandal.

6. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the inaugural addresses from a lexical-semantic and evolutionary perspective, this research illustrates how chronology and historical context have a direct relationship with the development and mention of this fundamental right to equality in the US, while showing how malleable the concept is. For example, notions of equality have been constructed through American sociopolitical history, implying not only legal impartiality but also unity and integration (of Northern and Southern states, in the case of James Polk or Millard Fillmore), social inclusion and dignity (in the case of racial differences in Abraham Lincoln, William Howard and Herbert Hoover), tolerance and lack of prejudice (towards diverse religions and ideologies, in Andrew Jackson), compassion, protection, and moral responsibility towards the vulnerable (in James Monroe and Dwight Eisenhower), as well as fraternity and equal opportunity for all citizens (in William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt).

Furthermore, the results show that, depending on the president and their party's' ideological profile, more emphasis is given to particular CARs. For example, in the case of equality as unity, Republicans (Ronald Reagan, George H. Bush, and Donald Trump) appeal more to a sense of national equality-unity against adversity from abroad (e.g., international terrorism), whereas Democrats (Barack Obama and Joe Biden) lead questions of equality towards global identity and the defense of human rights in US territories. However, it should also be noted that high-impact current affairs also affect the predominance and meaning of these cognitive constructs. The keywords analysis in phase one reflects up-to-date topics and ideas that seem to be fundamental to the expression of the right to equality.

Our results also demonstrate the complex lexical-semantic categorization of the mental constructs involved in the genre of presidential inaugural speeches, allowing us to observe how political and historical circumstances, such as conflicts and conjectural crises, notably influence the style of the said speeches. For example, the shortest addresses with significant structural differences (e.g., fewer moves) are those of the presidents who came to office as vice presidents and were unexpectedly required to succeed their predecessors, namely, John Tyler (I) (1841) after William Harrison (W) (1841), Chester Arthur (R) (1881) after James Garfield (R) (1881), Andrew Johnson (D_UN) (1865) after Lincoln's assassination and Gerald Ford (R) (1973) after Richard Nixon's resignation.

Finally, this work demonstrates that corpus linguistics enables quantitative as well as qualitative observations that go beyond the researcher's intuition and thus provide greater transparency, objectivity, reliability, and replicability, which are becoming increasingly important in data-driven research in the humanities and social sciences, At the same time, the findings emphasize how the analysis of political discourse from the perspective of cognitive linguistics and lexical semantics can shed light on social, political, and historical issues. This illustrates the existence of a niche for more interdisciplinary studies focused on the interrelation between this genre's linguistic and cognitive-semantic dimensions and other factors —cultural, political, rhetorical, etc.— that exert an influence on presidential inaugural speeches. This study has not included Donald Trump's second inaugural address as the analysis was concluded by the end of 2024. The observational evidence suggested that some of the results obtained here persisted in his speech style while also showing significant new elements, indicating that a deep contrast analysis between the first and the second inaugural addresses would likely be an interesting follow-up to this research.

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