

SELF-PRAISE UTTERANCES IN UKRAINIAN CULTURE

Elina Koliada,

PhD in Philology, Professor of
Conversational English Department
Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University
Lutsk, Ukraine
elina.koliada@vnu.edu.ua
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5437-1320>

Iryna Kalynovska,

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor of
Conversational English Department
Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University
Lutsk, Ukraine
kalynovska@vnu.edu.ua
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3406-1456>

Received October, 07, 2024; *Accepted* December, 08, 2024

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the portrayal of self-praise in Ukrainian proverbs, folktales, literature, social media, and humorous songs. Self-praise is regarded as a speech act providing positive characteristics, opinions, and statements about oneself or one's accomplishments. Ukrainian society frowns upon self-praise, considering it a sign of arrogance. The Ukrainian lexical units denoting the act of self-praise have negative meanings associated with boasting and bragging.

The research results indicate that Ukrainian proverbs and folktales contain negative attitudes toward self-praise. Ukrainian proverbs valued as moral maxims often satirize those who boast, portraying them as foolish or self-deceived. Folktales frequently feature characters who are punished for their hubris and boastful behaviour. Ukrainian literature usually depicts boasting as a negative trait associated with arrogance and a lack of genuine merit. Users on social media repeatedly engage in self-praise, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, although this behaviour is generally frowned upon. This self-promotion often elicits negative responses from their followers. Ukrainian humorous songs mock those who exaggerate their achievements or abilities.

The cultural aversion to boasting reflects a deep-seated belief in the importance of humility and self-effacement. In Ukraine, modesty is highly valued, and it is generally considered inappropriate to boast about one's accomplishments.

Key words: self-praise, boasting, bragging, proverb, folktale, novel, social media.

Introduction

Self-praise, otherwise known as bragging, boasting, or complimenting oneself, is a public display of one's merits and/or advantages (Xie and Tong 2022, 1). According to Dayter, the speech act of self-praise gives credit to the speaker's attributes,

possessions, achievements, or skills that are positively valued by the speaker and the potential audience (Dayter 2016, 65). Self-praise has been characterized as a face-elevating act involving statements that vary from slightly positive to boastful disclosures about oneself, and it is regarded as an “interpersonally risky” behaviour (e.g., Dayter 2016; Speer 2012) in the sense that it can be perceived as being “impolite” due to its focus on oneself, since “true politeness may be in when self is out” (Xie 2018, 205). Self-praise is also called face-flattering (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005) and face-enhancing (Sifianou 1995).

The socially undesirable consequence of performing the speech act of self-praise has been illustrated by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983). In their discussion of face and politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) regard boasting as a face-threatening act performed by the speaker who shows no concern for the hearer’s feelings, wants, etc. The face-threatening nature of the act can be derived from the consequence of performing the act as “a raising of the self may imply a lowering of the other” (Brown and Levinson 1987, 39). The act of self-praise also violates the Modesty maxim, which stipulates that one should “minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self” (Leech 1983, 132). Moreover, self-praise can simultaneously harm the positive face of the speaker as the addressee might regard him/her as inconsiderate, impolite, or self-involved (Matley 2018; Speer 2012). From an interpersonal perspective, self-praise is considered problematic behaviour which could lead to “unfavorable character assessment” (Pomerantz 1978, 89).

Self-praise seems to be particularly vulnerable to the cultural and moral values of a given group of people who may encourage or discourage the use of self-praise (Wu 2011). After all, ancient sources, such as “rhetorical treatises and speeches of the orators,” recognized the negative impact of self-praise, describing “the psychological pressures placed upon listeners to self-eulogizing speakers” with words like “burdensome,” “vulgar,” or “troublesome” (Spartharas 2011, 200). Thus, the speaker’s self-praise risks belittling the addressee, threatening the addressee’s positive face, and triggering feelings of envy (Plutarch 2004; Spatharas 2011).

Lexical means denoting self-praise

Our analysis of the semantics of nouns and verbs denoting the notions of praise and self-praise in Ukrainian shows that, for the most part, these words belong to a word family united by the root “хвал” (“khval”), meaning “praise” in Ukrainian. The words denoting praise have positive evaluative meanings, as described in the Academic Explanatory Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language (Akademichnyi tлумachnyi slovnyk ukrainskoi movy). For example:

хвала (*khvala*) – [N] praise (generic), glorification;

хвалити (*khvalyty*) – [V] to express praise, approval of someone or something;

похвала (*pokhvala*) – [N] praise (more specific), an act of praise; approval;

похваляти (*pokhvaliaty*) – [V, imperf] to express approval, to speak with praise about someone or something; to praise;

похвалити (*pokhvalyty*) – [V, perf] the same meaning as above;

вихваляти (*vykhvaliaty*) – [V, imperf] to praise a lot, to emphasize the good qualities of someone or something;

вихваляння (*vykhvaliannia*) – [N] made from the above verb;
нахвалювати (*nakhvaliuvaty*) – [V, informal, imperf] to speak of someone or something with praise; to praise;

нахваляти (*nakhvaliaty*) – [V, informal, imperf] the same meaning as above;

хвалебність (*khvalebnist*) – [N, abstract] made from the above adjective.

Now let us consider words denoting self-praise:

самовихваляння (*samovykhvaliannia*) – [N] praising oneself;

самохвальба (*samokhvalba*) – [N] the same meaning as above;

самохвальство (*samokhvalstvo*) – [N] the same meaning as above;

вихвалятися (*vykhvaliatysia*) – [V, imperf, reflexive] to boast, to praise oneself;

вихвалитися (*vykhvalytysia*) – [V, perf, reflexive] the same meaning as above;

вихваляка (*vykhvaliaka*) – [N, informal] one who boasts;

хвалитися (*khvalytysia*) – [V, imperf, reflexive] to praise oneself, to brag about someone or something;

похвалятися (*pokhvaliatysia*) – [V, imperf, reflexive] to speak about one's own or a loved one's successes, achievements, and actions with praise; to brag;

похвалитися (*pokhvalytysia*) – [V, perf, reflexive] the same meaning as above;

хвалько (*khvalko*) – [N, informal] a boastful person; a braggart.

Само- (samo-), meaning self-, is used in forming compound words and always forms the first part of the compound. It indicates the direction of the action, named by the second part of the compound, to oneself.

The other word family contains words united by the root “хваст” (“khvast”), meaning “boast” in Ukrainian. For example:

хвастати (*khvastaty*) – [V, imperf] to praise oneself, to brag about someone or something;

хвастатися (*khvastatysia*) – [V, imperf, reflexive] the same meaning as above;

хвастун (*khvastun*) – [N, informal] a boastful person; a braggart;

хваст (*khvast*) – [N, informal] the same meaning as above.

Reflexive verbs in this group are derived from transitive non-reflexive verbs and form pairs with them. For example: *хвалити* (*khvalyty*) – *хвалитися* (*khvalytysia*); *похваляти* (*pokhvalyty*) – *похвалитися* (*pokhvalytysia*); *вихваляти* (*vykhvaliaty*) – *вихвалятися* (*vykhvaliatysia*).

The postfix -ся (-sia) makes a transitive verb intransitive and directs the action back to the subject, i.e., the action is performed and received by the subject. This suggests that in cases of self-praise utterances, the producer and the recipient of the action are the same person. Speer notes that the speaker is the subject, i.e., the producer, and the object, i.e., the recipient, of the positive assessment (Speer 2012, 56). In his book “Meaning in Life: An Evidence-Based Handbook for Practitioners”, Vos points out that “Self-oriented types of meaning describe the value of the self” (Vos 2018, 65). Thus, self-praisers are self-referential. However, as mentioned before, we have a broader definition of self-praise in mind, one that involves the speaker and the potential audience.

As we can see from the above, in Ukrainian, the lexical units reflecting the act of self-praise have negative meanings associated with boasting and bragging. The latter is defined as a more extreme and aggressive form of self-praise (Dayter 2016; Miller et al. 1992).

Ukrainian proverbs about self-praise

The desire to impress others, particularly with one's competence, is just human nature (Xie and Tong 2022, 5). Self-praise is known to vary by language and culture (e.g., Ogiermann 2009). Potential factors in the production and perception of self-praise may involve ethnic, age, or gender groups or other socio-cultural characteristics (Miller et al. 1992). For example, boasting is not only common and acceptable but even prestigious in African-American discourse (Garner 1985), whereas in Ukrainian culture, modesty is highly valued, ranking alongside respect for the elderly, those of higher status, and women. Modesty is seen as a sign of moral strength and simplicity without implying any lack of self-respect (Shkitska 2016, 145). Unlike pride, self-respect does not imply feelings of superiority. As the American philosopher Jerome Neu points out it has to do with rights and dignity, not merit (Neu 1999, 74).

Ukrainian society frowns upon self-praise, considering it a sign of arrogance. This can be illustrated by Ukrainian proverbs (Markovych 1993; Prypovidky abo ukrainsko-narodnia filosofii). They are valued as moral maxims that teach some practical lessons outlined in concise, pithy sentences that are easily remembered and repeated. Until now, proverbs have still been used to teach character traits in Ukrainian schools. For example:

Не хвались, а Богу молись (Ne khvalys, a Bohu molys). – Do not boast, but pray to God.

This proverb implies humility and suggests that one should not be overly proud of their accomplishments but rather attribute them to divine intervention.

Не хвались, ідучи на торг, а хвались, ідучи з торгу (Ne khvalys, iduchy na torh, a khvalys, iduchy z torhu). – Do not boast when going to the market, but boast when coming from the market.

This proverb emphasizes the importance of demonstrating your achievements rather than just discussing them. Ukrainian culture values modesty, discouraging the premature celebration of unaccomplished tasks (Shkitska 2016).

Хвальба сорочки не дасть (Khvalba sorochky ne dast). – Boasting will not give you a shirt.

This proverb highlights the futility of boasting. It implies that empty words will not provide tangible benefits or solve problems. Thus, bragging is useless.

Хто ся сам хвалить, той злих сусідів має (Khto sia sam khvalyt toi zlykh susidiv maie). – He who brags has evil neighbours.

This proverb implies that excessive self-praise can lead to negative relationships and a lack of genuine support. Individuals who brag are generally disliked, distrusted, sometimes envied, and often condemned (Kosmeda and Osipova 2010, 159).

Пуста бочка найбільше скрипить (Pusta bochka naibilshe skrypyt). – An empty barrel creaks the most (Markovych 1993).

This means that people who boast about their knowledge, talent, or experience are often not as knowledgeable, talented or experienced as they claim to be. Those who have little substance or accomplishment often boast the most, trying to cover up their emptiness. Those who are genuinely accomplished often do not feel the need to brag.

Хвали мене губонько, бо як не похвалиш, то я тебе роздеру (Khvaly mene hubonko, bo yak ne pokhvalysh, to ya tebe rozderu). – Praise me, my mouth, or I will tear you apart.

This proverb highlights the absurdity of self-praise and suggests that true worth is recognized by others, not through self-promotion.

Чекай, аж ті друзі похвалять (Chekai, azh ti druhi pokhvaliat). – Wait until the others praise you.

It is better to let others compliment you than to boast about yourself (Kosmeda and Osipova 2010, 139). The proverb suggests that genuine accomplishments will be recognized and appreciated eventually and that external validation is far more credible than self-promotion. It is much more meaningful and valuable when praise comes from others.

Гречана каша сама себе хвалить (Hrechana kasha sama sebe khvalyt). – Buckwheat porridge praises itself.

This is said when a self-absorbed person, despite lacking real merit, starts praising themselves, trying to impress others. It implies that something that needs to praise itself constantly is likely not that good. This proverb means that a good product does not need to be praised; it speaks for itself (Prypovidky abo ukrainsko-narodnia filosofiia).

Не говори пишно, аби тобі на зле не вийшло (Ne hovory pyshno, aby tobi na zle ne vyishlo). – Do not boast, lest it backfire on you.

This proverb serves as a reminder against excessive pride and arrogance. It warns about the potential consequences of boasting. If someone brags about something and then fails to deliver, they will look foolish and lose credibility. Those who boast prematurely risk facing severe disappointment (Kosmeda and Osipova 2010, 88).

Багатого з хвастливим не розпізнаєш (Bahatoho z khvastlyvym ne rozpiznaesh). – You cannot tell a wealthy person from a boastful one.

This proverb suggests that sometimes, braggarts try to appear wealthy or successful by boasting. It cannot be easy to distinguish between someone genuinely rich and someone simply trying to project an image of wealth through bragging. The communicative strategy of a braggart involves disguising their actual social standing, often by either exaggerating their wealth (if they are rich) or fabricating it (if they are poor).

So, the proverbs emphasize the value of humility. Self-praise often comes across as insecure, and it can even lead to negative consequences.

Ukrainian folktales about self-praise

Folktales have been kept alive through countless generations. They can be classified as magical tales, animal tales, and the tales of everyday life. Animal tales are mostly satiric or moral. They are used to teach social behaviour and to show how one should behave to survive and exist successfully in a community. These tales resemble fables in which animals talk and behave like humans. This can be illustrated by the Ukrainian folktales “Заєць-хвалько” (“Zaiets-khvalko” – “The boastful hare”) and “Хвальки” (“Khvalky” – “The braggarts”).

The former tale depicts a boastful hare. In the summer, a hare lived comfortably in the forest. However, during the harsh winter, he had to sneak into a village to steal oats for survival. One day, he encountered a group of hares at the threshing floor and

began boasting about his physical strength, claiming that his whiskers, paws, and teeth were the biggest and that he feared no one.

The hares told a crow about the boastful hare. The crow sought him out and found him hiding under a bush. The hare was terrified and apologized for his boasting. The crow plucked some of his fur and let him go with a warning.

Later, the crow was caught by dogs and was in danger. The hare, witnessing the crow's plight, realized he had to act. He ran out into the open, distracting the dogs and drawing their attention away from the crow. The crow escaped to a high tree while the hare outran the dogs.

The crow later met the hare again and praised him, acknowledging that he was no longer a braggart but a brave hero (Zaiets-khvalko).

This folktale teaches us that boasting is a negative trait and that true bravery lies in actions, not words. The hare's transformation from a boastful creature to a courageous hero highlights the importance of humility and selflessness.

The latter folktale tells us about two sparrows boasting about their bravery. One sparrow bragged that he was not afraid of the cat and could fly right in front of its nose, while the other said that he was not afraid of the rooster and could even steal food from it. The sparrows did not believe each other and decided to make a bet.

The first sparrow flew in front of the cat, which was drowsing, and the cat grabbed his tail. The second sparrow tried to steal food from the rooster, but the rooster caught him and plucked out most of his tail feathers (Khvalky). Both sparrows lost their tails and learned that it is not good to brag about things you cannot do. As this folktale reveals, self-praise is considered undesirable behaviour that should be avoided.

In the tales of everyday life, actual phenomena are described in a grotesque and hyperbolic form. The tales are set in the village hut, the landlord's estate, and the fields and forests surrounding the village. The example given below represents a Ukrainian folktale "Заяче сало" ("Zaiache salo" – "The Hare Fat").

The story revolves around a landowner who is traveling with his coachman, Ivan. To break the monotony of the journey, the landowner begins to boast about a hunting trip he had. He claims to have shot an enormous hare, one so large that it yielded over half a pood (Slavic measurement of weight equal to 36 pounds) of fat.

When the landowner finishes his hunting story, Ivan subtly hints at the landowner's lies by mentioning a bridge ahead of them that collapses under the weight of liars. The landowner, slightly embarrassed, admits that perhaps the hare was not as large and fat as he initially claimed.

As the journey continues, the landowner repeatedly returns to his story about the enormous hare, each time diminishing the amount of fat he claims to have obtained. Finally, as they approach the place Ivan mentioned, the landowner inquires about the bridge. Ivan replies that the bridge has "melted away," like the hare fat (Zaiache salo).

It is common knowledge that hares are not fat. The coachman's witty remarks are far more effective in exposing the landowner's lies than any confrontation would have been. Kosmeda and Osipova underline that interacting with boastful individuals demands a high level of communicative competence and awareness (Kosmeda and Osipova 2010, 217).

The moral of the folktale is that boasting and exaggeration can lead to embarrassment and ridicule. It is better to be honest and truthful, even if it means admitting that one's accomplishments are not as impressive as they might seem.

Thus, folktales represent more than just entertaining stories. They are complex narratives that serve as a powerful tool for social satire, moral instruction, and the transmission of practical knowledge necessary for navigating community life.

Self-praise in literature

Literature is a way for people to express their values, beliefs, and experiences. Let us consider the examples of Liubov Vasyliv-Baziuk's novel "Новими стежками" ("Novymy stezhkamy"). The title of the novel can be translated into English as "By New Paths." Vasyliv-Baziuk is a contemporary Canadian writer of Ukrainian origin. She was born and brought up in Western Ukraine in the family of an orthodox priest. Surrounded by priests and bishops, Vasyliv-Baziuk absorbed Christian tradition-guided ethics. She considers ethical principles and virtues as moral imperatives rather than simply customs.

Vasyliv-Baziuk lives up to a high moral standard, and in her novel, she highlights the importance of raising Ukrainian children who do not boast about their achievements at school. She emphasizes that in Canada, students typically avoid discussing their examination grades or final marks with their peers. It is considered impolite to inquire about others' academic performance. Teachers often remind students to mind their own business, encouraging a focus on personal growth rather than comparisons. Children are being taught to be honest. They are encouraged not to ask about others' wealth or show off their possessions. They should be humble in their relationships. This mirrors how parents raise their children at home – keeping personal matters private and sharing them only with close friends. Similarly, at work, people avoid discussing their finances to prevent envy. It is considered impolite to ask such personal questions (Vasyliv-Baziuk 2018, 273).

The author's attitude toward self-praise is strongly negative. She advocates for a culture of humility and modesty, where self-praise is discouraged, and personal achievements are kept private. This approach, the author believes, cultivates a more supportive and less competitive atmosphere. By downplaying personal successes, individuals avoid creating an environment where others feel pressured to measure up or may feel diminished by another's perceived superiority. Self-praise, in the author's view, can be perceived as an intrusion into others' personal space, potentially triggering feelings of inadequacy, resentment, or envy.

Vasyliv-Baziuk states that in Ukraine, neighbours are incredibly knowledgeable about everyone else's business. They know who has bought a new washing machine, who has been on vacation, and even how many packages someone's family has sent from overseas. This constant comparison can lead to feelings of inadequacy and resentment. People who cannot afford the same things often feel like they are falling behind, blaming the government or economic conditions for their situation. Some people even feel pressured to change their lives, like finding a wealthier partner, regardless of their current relationships or circumstances. It seems that instead of appreciating what they have, many people focus on what they do not, creating a cycle of discontent (Vasyliv-Baziuk 2018, 273–274).

Bragging and the inevitable comparisons it sparks can have damaging effects on both individuals and society. When people constantly measure their own lives against the perceived triumphs of others, it can breed feelings of inferiority and bitterness in those who feel they lagging behind. The pressure to match the lifestyles of wealthy neighbours can be immense, leaving people dissatisfied with their situations, even if they have a comfortable life. This constant focus on what they lack, rather than appreciating what they have, fosters a persistent state of dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

The competitive environment can distort social events like weddings and baptisms, transforming them into public displays of wealth and status. Instead of celebrating the joyous occasion, these events become arenas for individuals to flaunt their riches, the importance of their guests, and their extravagant spending. It is as if they are saying, “Look at us; we are important and wealthy” (Vasyliv-Baziuk 2018, 232). This conspicuous consumption fuels social anxiety and pressure. It can widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots, further exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and resentment among those who cannot afford to participate in this lavish display.

There are differences in clothing styles between Ukraine and Canada. Clothing, a fundamental aspect of human expression, is a powerful indicator of cultural norms, societal values, and environmental adaptations. The author provides an example, describing women wearing sumptuous, full-length fur coats, even without a chill in the air, who strutted in fashionable high-heeled boots along the uneven sidewalks in Kyiv. The image of these women highlights an element of ostentatious display. Wearing extravagant garments when the weather does not necessitate them strongly suggests a desire to flaunt wealth and status. The way the women walked implies a confident and perhaps even arrogant gait, further emphasizing the intention to draw attention. High-heeled boots, while fashionable, are often impractical for uneven sidewalks, suggesting a prioritization of style over comfort and practicality. This stands in contrast to the more practical, comfort-oriented approach often seen in Canada. In the Ukrainian capital, there were those who were more sensibly dressed in jackets and sneakers, akin to what is seen on Canadian streets (Vasyliv-Baziuk 2018, 90). The author concludes that life is not on display in Canada, unlike in Ukraine (Vasyliv-Baziuk 2018, 206).

Self-praise on social media

Despite its undesirable nature, social media users construct self-praise with various levels of explicitness. In contrast to conversational norms of face-to-face interaction, positive self-presentation is a frequent feature of online environments. In computer-mediated communication, self-praise is omnipresent, only mitigated to various degrees (e.g., Dayter 2018; Ren and Guo 2020). The asynchronous text-based communication allows a malleable self-presentation that empowers social media users to foreground their desirable features according to their lines in the rhetorical context where voyeuristic and exhibitionistic tendencies (Miller and Shepherd 2009) often dominate social interactions.

Matley (2018) analyzed Instagram posts and found that the users self-praised with photos and captions. The posts included hashtags and employed strategies to mitigate the potential negativity of self-praise. In such cases, “upon the production of

self-praise, the speaker follows up immediately with a retraction or some sort of modification about the matter that the speaker has just praised him- or herself for” (Wu 2011, 3156).

Let us take an example illustrating how Kira Rudyk, a Ukrainian politician, who had received the “Women in Politics – Champion of the Year” award from The Alliance of Her in November 2022, shared a post about her achievement and wrote on Facebook that she had been recognized as the most influential female politician in Europe and faced criticism on social networks (Klochko 2022).

Rudyk is currently serving as a People’s Deputy of Ukraine from the proportional list of the Holos party. She is the party leader and vice president of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

On November 26, 2022 Rudyk wrote:

To be a Ukrainian today is to destroy the enemy at the front, collect volunteer aid, evacuate, sit with children in bomb shelters, help those who have lost everything, be the financial foundation of your family, look for generators for school, make trench candles, wait in the messenger on the tick “read” from the closest, to smile through tears... To be a Ukrainian in the world today is to become a symbol of bravery and indomitability.

Today I am recognized as the most influential politician in Europe. I received an award that I want to share with millions of Ukrainian women. Because it is about them and for them. Ukrainian women are a force that motivates, inspires and creates miracles. We are capable of the impossible, although we can be both strong and weak.

As an ambassador for The Alliance Of Her, I never tire of emphasizing that women's leadership in politics or business is a strength. And the Women In Politics Champion of the Year Award is another proof of that.

Infinitely grateful to my team, FNF East and Southeast Europe to everyone involved in this remarkable event. And most importantly: to every Ukrainian woman (Rudyk 2022).

The initial description of the challenges faced by Ukrainian women (“destroy the enemy at the front, collect volunteer aid, evacuate, sit with children in bomb shelters”) creates a shared context of hardship. It emphasizes Rudyk’s solidarity with her fellow female citizens. This shared experience helps to contextualize her achievement within the broader struggle of the Ukrainian people. She repeatedly highlights the strength and resilience of Ukrainian women as a whole, emphasizing their collective contributions and downplaying her individual accomplishments. Phrases like “Ukrainian women are a force” and “it is about them and for them” shift the focus from her personal success to the collective strength of Ukrainian women.

To avoid appearing self-centered, Rudyk attributes her success to external factors such as “my team, FNF East and Southeast Europe,” and “everyone involved in this remarkable event,” acknowledging the support and contributions of others. This minimizes the perception of self-aggrandizement by emphasizing the role of others in her success. Phrases like “although we can be both strong and weak” and “I never tire of emphasizing that women’s leadership in politics or business is a strength” convey a sense of humility and downplay her leadership qualities. This helps to mitigate the potential perception of arrogance or self-importance.

The politician frames her achievement as a symbol of Ukrainian courage and the ability to withstand hardships, elevating it to a level beyond personal ambition. This aligns her success with a broader national narrative and minimizes the focus on individual accolades. The politeness strategies in this post are used to claim common ground between the poster and her followers and show that they are cooperators.

By employing mitigation techniques, the poster effectively softened the potential impact of self-praise, but social media users criticized her for boasting and expressed negative reactions.

Thus, Denys Rybachok wrote that she had won the award for the Most Influential Kira Rudyk in Europe. His comment is dripping with sarcasm and suggests that he does not believe Rudyk deserves the prestigious title of “Most Influential Female Politician in Europe.” He employs a highly ironic and mocking tone to challenge the deservingness of the award bestowed upon Rudyk. The phrase “Most Influential Kira Rudyk” serves to undermine the significance of the recognition.

Leonid Goryachy mentioned that Rudyk had been recognized as the most influential female politician in Europe. He suggested that her recognition had been due to her unconventional appearance [*Kira posted a photo of herself holding a machine gun*] rather than her actual political influence and authority. So, the jury had decided “not to take any risks”. He added that the cynicism deepened when he considered that this had occurred on Yuliia Tymoshenko’s birthday. He concluded by saying that was what the young generation was like: brazen, ambitious, and totally disrespectful.

The reference to Tymoshenko’s birthday may be a symbolic gesture to contrast the perceived “disrespectful” nature of the younger generation, represented by Rudyk, with the more established and respected political figures like the leader of the Batkivshchyna political party.

Pavlo Vernivskyi wrote that Rudyk had boasted about being called the most influential female politician in Europe. He then posed a question: did Rishi Sunak, Macron, Scholz, and other European leaders know about her existence? He asked how many times she had met with them personally, and not as part of delegations. He also inquired whether her opinion was authoritative for the above-mentioned leaders and if she had influenced any decisions.

The use of rhetorical questions throughout the post suggests that Vernivskyi is challenging the validity of Rudyk’s “most influential” status. His personal opinion that the “most influential” title implies “authority and influence” further reinforces his skepticism about Rudyk’s qualifications for this title.

Serhii Bykov pointed out that if anyone thought that the most influential female politician in Europe was someone like Angela Merkel, Ursula von der Leyen, or Yuliia Tymoshenko, then they were seriously behind the times.

This statement serves as a clear, pragmatic marker, setting the mocking tone of the message. Then Bykov added that the most influential woman in Europe was Kira Rudyk. Bykov’s sarcastic comment about Rudyk being the most influential woman in Europe highlights her lack of influence. This is achieved through irony, where his statement intends to convey the opposite of its literal meaning.

Thus, we can conclude that self-praise on social media is generally viewed negatively. It can be perceived as boasting or bragging, violating social norms of modesty and humility, and leading to impressions of arrogance or attention-seeking.

Self-praise in humorous songs

Humor can be used as a method of coercing people into conforming or desired behaviours. It is important to note that humor is often used to enforce group norms within social groups. This can be achieved either by “making fun of the discrepant actions and traits of people who are outside the group or by teasing members within the group when they engage in deviant behaviour” (Martin 2010, 18).

Let us consider the following example. The Ukrainian female band “Лісапетний батальйон” (“Lisapetnyi battalion”) has a humorous song in its repertoire titled “Сама файна” (“Sama faina”). This title can be translated into English as “The most beautiful.” The song lyrics reveal a humorous self-portrayal of a village girl who wants to get married and boasts about her beauty, skills, intelligence, social status, and sexual prowess.

She claims she is the most beautiful and the proudest girl in a village. She has the whitest teeth, the finest ears, and the most beautiful face. Her bee-stung lips are bigger than Angelina Jolie’s, and she compares her legs to those of Christina Aguilera. However, mentioning wearing size forty-four shoes (a huge size for a girl) humorously undercuts her boast.

Using the names of Angelina Jolie and Christina Aguilera suggests that she tries to associate herself with glamour and celebrity. The use of superlatives like “the most beautiful”, “the proudest”, “the whitest”, and “the finest” emphasizes the girl’s high opinion of herself.

She carries water from the well, chops firewood, and is utterly “wild” in bed. She does not work on a farm but in a library. Every day, she goes to work in a new skirt.

The contrast between traditional domestic tasks (carrying water, chopping firewood) and the claim of being “wild” in bed adds to the humor and creates a surprising image. Carrying water and chopping firewood evokes a hardworking, rustic lifestyle, yet the claim of library work and daily changes of new skirts suggests a more refined, modern existence and an attempt to look fashionable.

She has read five books and about two newspapers. Saying this, she implies that she is intelligent and well-read. The final lines, “I’m just a queen, I’m just a goddess,” (Sama Faina) are the ultimate expression of her self-aggrandizement.

Thus, the lyrics can be seen as a satire of the human tendency to boast and exaggerate their positive qualities. This song also highlights the humorous gap between how individuals see themselves and how others see them. Therefore, humor can make people feel like they need to conform to certain behaviours or beliefs in order to fit in with a social group.

Conclusions

Ukrainian culture places a strong emphasis on actions rather than words. Those who boast are often perceived as compensating for a lack of genuine achievement. Modesty is highly valued, while boasting is seen as a sign of insecurity and self-unawareness. This discouragement of self-promotion fosters a sense of community and interdependence, where individuals are recognized for their contributions rather than

their self-aggrandizement. This value is reflected in Ukrainian folklore, where characters are frequently punished for hubris and boastfulness.

Ukrainian literature often portrays boasting as a negative trait, associating it with arrogance and a lack of genuine merit. Humorous songs further satirize those who exaggerate their accomplishments or abilities. This cultural aversion to boasting underscores a deep-seated belief in the importance of humility and self-effacement.

Consequently, Ukrainian society tends to cultivate an environment where humility and modesty is admired while boasting is met with skepticism and even ridicule.

References

Brown, Penelope, and Levinson, Stephen C. 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dayter, Daria. 2016. *Discursive self in microblogging: Speech acts, stories and self-praise*. John Benjamins. DOI: 10.1075/pbns.260

Dayter, Daria. 2018. "Self-praise online and offline: The hallmark speech act of social media?" *Internet Pragmatics*, 1(1): 184–203. DOI:10.1075/ip.00009.day.

Garner, T. 1985. "Instrumental interactions." *Central States Speech Journal*, 36(4): 229–238.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine. 2005. "Politeness in France: How to buy bread politely." In *Politeness in Europe*, edited by L. Hickey and M. Stewart, 29–44. Multilingual Matters. DOI: 10.21832/9781853597398-004

Klochko, Nadiia. "Dopys samovykhvaliannia Kiry Rudyk sprovokuvav khvyliu krytyky u sotsmerezkhakh." *Hlavkom*, November 27, 2022. URL: <https://surl.li/vbwbic>

Kosmeda, T. A., and Osipova, T. F. 2010. *Komunikativnyi kodeks ukrainsiv u paremiiakh: tlumachnyi slovnyk novoho typu*. Drohobych: Kolo.

Leech, Geoffrey N. 1983. *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.

Markovych, O. V., et al. 1993. *Ukrainski prykazky, pryslivia, i take inshe*, compiled by M. Nomys, edited by M. M. Pazyak. Kyiv: Lybid. URL: <https://surl.li/omqtuv>

Martin, Rod A. 2010. *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. Cambridge: Academic Press.

Matley, David. 2018. "This is NOT a #humblebrag, this is just a #brag": The pragmatics of self-praise, hashtags and politeness in Instagram posts." *Discourse, Context & Media*, 22: 30–38. DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2017.07.007

Miller, L. C., Cooke, L. L., Tsang, J., & Morgan, F. 1992. "Should I brag? Nature and impact of positive and boastful disclosures for women and men." *Human Communication Research*, 18(3): 364–399. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.1992.tb00557.x

Neu, Jerome. 1999. "Pride and identity." In *Wicked pleasures: meditations on the seven "deadly" sins*, edited by R. C. Solomon, 51–79. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139165433

Ogiermann, Eva. 2009. "Politeness and in-directness across cultures: A comparison of English, German, Polish and Russian requests." *Journal of Politeness Research*, 5: 189–216. DOI:10.1515/JPLR.2009.011

Plutarch, L. M. 2004. *Moralia: Volume VII* (P. H. De Lacy, & B. Einarson, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Pomerantz, Anita. 1978. "Compliment responses: Notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints." In *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*, edited by J. Schenkein, 79–112. Academic Press. DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-12-623550-0.50010-0

Prypovidky abo ukraïnsko-narodnia filosofii. Slovnyk.me. URL: <https://surl.li/pnijvh>

Ren, Wei, and Guo, Yaping. 2020. "Self-praise on Chinese social networking sites." *Journal of Pragmatics*, 169: 179–189. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2020.09.009

Shkitska I. Yu. 2016. "Verbalnyi vyïav skromnosti v reaktsiiakh na pozytyvno otsinni manipulemy." *Linhvistychni doslidzhennia*, 44: 144–152. URL: <https://surl.li/zesbyj>

Sifianou, Maria. 1995. "Do we need to be silent to be extremely polite? Silence and FTAs." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5(1): 95–110. DOI: 10.1111/j.1473-4192.1995.tb00074.x

Spartharas, D. 2011. "Self-praise and envy: From rhetoric to the Athenian courts." *Arethusa*, 44(2): 199–219.

Speer, Susan A. 2012. "The interactional organization of self-praise: Epistemics, preference organization, and implications for identity research." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 75(1): 52–79. DOI: 10.1177/0190272511432939

Vasyliiv-Baziuk, L. Y. 2018. *Novymy stezhkami*. Chernivtsi: Bukrek.

Vos, Joel. 2018. *Meaning in Life: An Evidence-Based Handbook for Practitioners*. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

Wu, Ruey-Jiuan Regina. 2011. "A conversation analysis of self-praising in everyday Mandarin interaction." *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(13): 3152–3176. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2011.05.016

Xie, Chaoqun. 2018. "(Im)politeness, morality and the internet." *Internet Pragmatics*, 1(2): 205–214. DOI: 10.1075/ip.00010.xie

Xie, Chaoqun and Tong, Ying. 2022. *Introduction: Self-Praise Across Cultures and Contexts*, 1–14.

Illustrative Material

Akademichnyi tlumachnyi slovnyk ukrainskoi movy. URL: <http://sum.in.ua/>

Khvalky (Ukrainska narodna kazka Podniprovia (Naddniproianshchyny)). URL: <https://surl.gd/ixlkqm>

Kira Rudyk. "To be a Ukrainian today." Facebook, November 26, 2022. URL: <https://surl.lu/dqluzy>

Sama faina. URL: <https://pisni.ua/lisapetnyi-batalion-sama-faina>

Zaiache salo (Ukrainska narodna kazka). URL: <https://surl.gd/geqjww>

Zaiets-khvalko (Ukrainska narodna kazka). URL: <https://surl.cc/wpsxwo>