Language Optionality and Variation
Festschrift in Honor of Anna Cardinaletti
edited by Chiara Branchini, Gianluca Lebani,
Lara Mantovan, Francesca Volpato

Pronouns in Discourse: A Theoretical Framework and Its Application to Donald Trump's Inaugural Addresses

Francesca Santulli
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

Abstract The paper focuses on the use of pronouns in discourse and their rhetoric exploitation. It starts with a brief overview of Benveniste's theory of persons, with special reference to the first person plural, and the inclusive- vs exclusive-we contraposition. Against this theoretical background, the use of persons is traced in two instances of institutional discourse, namely President Trump's Inaugural Addresses of 2017 and 2025. Differences in the occurrence of personal forms are connected to other structural features of the two speeches, showing a marked evolution in the way the norms of the genre are actually enacted by the arguer and confirming the crucial role of enunciation patterns in discourse.

Keywords Discourse. Person. Genre. Inaugural Address. Trump's Inaugurals.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Discourse, Person, Subjectivity. – 3 Trump's 2017 and 2025 Inaugural Addresses: A Case Study. – 4 Conclusions.

1 Introduction

The paper investigates the use of pronouns in discourse and their rhetoric exploitation, focusing on Trump's Inaugural Addresses as a case study. In order to sketch the theoretical background, I will briefly re-examine Benveniste's fundamental observations on the role of person in language use, starting from the distinction between first and second person, on the one hand, and third person on the other (*correlation de*

Edizioni Ca'Foscari

LiVVaL 9
e-ISSN 2974-6574 | ISSN 2974-6981
ISBN [ebook] 979-12-5742-086-4 | ISBN [print] 979-12-5742-121-2

Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2025-11-04 | Accepted 2026-05-12 | Published 2026-11-17
© 2026 Santulli | CC BY 4.0
DOI 10.30687/979-12-5742-086-4/011

personalité) (§ 2.1), with special reference to the problem of pluralization, which appears particularly interesting for the first person (§ 2.2).

The notions put forth by Benveniste and then developed in more recent research have been applied to the analysis of discourse in different domains and genres. In this paper, I will examine the two Inaugural Addresses delivered by Donald Trump (in 2017 and in 2025), to trace the use of pronouns and their pragmatic value. The speeches are two instances of the same institutional genre, whose prototypical traits will be briefly described (§ 3.1). Though delivered by the same President, they are both representative of a Challenger's Address, as Trump's second Address was delivered eight years after the first, after a term of another President (Biden). In principle, this circumstance should strengthen the similarities between the two Inaugurals. Yet this may not be the case, as Trump's attitude profoundly changed between 2017 and 2025. The aim of this analysis is to ascertain if and to which extent the two speeches show any differences, for both their overall organization and main argumentative line (§ 3.2), and to verify whether the discrepancies (if any) correspond to a different way of exploiting person reference (§ 3.3).

2 Discourse, Person, Subjectivity

2.1 Pronouns and *Discours*

In an essay published in 1946,[1] Benveniste makes a fundamental distinction between the actual person(s) (i.e. the so-called first and second person) and the *non-person* (i.e. the third), thus identifying a *correlation of personality*, in which *je/tu* possess the sign of person and participate in the dialogic structure of discourse, while the third person represents "a nonpersonal invariant" (Benveniste 1971, 200), and therefore does not share with the other two the capacity of representing the actual situation of enunciation.

Benveniste clearly identifies the level of language use, mentioning Charles Morris, as the one who labelled it as *pragmatics* (cf. Benveniste 1971, 217). *Je* can only be defined in enunciation, as the person who is uttering the present instance of discourse, while *tu* can be defined symmetrically, as the individual who is spoken to. Pronouns serve the needs of intersubjective communication, making it possible to

1 The paper was originally published in the Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique (1946) and reprinted in the volume *Problèmes de linguistique Générale* (1966), in a section devoted to *L'homme dans la langue*. Quotations in the text are taken from the English translation of the volume (Benveniste 1971).

convert language into *discours* – a plane of language use defined "in its widest sense: every utterance assuming a speaker and a hearer, and in the speaker the intention of influencing the other in some way" (Benveniste 1971, 209).[2]

This definition combines the dialogic nature of *discours* with an inherent persuasive component. Scholars have frequently debated the point, often distinguishing between overt argumentative aims (which are typical of given domains and genres) and a mere argumentative *dimension* spreading across a wide range of practices and communicative exchanges (Amossy 2005). Whether this component is a necessary and ineliminable element or not is still a matter of debate. In any case, as already put forth by Benveniste, the *interpersonal* character of discourse implies the respective positioning of the interlocutors, and this in turn often includes promotion of one's own image and viewpoints.

Moving from the realm of pragmatics to that of rhetoric proper, the representation of the interlocutors evidently takes a prominent position. *I* represents the arguer, introduces their qualities and their convictions, is the first and foremost expression of *ethos*. For Aristotle ethos was in some respect the strongest argument, as it is able to generate trust (Rh. 1356a). Self-representation plays therefore a crucial role, and includes both *speaking* of oneself (*l'ethos dit*) and *showing* one's own character (*l'ethos montré*; cf. Maingueneau 2016).

Symmetrically, *you* identifies the audience: it is used to address them but at the same time makes it possible to single out and represent a series of selected features that are functional to the construction of agreement. As emphasised in the New Rhetoric (Perelman/Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958), the preliminary step for any form of persuasive discourse is the identification of the intended audience. Success in the persuasive process depends on a clear awareness on behalf of the arguer of the group they intend to address, and on the selection of adequate 'objects of agreement' (facts and values). This in turn generates a common ground where premises to argumentation proper are shared and do not need to be proved. As argumentation does not rely on premises universally assumed as true, but (rhetorically) depends on probable premises, their preliminary identification is a necessary step, influencing the whole structure of a speech and crucially contributing to its effectiveness.

I and *you* are therefore the backbone of persuasive discourse. Moreover, as the construction of the audience is pursued in close connection with the representation of the arguer, it leads to the creation of a collective identity including both. This is where *we* comes into play.

2 The paper was originally published in the Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique (1959) and reprint in the same section of the 1966 volume (s. previous note).

2.2 *We* as Non-Pluralization of *I*

The relations established among the three pronominal forms of the singular cannot be applied to the plural. The passage from the singular to the plural "does not involve a simple pluralization" (Benveniste 1971, 201). As for the first person, there is a further semantic point, as "'we' is not a multiplication of identical objects but a *junction* between 'I' and the 'non-I' [...]. The presence of 'I' is constitutive of 'we'" (Benveniste 1971, 202).

Thus, for Benveniste it is *ontologically* impossible to conceive *nous* without *moi*, though it is important to consider that the 'non-I' element can be filled with different contents. In numerous languages, "'we' is expressed in one way for 'I + you' and in another for 'I + they'" (202). *Inclusive* and *exclusive* forms can be morphologically differentiated, but the distinction is not universally codified, and there are numerous languages where the semantic interpretation of the first person plural shifts from a minimum core (the self + one other) to a maximum expansion (the self + mankind as a whole), or "the speaker and a variable" (Nunberg 1993). The blurred boundaries of *we* are defined in context, leaving room for their exploitation for communicative purposes.

While the first person plural has been given comparatively little attention in both sociolinguistic and strictly pragmatic research,[3] it has been repeatedly investigated in a discourse analytic perspective, especially in media and political studies, where the construction of contraposed identities plays a crucial role (cf., among others, Duszak 2002). In particular, the opposition between inclusive and exclusive forms has been frequently explored in different domains and contexts – the notion of *clusivity* including the possibility of applying the distinction also to the second person (Filimova 2005).

In the domain of politics, a 'non-prototypical' usage of the first person plural may occur, namely the so-called *rhetorical-we* (Quirk et al. 1985), a special case of *speaker*-exclusive form.[4] Speaker-exclusiveness should be excluded *a priori* (for ontological reasons, as stated by Benveniste), but it does occur in numerous contexts (for a comprehensive review, cf. Helmbrecht 2015), all characterized by an empathic attitude of the speaker, who puts themselves in the position of the addressee or identify as members of a group they actually

3 In pragmatics, the focus primarily lies on the creation of perspectives in discourse (e.g. the use of personal subjects vs impersonal/passive forms). In a rather recent volume tackling the pragmatics of pronouns (Gardelle/Sorlin 2015), no single paper is devoted to the first person plural. On the other hand, Truan (2021) focuses on third-person forms, exploring their potential in political discourse.

4 A common example of speaker-exclusive *we* is "How do *we* feel today?", uttered by a doctor/nurse addressing a patient. For a more comprehensive analysis cf. Santulli 2020.

do not belong to. The rhetorical use differs from the other cases of speaker-exclusiveness in that it *creates* a group.

The rhetorical use can be exploited with persuasive aims and metaphorical implications (Santulli 2020). A famous example can be found in the American Constitution, where *We the people* is expression of a collective feeling and identifies a group of people (extending across centuries) who recognise themselves in their common founding values. In this case, the formula is often evoked in markedly addressee-inclusive contexts, with the aim of strengthening the relation between speaker and audience through the exploitation of a recognisable (and linguistically codified) common ground.

In this paper, the use of personal pronouns – particularly the first person plural – has been traced in two speeches belonging to a well codified institutional genre. The next section examines Trump's Inaugural Addresses linking pronominal choices to the distinguishing traits that prototypically characterize this genre.

3 Trump's 2017 and 2025 Inaugural Addresses: A Case Study

3.1 The Inaugural Address as a Genre

Among discourse genres in the domain of political communication, the Inaugural Address (IA) stands out as a prototypical example of highly codified institutional genre (Degano 2022). Institutional genres usually display a high level of stability, as persisting contextual constraints limit the variability of textual features, and both aims and expectations tend to remain resistant to diachronic change. This is particularly evident when a genre produces recurring instances at regular time intervals and in a limited number, as is the case with the IA, a speech delivered during the ritualized ceremony marking the beginning of a new presidency and including the presidential oath. The IA is therefore an important document not only for the term it inaugurates, but also in the dimension of US political history. Firstly, it aims to restore 'ideological normality' after the contrasts characterizing the electoral campaign, and at the same time it invokes the 'Plural Presidency', as the arguer no longer speaks as an individual but gives voice to the institution (Hart 1984, Campbell/Jamieson 1986). The President addresses all the American people, obliterating the divisions that had prevailed during the campaign, and summons the audience to unity and common action. Complying with genre rules presidents establish their administration in the wake of tradition, frequently evoking (and occasionally quoting) their predecessors to reinforce connection with the past.

As a highly institutionalized genre occurring at regular intervals, the IA can be studied in its diachronic dimension, to investigate its evolution and, at the same time, to emphasize the preservation of constant traits that belong to its distinguishing features. Despite evident changes, some elements have survived through the centuries, given the relative stability of the institutional context and the highly symbolic function of the genre. If we narrow the focus, and take into consideration a shorter period, the distinguishing features become more evident: Degano (2022) analyzed a corpus of IAs delivered after World War II and was able to identify a series of recurring moves and steps as well as a prototypical argumentative line.

In the framework of genre theory (Bhatia 1993), Degano (2022, 115-29) singles out four moves: Appeal to collective identity and unity of purpose; Problem statement and solution; Plural Presidency as a call to action; Final exhortation and historical quotation. The first move, in its turn, comprises three different steps: Why we are here; Unity over division; Unity against an enemy. The argumentative line can be summarized as follows: we have to set aside divisions, as we now have a common goal (based on common values), which can be achieved only if we all contribute to it.

Though differently enacted by each individual president, these elements recur across the decades, adapting to the changing historical context and reflecting the personal attitudes of the arguer.

In the following paragraphs Trump's IAs will be examined in the light of genre and argumentation theory to show if they comply with the prototypical traits. The investigation will then focus on the pronominal patterns, to ascertain whether they correspond to the general structure of the speeches, to the selected argumentative line, and, ultimately, to the aims of the arguer.

3.2 The Macro-Structure of the Speeches

3.2.1 The 2017 Inaugural

In enacting the first move of the prototypical structure described above (Degano 2022) Trump[5] starts with the crucial first step, which includes both deictic space-time reference and a metadiscursive comment, combined with the expression of thanks for the *gracious* behavior of the previous President. He does not expand on the notion, as some of his predecessors did, emphasizing the "majesty

5 Quotations are taken from the version published on the website of the American Presidency Project (UC Santa Barbara): `https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-14`.

of the moment" (Nixon) as a "celebration of freedom" (Kennedy), a celebration of unity, "the mystery of American renewal" (Clinton), a "miracle" (Reagan) of democracy. Yet in the 2017 Inaugural, the meaning of the ceremony is forwarded thanks to its evaluative description ("every four years we gather on these steps to carry out *the orderly and peaceful* transfer of power" [emphasis mine]). The first move also includes the identification of the Enemy with the Federal Capital, Washington as the personification of the establishment – of the politicians who prospered to the detriment of "the citizens of our country".[6] Differently from most IAs where the Enemy is identified with an external threat (e.g. the Communists or terrorism), this representation echoes Reagan's famous claim that "government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem". The first move is completed with the representation of unity as a movement of people who share the same conviction, namely "that a nation exists to serve its citizens". There is no actual appeal to unity, as unity is already taken for granted, as evident from the very beginning of the speech: "We, the citizens of America, *are now joined* in a great national effort to rebuild our country [emphasis mine]".

This movement of the united people against Washington shifts the focus onto the problems of the present and the solutions for the future. Success will come because of the "total allegiance to the United States of America": loyalty, patriotism, unity are the keywords, reinforced by a Biblical quotation. There is no further quotation in the final part, but a grand past of victories is evoked, combining the blood of patriots with the homage to the American flag, and exhorting to a common action for an ultimate aim – make America great again.

The speech is on the shorter side if compared with other Inaugurals, but the essential elements of the genre are comprised in its structure. Moreover, in its main argumentative line unity does play a crucial role, although with a shift from the prototypical pattern described above: Success will come *because* the American people have already achieved unity.

3.2.2 The 2025 Inaugural

The first striking feature of the 2025 IA[7] is the complete cancellation of the first step: there is no pragmatic frame, no idea of tradition and

6 After Watergate, this theme frequently recurs in pre-electoral speeches (e.g. "the ways of Washington" are evoked by both Clinton and Obama), though the winners then avoid mentioning it explicitly in their Inaugurals.

7 Quotations are taken from the version published on the already mentioned website: `https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-54`.

continuity, no representation of the inaugural ceremony as a symbol of democracy. The very meaning of the ceremony is ignored; after a series of vocative appeals, the *incipit* is clear-cut: "The golden age of America begins right now". It revives an often-exploited myth, which is usually presented with a presupposition ('return'), implying that it is necessary to forget the recent past and recover an ancient glorious tradition. In Trump's words, on the other hand, the idyllic condition starts from scratch, simply because he will "put America first". As in the 2017 IA, the Enemy hides inside, but it is explicitly identified with the incumbent administration, whose policies are the source of all problems. And, as in the 2017 IA, unity is not an aim but a reality, as "the entire nation is rapidly unifying behind our agenda". The description of the problems is more in tune with the deliberative style of a pre-electoral speech, while the celebration of unity would better resound in a Victory Speech ("we had a powerful win in all seven swing States and the popular vote we won by millions of people") (Santulli, Degano 2022). Trump does not aim to reconstruct unity after division; on the contrary, he emphasizes the divide between the winning Republicans and the succumbing Democrats. In this context, *unity* sounds hollow.

When coming to the solutions, the prototypical appeal to the Plural Presidency is changed into a series of actions performed by the new president, i.e. the signing of "a series of historical executive orders". This is the core of the speech: a long list of decisions which result in radically new policies to be enacted immediately after the presidential oath.

Compared with the 2017 Inaugural, the speech is nearly twice as long, as the actions to be performed are numerous, spanning from immigration policies to the re-naming of the Gulf of Mexico. Despite the lack of historical quotations, the final exhortation is rather long, characterized by an upward spiral movement: the growth of the American nation is traced back to its origin, looking for the roots of American pride. In Inaugurals, these common origins are usually evoked in the opening lines; here they come towards the end, and – again – take the tones of a triumphant Victory Speech ("The American people have spoken"). The final exhortation is a summary of the problems ("our Nation has suffered greatly") and the prospected solutions ("we are going to bring it back and make it great again"), which lead to the desired result; the speech ends as it started, as America's "golden age has just begun".

In this atypical Inaugural, the argumentative line is limited to suggesting that success is a mere consequence of the exceptional character of American people. Unity belongs to the American spirit, it is its tradition and at the same time a divine gift ("we are one people, one family, and one glorious nation under God"), and the unity of the nation is represented in a long series of statements projected into

a very near future where the determination of the American people makes it possible to enact the will of their leader.

3.3 The Arguer (*I*), the Audience (*you*) and Their Union (*we*)

The different patterns exploited in the two speeches[8] are reflected in the data concerning the occurrence of personal pronouns and possessive adjectives, shown in Table 1.[9]

Table 1 Occurrences of personal pronouns and possessive adjectives

Pronouns and Possessives	2017	2025
I	3 (0.21%)	33 (1.13%)
My	1 (0.07%)	16 (0.55%)
You	14 (0.96%)	32 (1.09%)
Your	11 (0.75%)	5 (0.17%)
We	47 (3.22%)	85 (2.91%)
Our	48 (3.29%)	71 (2.43%)
Us	2 (0.14%)	2 (0.07%)

3.3.1 First person singular

The most remarkable difference between the two speeches is the relevance attributed to the speaking subject. In 2017, the first person singular subject *I* occurred only thrice, two of the occurrences being rather formulaic and expressing the commitment of the arguer to support his audience ("I will fight for you / I will never let you down"). Conversely, the 2025 IA includes 33 occurrences of *I*, corresponding to more than five times as many in percentage. This confirms the predominance of the enunciator who puts himself on stage and takes full responsibility of the actions that are going to be performed. Concordances show 18 occurrences of *I will*, most of them marking the progression of actions to be performed in order to solve America's problems (and the executive orders to be signed). The occurrences

8 The two speeches differ in length (1461 vs 2923 tokens, respectively). For this reason, percentages are provided in Table 1.

9 Frequency lists and concordances were obtained using Wordsmith Tools 8.0. The Tables in the text show the absolute number of occurrences and the percentages obtained with the Frequency Tool. The third person (which, as discussed above, is a non-person) is not considered in this research. The data presented are purely descriptive; a quantitative approach to the texts would require inferential processing that lies beyond the scope of this paper, which is focused on qualitative analysis.

of *my* are not negligible in the 2025 speech: a few of them refer to the attack on Trumps' life during the campaign, while there are also a couple of formulaic uses ("my fellow citizens / my message to America"). It is however interesting to note that in some cases *my* is used to emphasize the predominant position of the new President who intends to hold firm control of his government ("my administration / my Cabinet / my policy / my leadership").

3.3.2 Second Person

Data for the second person (which is always intended as a plural, representing the audience) are more homogeneous, particularly in the case of the pronoun *you*. Yet the number of occurrences in the formula "Thank you" is much higher in 2025 (23 vs 5 in 2017). Excluding these, the proportion of *you* is twice as high in the 2017 Inaugural (0.62% vs 0.34% in 2025), but in both speeches *you* is only occasionally a subject (4 times in 2025 vs 3 in 2017, one of which subject of a passive sentence, "You will never be ignored"). In the object position, *you* occurs in similar contexts in both speeches, with "I will fight for you" occurring in both speeches; in 2017, however, *you* serves to represent the solemn moment when power shifts from Washington to the people ("I am giving it [power] back to you / It belongs to you /everyone is listening to you"). This is also reflected in the use of *your*, which combines with words like *moment*, *victory*, *triumph*, *celebration*, *day*, all referring to the new meaning of the old Capitol Hill ceremony. *Your* is far less frequent in the 2025 Inaugural, and combined with nouns referring to Trump election (*your vote* [twice], *choice*, *voice*, *help*).

3.3.3 First Person Plural

Globally considered, the first person plural is more frequent in the 2017 Inaugural, with more relevant differences for the adjective *our*. These data are however meaningless if we do not consider them in the light of the opposition between inclusive and exclusive forms. It is obviously difficult to assign each single occurrence to one or the other group, even working on a qualitative basis and analysing their value by hand. In some cases, the inclusive character is signalled by linguistic clues (we all / together we / we in America /we, the citizen of America / we assembled here today /etc.), while in other cases it is the semantics or the pragmatic value of the utterance that enhances the exclusive (or, more rarely, the inclusive) interpretation.

In political discourse, the ambiguities of the first person plural are often exploited to obtain an inclusive *pragmatic* effect even if

the *semantic* interpretation of the pronoun is more consistent with exclusivity. In principle, however, the subject pronoun *we* – especially in combination with a future tense – is likely to have a semantically exclusive value in the context of institutional addresses where arguers present themselves and sketch the actions they intend to perform, as the pronoun refers to the group who is going to enact a shared programme (his/her party /government /collaborators etc.). The possessive adjective, on the other hand, is more frequently used with an inclusive value, and is exploited to emphasise that speaker and audience share a common ground, which includes both sheer facts and 'loaded' values (in Trump's IAs: our country / nation / children / flag, etc.; but also: our dreams / loyalty / way of life / freedom, etc.).[10]

In this perspective, the higher number of occurrences of *our* in 2017 should *per se* indicate a prevalence of inclusivity. This is in fact confirmed by the analysis of concordance lines, which shows that in almost all occurrences the inclusive value is evident. On the other hand, there is only one case where exclusivity clearly prevails ("at the bedrock of our politics"). The pattern is completely different in the 2025 Inaugural. A lower percentage of occurrences of *our* combines with a significant proportion of clearly exclusive (or markedly ambiguous) forms: "*our* top priorities / under *our* Administration /*our* agenda" obviously refer to the speaker + his collaborators, sometimes enhancing a *majestatis* interpretation (e.g. "*our* presidential election / I will direct *our* government"). There are also a few ambiguous occurrences which however seem to be more consistent if interpreted as exclusive ("we will measure our success / our power will stop all wars").

As for the pronoun, while the occurrences of the object form (*us* occurs only twice in both speeches) are negligible (and yet, in 2017 they are both evidently inclusive, while in 2025 one of them is at best ambiguous), the subject form has similar percentages of occurrence in the two speeches. The most frequent collocate is in both cases *we will* (28 occurrences in 2017 vs 53 in 2025, with similar percentages): in 2017 the cluster "we will make America" occurs 8 times; while in 2025 the most frequent clusters are "we will be (10) / will not be (8)". There is however an important difference between the two speeches. In the 2017 Inaugural, linguistic clues clearly indicate that the actions will be performed by the speaker in conjunction with the audience ("together, we will make America great/safe/proud/wealthy/strong again; we all salute the same great American flag; we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms", etc.). In 2025, on the other hand, future actions are mostly the task of a government ("we will move

10 For more data and their refined analysis cf. Santulli 2005, who examined the institutional genre of presentation of a new government to Parliament in Italy.

with purpose and speed / we will restore integrity / we will reinstate my Remain in Mexico policy / we will bring prices down / we will end the green new deal", etc.). In this context, ambiguous statements (e.g. "we will not forget our country/our Constitution/our God") foster an exclusive interpretation, but as they refer to very general attitudes and values, inclusion cannot be totally excluded. The audience is given no agency power, but it is involved in a process of *embrayage*, which is more evident when (inclusive) *we* is used in predicative structures: e.g. we will be proud/strong/the envy of every nation.

3.3.4 Summary

To sum up, the data presented above clearly show that the explicit representation of the speaker is not essential in the 2017 IA: the enunciator occasionally materialises in discourse as the leader who fights for his supporter. Quite differently, in 2025 the enunciator takes responsibility for his actions and presents himself as the agent who is going to enact a momentous change.

In both speeches the audience is represented as a rather passive character, but in 2017 they are considered the addressees of a profound transformation in political mechanisms (power is to be brought back to them). In 2025, on the other hand, the audience is represented as a mere instrument for the achievement of the aims set by the leader: their support (and their vote) made it possible for the speaker to win the presidency and, in this new role, to bring forth his programme for change.

The use of the first person plural is consistent with these different representations of both speaker and audience. In 2025 the possessive adjective is more often used with an exclusive meaning, contributing to the exclusion of the audience from all political action. Similarly, in 2017 the pronoun *we* is frequently used in conjunction with linguistic expressions that suggest an inclusive interpretation, while in 2025 exclusion prevails, contraposing the actions of Trump's government to the passive representation of the people who are only included in a static picture of hollow grandeur.

4 Conclusions

The use of personal pronouns in Trumps' IAs illustrated in the previous section is in tune with other features of the two speeches. Some important structural elements reflecting the different ways of enacting the norms of the genre correspond to significant differences in the structure of the enunciation and in the representation of the

actors involved, thus confirming the crucial role of persons in the rhetoric organization of discourse.

In 2025 the marked divergence from the prototypical structure of the IA and the fainting of its ritual meaning corresponds to the evident exclusion of the audience from the role of agent: the enunciator takes possession of discourse and takes the prominent position, while the audience is reduced to a mere instrument (as they put the enunciator in the position of agent). The union of leaders and followers is weak: far from being called to action, the latter are deprived of any power, thus eliminating a crucial move of the genre. The first person plural has an exclusive value when in a subject position, while an inclusive interpretation is possible only to identify qualities or attitudes.

The use of personal pronouns confirms that, in comparison with the 2017 Address, the 2025 IA reveals a different attitude of the arguer. Some elements of the first address that already indicated a divergence from the prototypical structure of the speech and its generic significance are further developed and emphasised, leading to a new interpretation of the institutional role of the whole inaugural ceremony. The prevalence of individual actions (reflected in the overwhelming use of *I*) is in contrast with the principle of the Plural Presidency, while the disempowerment of the audience, predominantly excluded from the agent role, precludes the possibility of a call to action.

These elements complete the distortion of the genre, evident from the very beginning of the speech, as the lack of the first step (why we are here) is *per se* symptomatic of a totally new course: we are here for a purpose unlike that of the past.

Bibliography

Amossy, R. (2005). "The Argumentative Dimension of Discourse". van Eemeren, F.; Houtlosser, P. (eds), *Practices of Argumentation.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 87-98.

Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica* (Rh.). En. transl. by C.D.C. Reeve. *Rhetoric.* Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2018.

Benveniste, É. (1971). *Problems in General Linguistics*. Miami: Miami University Press. En. transl. of: *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

Bhatia, V.K. (1993). *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings.* London; New York: Longman.

Campbell, K.K.; Jamieson, K.H. (1986). "Inaugurating the Presidency". Simons, H.W.; Agazarian, A.A. (eds), *Form, Genre, and the Study of Political Discourse*, 5. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 203-25.

Degano, C. (2022). "The Inaugural Address: Fostering Objects of Agreement". Santulli, F.; Degano, C., *Agreement in Argumentation. A Discursive Perspective*. Cham: Springer, 113-44. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16293-0_5.

Duszak, A. (ed.) (2002). *Us and Others. Social Identities across Languages, Discourses and Cultures*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2006.0091.

Filimova, E. (ed.) (2005). *Clusivity. Typology and Case Studies of the Inclusive-Exclusive Distinction*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.63.06cys.

Gardelle, L.; Sorlin, S. (eds) (2015). *The Pragmatics of Personal Pronouns*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Hart, R.P. (1984). *Verbal Style and the Presidency*. Orlando: Academic Press.

Helmbrecht, J. (2015). "A Typology of non-Prototypical Uses of Personal Pronouns: Synchrony and Diachrony". *Journal of Pragmatics*, 88, 176-89.

Maingueneau, D. (2016). *L'ethos en analyse du discourse*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Nunberg, G. (1993). "Indexicality and Deixis". *Linguistics and Philosophy,* 16, 1-43.

Perelman, Ch.; Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1958). *Traité de l'argumentation. La nouvelle rhétorique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. https://doi.org/10.7202/705750ar.

Quirk, R.; Greenbaum, S.; Leech, G.; Svartvik, J. (1985). *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman. https://doi.org/10.2307/415437.

Santulli, F. (2005). *Le parole del potere, il potere delle parole. Retorica e discorso politico.* Milano: FrancoAngeli. https://doi.org/10.1525/rh.2008.26.2.202.

Santulli, F. (2020). "*We Shall Fight*: Speaker-Exclusive *We* as a Grammatical Metaphor". *International Journal of Linguistics*, 12(4), 43-64. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v12i4.16931.

Santulli, F.; Degano, C. (2022). *Agreement in Argumentation. A Discursive Perspective*. Cham: Springer.

Truan, N. (2021). *The Politics of Person Reference*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.