

# **Rhetorical Argumentation in Italian Academic Discourse**

Manuti Amelia, Cortini Michela & Mininni Giuseppe

[a.manuti@psico.uniba.it](mailto:a.manuti@psico.uniba.it)

Department of Psychology

University of Bari

Palazzo Ateneo

Piazza Umberto I, 1

70121 Bari

Italy

## **Abstract**

The recent trend in institutional communication research seems to foster the image of University as a private organization significantly oriented towards the customer satisfaction's philosophy. Following the concept of organizational culture, institutional settings too are conceived as organizational contexts, where discourse is a privileged vehicle to convey and spread values, traditions and artifacts, both through internal and external communication practices. Thus, within academic discourse organizational culture is shaped and perpetuated by specific devices of rhetorical argumentation.

The corpus of data consists of two different examples of academic discourse: the self promotional endorsement letters of the academic candidates to the chancellor's position on occasion of the elections and the inaugural speeches proclaimed by the chancellors in charge during the opening celebration of the academic year. The first kind of academic discourse could be meant as an example of political discourse since the candidates use communication strategically and manipulate their academic membership as a rhetorical device to support their aims. On the other hand, the second example is a mere celebration of academic culture which through linguistic rituals recalls and perpetuates the basic values of this microcosm.

The data have been analysed with the critical discourse analysis which pays particular attention to the context of talk. Moreover, attention has been focused on the metaphors and on the meta-discursive cues. The results show that although with different purposes academic discourse use similar discursive and rhetorical strategies as both belong to the same organization.

*Keywords:* academic discourse, rhetorical argumentation, metaphor analysis, metadiscourse, diatextual power, critical discourse analysis.

## **Academic communication as argumentation**

The term *academese*, as the similar neologisms *motherese*, *legalese*, *businessese*, does identify specific varieties both of professional and relational mode or form of communication. Then, *academese* is a specific kind of language adopted by professionals (i.e. scientists, researchers, teachers) within the world of knowledge and education in particular by communicative situations, where the intention is determined by the necessity (or rather by the wish) to highlight the own social and institutional function as to validate social and professional identity.

In a pioneering pragmalinguistic text, Mey (1985) states that *academese* is not simply a sectorial language, that is an enunciative space of meanings, where a community of individuals build and perpetuate the motives of their professional specificity, but rather it reveals a consistent pragmatic density with several research implications.

Therefore, *academese* shows more than one affinities with scientific language meant as a discursive practice which detaches from the everyday language that shapes common sense. Then, the scientific connotation of *academese* gives to this kind of discourse both intellectual salience and stylistic refinement. Further, in consonance with scientific language the ideal format of *academese* extols emotional aspects and avoids person markers. Finally, as for the *enjeu* brought about by *academese*, it is similar to that of the rhetoric of argumentative discourse, meant as an enunciative practice of common talk (Mininni 2000).

Most generally, almost every communicative situation reveals an argumentative structure when interpreted as a complex network of individuals, of their versions of events and of their reciprocal interest to consider the others' mental models. Then, every discursive form of life has an argumentative framework since it allows individuals to

act, by positioning them as enunciators of meanings and as holders of interests and interpretative modalities (Billig, 1991). By a communicative situation marked by the argumentative intention of the interlocutors, the *enjeu* is defined by the reciprocal acknowledgement to attribute each other the power to solve the conflict of opinions to the “order of discourse” (Foucault, 1971). Then, the peculiarity of such communicative situations resides in the fact that the interlocutors share the availability to solve the conflict according to specific discourse configuration. The dialectical nature of the argumentative process may be explained by distinguishing the following stages (Van Eemeren and Houtlossen, 1996: 480-1):

- 1) confrontation stage, that is the communicative phase during which any difference between interlocutors becomes evident;
- 2) opening stage, that is the negotiation of the discussion’s pragmatic organisation in terms of turn taking, topic control and schedules;
- 3) argumentation stage, that is the explanation of the own points of view of both interlocutors;
- 4) concluding stage, during which the discussion’s outcome is decided.

These dialectic rules do represent a sort of “behavioural code for the critical discussion” (Van Eemeren et al., 1996: 283) which warrants the interlocutors for the reasonableness of their claims and supply them with the interpretative resources to overcome the sense of challenge that the other’s argumentation might provoke to the self. Moreover, Van Eemeren stresses that the rhetorical value of argumentative discourse is the strategic tension of both interlocutors to gain advantage on the other.

Then, this study aims at focusing on the rhetoric of argumentation inherent to the third step specified by Van Eemeren et al. that is the intralocutor effort to build a few effective *(dia)texts of academese*. Indeed, although argumentative in nature, the rhetoric of *academese* could not be investigated simply by giving an answer to the question “Why A says this to B in this context”. Rather the specific features of the context suggest to consider the modalities through which the interlocutors manage the variety of enunciative formats.

Indeed, academic communication reveals itself in several discursive practices. Obviously, as by every kind of communicative interactions, the main variation criterion is set by the features of the channel chosen to communicate (i.e. oral, written, visual communication), even if it should be acknowledged that the written one is the most prototypical format of academic communication within common talk (Ong, 1981). Therefore, even by face to face interactions the degree of metacognitive control within the production of academic discourse is comparable to that of written communication. A (successful) academic lecture, a communication during a congress session, a chancellor’s inaugural speech are actually communicative formats that engage the interlocutors in specific tasks of informative precision and stylistic accuracy similar to those imposed by written communication.

Thus, academic communication seems to be characterized by a relevant inclination to reflexivity which mirrors the obsession of interlocutors to control the ongoing interaction. As a consequence, the most adequate conceptual tool to frame the peculiarity of the socio-cognitive organization of academic communication is the notion of *metadiscourse*.

## **Pragmatics of academic identity: the corporate culture of University as an organisation**

Academic communication represents a very interesting research topic not only because of the specific juridical frame which legitimises both the communicative event and the interlocutors involved (Bazerman, 1988), but also because of its *intrinsic multivocality* and because of the relevance of its *sociocultural function*.

Within the academic context different typologies of institutional discourse could be distinguished, thus marking internal and external organizational communication practices.

Academic discourse could be investigated as interchange between colleagues, for instance on occasion of formal and informal meetings, assemblies, congresses and elections. In this case the relationship is symmetric and internal as teachers are supposed to share the same background of experiences and knowledge even if they do not belong to the same disciplinary community.

On the other hand, academic discourse could be marked as institutional communication since it takes place between the University as a bureaucratic organisation and its employees, meant not only as teachers but mostly as management staff. The kind of communication which develops could be seen as internal and asymmetric. In the meanwhile its aim is to manage impressions and to convey a strategic public image of University to its employees, who take active part to the academic life and manifest their consent/dissent on occasion of specific institutional events as for instance on occasion of the chancellor's election.

Finally, academic communication could be classified as purely external as the Institution opens to the broader social context to promote its public image and addresses

directly to the stakeholders for example on occasion of congresses, promotional campaigns or public conventions. In this case the aim is to persuade the audience as to convince the customers about academic credibility and qualified educational offer.

University is often defined as a cultural institution or as an organization in common talk. Recently, the debate about the nature and significance of organizations has developed according to two main research perspectives, since the image of organizations as *superpersons* (Czerniawksa-Jorges, 1998) has replaced the old rationalistic claim that machines and organisms do represent the most adequate image of organizations (Morgan, 1986). In this perspective, organizations are conceived as sets of collective action undertaken in an effort to shape the world. Therefore, being an organization the academic institution could be considered a pattern of social action, where the actors are a few legitimized social groupings. These patterns of social actions produce shared meanings which are the core of organizational culture. The concept of organizational culture focuses on the beliefs, values and meanings used by members of an organization to make sense of the uniqueness of the organization and to understand how it originates, it operates and it evolves.

The debate between different organizational perspectives, between the rationalistic and the symbolic theory, is also mirrored by a different conception of organizational culture. The peculiarity of each research perspective is to be found in the following assumption: organizations *have* or rather *are* culture. The rationalistic approach considers culture as an organizational variable which should be managed - as for instance absenteeism, turnover rates and so on. In line with this, culture attains a mere functional aim, that is it contributes to the organizational process of adaptation and survival. To use a metaphor, culture is seen as a funnel which filters the outside inputs and adapts these to the

internal demands of the system. The most representative author of this research perspective is Schein (1990; 1992; 1999), who distinguishes three levels at which organizational culture may manifest itself: *observable artifacts*, *declared values* and *basic underlying assumptions*. First of all, when we enter an organization we observe and feel *artifacts*: for instance, examples of academic *artifacts* are the physical layout, the dress code, the manner in which people address to each other, the emotional intensity of the organization. The second level of organizational culture is made up by the *declared values* which are the explicit espoused norms and ideologies of the organization. In the chancellor inaugural speeches we find several examples of the academic *declared values*. Finally there is the most underlying and tacit level, namely the *basic assumptions* that determine unconscious and taken-for-granted perceptions, feelings and behaviour of the organizational members in reference to the nature of time, space, human relations.

On the other hand, the symbolist research perspective (Schultz, 1995) argues that organizations are and produce culture, seen then as a web of meanings which maintains the shared social reality. Similarly to the functional, this view too distinguishes between levels of organizational culture. The most evident one is made up by *physical, verbal and behavioural symbols*. Then at a more implicit and unconscious level we find the *cognitive world view* and the *ethos* that are the mental representation of the moral and ethical code of the organization. The difference between this classification and the one proposed by Schein is that here the levels are not independent from each other but rather interact with each other thus creating a web of meanings.

The present contribution aims at overcoming any opposition and narrow classification that is why the symbolist perspective is espoused (Mumby & Clair, 1997). Academic



organization is conceived as a social collective, which is produced, reproduced and transformed through the ongoing and goal-oriented communication practices of its members. As a consequence, the label 'academic discourse' recalls not simply discourse which occurs *within* the academic organization, rather support the argumentation that organization exist in so far their members *create* them through discourse. Discourse is thus the principal means by which academic members create a coherent social reality that frames the sense of what they do. To study academic communication is thus to analyse simultaneously the expression and the creation of the organizational structure. This is why *academese* as organizational discourse has been studied in reference to two main perspectives which characterise current lines of research: the cultural and the critical approach. Both perspectives concern the relationship between discourse and the creation of social reality although with different research implications.

Therefore, the cultural or interpretative approach operates at a descriptive level and focuses on the way in which the organization members' discursive practices contribute to the development of shared meanings. The principal goal within this perspective is to demonstrate the connection between shared norms and values of the organization and the means by which these norms and values are expressed. On the other hand, the critical approach to organizational discourse is focused on different issues. Although interested in exploring how organizational discourse shapes reality, as well as the cultural perspective, the critical approach investigates more closely the question of power and control in organizations. Critical discourse studies see organizations not only as social collectives where shared meanings are produced but rather as spaces of conflict where different groups compete to shape the social reality in ways that serve

their own interests. Most research in this perspective has focused on the investigation of control of symbolic and discursive resources. As economic resources, the symbolic ones are not distributed equally among members and interest groups, that is why organizational power is frequently exercised through the discourse of its members. Then the critical approach focuses not only on the relationship between power and discourse, but on the inequities that are produced and maintained as a result of this relationship.

In this context, straight distinctions are overcome by adopting both perspectives as this study attempts at analysing the cultural aspects of academic communication and through the critical approach focuses attention on the discursive strategies adopted by the organizational members to compete and to affirm their own view of reality.

### **For a diatextual approach to academic communication**

The pragmatic perspective allows for a contextual analysis of academic communication. In order to highlight the relevance of the *text-context* relationship, showing that “context is everything” (Engel, 1999), the interpretative format of *diatext* has been adopted, since it serves specific theoretical and methodological demands. The diatext is a semiotic device that helps the researcher in understanding the context as it is perceived and expressed by the text producers. Such a notion pertains to a psycho-semiotic perspective in discourse analysis, which aims at catching the dynamics of sense in the dialogue that every text finds with its context (Mininni, 1992; 2000). Every text is a *diatext* per se, since it is always situated as to enunciate the interlocutors’ sense. Moreover, every text operates as a *diatext* since the propositions which give life to it do represent sense potentialities, which find concrete application within the world of reference shared by the interlocutors. Then, the diatextual approach underlines the procedures of *attunement*

between the interlocutors' intentionality and the recognition of the enunciative situation. In deciding what to say and how it has to be said, the interlocutors co-construct in a perennial way the possible world within which their joined (and partially shared) intention takes sense: the situation of enunciation.

Concretely to investigate texts *diatextually* the researcher may focus on a few pragmatic markers such as for instance *indexicality markers* (the use of personal pronouns, deixis etc.), *positioning strategies* (identity roles, semantic options, etc), *involvement* (modalization, emotional traits, etc.), *illo-perlocutive actions* (indirect formats, transparency-opacity, etc.), *enunciation rhetoric* (figures of speech-think, style, etc.) *argumentation* (epistemic programs, etc.) and *polyphony* (intertextuality, quoting, etc). Some of these analytical procedures allow to find out the powerful devices of rhetorical argumentation which are often implicit in the academic *diatexts*.

### **The corpus of data**

The peculiarity of the texts which constitute the corpus of data answers the necessity to represent the variety of academic discourse. Actually, the data could be distinguished in two genres of academic discourse.

The first half is made up of 14 letters written by the academic candidates to the chancellor position to support their election during the academic year 1991-1992, 1997-1998 and 2000-2001.

The second half consists of three chancellor's inaugural speeches uttered on occasion of the beginning of the academic year in 1999-1998, 1999-2000, 2001-2002.

The two sub-corpora refer to different kind of academic discourse. The letters could be meant as *symmetric academic discourse* since they involve teachers and colleagues

which share the same background of knowledge and live the same microcosm (even if this format should be interpreted with reference to the peculiar asymmetry which marks any postulant–elector relationship). On the other hand, the inaugural speeches may be labelled as *asymmetric academic discourse* as they evoke and involve teachers but also students, management staff and several stakeholders. Although this, it should be underlined the specific political and thus persuasive intention expressed by both elements of the corpus even if with different final aims.

In the first case, the aim of the interlocutors is to gain the audience’s consent and trust as to win on the rivals. By the letters of “announcement of the own candidature to the chancellor position” the academics project their enunciative commitment on a political (*latu senso*) background as they are conscious they are competing for a vote. The communicative situation is defined by the authors of these letters according to the format of an *interlocutionary diatext* (Mininni 1992), as the project of sense is to mark the differentiation with the positions expressed by the interlocutors. Every candidate shapes his/her text according to the model of the *ideal reader* of the potential electorate and also by trying to be recognizable and preferable according to the argumentation strategies of their program. Moreover, the candidature’s construction has a diachronic dimension, since it develops across time. The topic variation has been investigated by focusing on the different value assigned to economical and financial themes within the electoral program. Namely, within the last quarter of this century, University (as prototype of ‘Academy’) has been hardly criticized by the so called *Unique Thought*, according to which “the academic world is nourished by a productivity spirit as to mark the time” (Billig 1996).

On the other hand, while within the letters the candidates act as potential guides of the Academic Institution, the second part of the corpus reports the voice of the chancellors in charge. The efficacy of the argumentative rhetoric produced by the inaugural speeches resides in the imaginary dialogue between components of the academic identity. As a consequence, the inaugural discourse could be seen as *intralocutionary diatext*, that is as a text situated in a space marked by dialogicity and consent.

Therefore, by the inaugural speech the chancellor aims at celebrating the Academic Institution both for its member and for all the potentials future customers of this organization. So the persuasive intent is not only self-focused, that is addressed to the University staff, but rather is social-focused as it attempts at conveying and promoting a specific public image of University as a customer-oriented organization.

### **Academic Discourse as Negotiated Credibility**

The analysis of the rhetorical dynamics in academic discourse claims the investigation of the topic of credibility, since both the potential chancellors in their candidature letters as well as the chancellor in charge with his inaugural speech face the problem of appearing credible to the audience's eyes.

In this perspective, credibility is not conceived as an individual trait which is part of the own personality but rather as a feature which is generally attributed to the speaker by the interlocutors. In other words *credibility* is *co-constructed* and *negotiated* (Gili, 1999; 2001).

According to the classic Goffmanian distinction, the dimensions of credibility may be distinguished in: author's credibility, animator's credibility and principal's credibility. Such a classification refers to three different enunciative functions: the animator is the

speaking machine, the author is the content producer, that is the one who creates the message and finally the principal is the spokesman, a person who speaks in the name of someone else.

As for the present corpus, the candidature letters show an overlapping between the principal's and the author's credibility. The potential chancellors speak for themselves in order to convince the audience that they are the right ones. Then, this strategy could be defined as a *self-promotional discourse*.

On the other hand, within the chancellor inaugural speech the roles of author and animator do not coincide perfectly with the principal, which is represented by University as a whole.

In other words, the credibility which is constructed and conveyed within the candidature letters is an *individual* and *context-specific* credibility, since it acknowledges the reliability of the candidate by making reference to his competence and past charges. Therefore, the roots of credibility could be traced back in the curriculum of the potential chancellor, who has already proved his/her ability in specific domains. Moreover, this kind of credibility is not simply *informative* that is based on facts and merits but rather it is *normative* as the audience trusts the candidates because of their membership to the Institution, because they share the same values, norms and worldview.

On the other hand, the credibility constructed within the inaugural speeches could be conceived as an *organizational* and an *external* credibility since the chancellor is acknowledged to be credible only on behalf of his membership to the academic Institution. This kind of credibility then is *normative* more than *informative* since the main aim of the inaugural speeches is not simply to inform the audience about what has happened within the academic year but rather to convey and strengthen the

organizational culture thus focusing on the affective dimension of organisational identification and on the credibility of its spokesman.

Further, the chancellor grounds his credibility on the involvement dimension showing attachment and commitment to his organization. Differently, the candidates base their credibility on the detachment dimension by justifying their decision to compete stressing the fact that they hide no personal interest but rather that they feel it as a commitment towards the Institution.

### **Metadiscourse as argumentative procedure**

At a socio-cognitive level the core of this kind of communication is the need for ratification, which is evident in the discursive search for support, expressed by the interlocutors through the use of some rhetorical devices such as for instance by expressing collegiality, by resolving difficulties and by avoiding disputation. At the pragmalinguistic level these dynamics are made clear through the analysis of *metadiscourse*.

The notion of *metadiscourse* is one of the most interesting aspects of pragmatic analysis. It takes its origin from Halliday's (1973) distinction between the ideational elements and the expressive meanings of a text, that is between strategic intentions and discursive means. Thus, *metadiscourse* does refer to all the non propositional aspects of discourse, which facilitate the reader in organising the prose coherently and in catching the author's personality and credibility.

More simply, *metadiscourse* can be seen as the 'discourse about discourse', which highlights the author's linguistic and rhetorical intentions and his attitude, thus shaping his/her relationship with the listener/reader (Crismore et al, 1993; Hyland, 1998).

*Metadiscourse* is present in everyday language: it is a major feature of communication in different settings and genres, which is not only conditioned to the author's will but rather to the specific norms and expectations of the professional and cultural community in which communication takes place. Therefore, the pragmatics of *metadiscourse* could be fully understood only by locating communication in its context, as it varies in function of the community of interpreters which receives the text. Its research significance lies in the role of context interpretation: *metadiscourse* helps the audience in grasping the way by which acts of communication define and maintain social groups. Such consideration will help us to better understand the role played by credibility.

As for the investigation of *metadiscourse* several taxonomies have been proposed (Beauvais, 1989; Crismore, 1989; Nash, 1992; Mauranen, 1993), but one of the most frequently adopted categorisation system distinguishes between textual and interpersonal *metadiscourse* (Crismore et al. 1993).

The label *textual metadiscourse* refers to the *mode* of discourse (Halliday, 1973), namely to all the devices which allow the reader to unmask the author's intentions by establishing precise and explicit interpretations. As a consequence, *textual metadiscourse* could be investigated through the use of specific textual indices, such as *logical connectives* (e.g. "in addition", "thus", "and", "therefore", etc.), *frame markers* (e.g. "finally", "to repeat", "our aim here", etc.), *endophoric markers* (e.g. "noted above", "see Fig.1, below", etc), *evidentials* (e.g. "according to", "X states that") and *code glosses* (e.g. "namely", "in other words", "such as", etc.). The broader function of these markers is to help the reader in grasping meanings by connecting clauses, explaining concepts, referring information from other sources.



On the other hand *interpersonal metadiscourse* refers to the *tenor* of discourse and identifies all the communicative devices which alert the reader about the author's perspective, thus shaping their reciprocal relationship. *Interpersonal metadiscourse* is evident through the use of *hedges* (e.g. "might", "perhaps", "it is possible", etc.), *emphatics* (e.g. "in fact", "obviously", "definitely", etc.), *attitude markers* (e.g. "I agree", "X claims that"), *person markers* (e.g. "I", "me", "our") and *relational markers* (e.g. "frankly", "note that", "you can see", etc.). The function of these items is to highlight the author's attitude both to the content of communication and to the readers. Moreover, the strategic use of *metadiscourse* serves three main purposes we may identify by adopting the aristotelian distinction between *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. First of all it has a rational and logical function that is it explicitly links ideas and arguments, it signals meaning relations. This *logos* function is mainly accomplished through the propositional content: how the writers choose to define and approach problems, to support claims, to state conclusions. In this case, *textual metadiscourse* helps the author in organizing the text and the reader in decoding it through the argumentative direction suggested by the writer (e.g. through logical connectives such as "in conclusion", "the point is", "I will now discuss").

The second function of *metadiscourse* is to create the *ethos* that is to build credibility. The perceived authority and integrity of the speaker is particularly important where candour and honesty are seen as essential elements of credible communication. To this purpose *metadiscourse* involves linguistic elements which help the reader in realizing the *ethos* by projecting the speaker or writer as credible, trustworthy, competent. By this the use of *interpersonal metadiscourse* and in particular hedges, emphatics and

relational markers help the addressee in evaluating the interlocutor (e.g. “we strongly believe that”, “there is good reason to believe that”, “I know that”).

Finally, the third function is the *pathos* appeal as the writer attains at specific desired effects. It is important that the ideal readers perceive the contents of the text as relevant and important to them. The *pathos* dimension is emphasized by a strategic use of person pronouns which personalise discourse and involve more closely the readers. Moreover, the use of the inclusive first person presents the goals as shared and transparent. Rhetorical questions give the audience the impression of directly participate. Modals such as ‘must’, ‘have to’, ‘need’, ‘should’ contribute then to align the goals and desires of the speaker with those of the audience (e.g. “our University”, “Your collaboration”, “Can we do more?”, “this transformation might be regarded as”).

Obviously, although very accurate, such a taxonomy could not restrict the liveliness of spoken language which could not be reduced to narrow categories (Hyland 1998). Anyway, this schema could be a useful reference point to better describe our corpus, that is this taxonomy has been adopted to better investigate the metadiscursive levels of academic communication. This choice answers to the the main aim of the study which is to unmask the author’s strategic intention to depict himself as adequate and social acceptable. Crismore’s categorisation was then simplified to suit this purpose.

### **The arguments of academese**

A qualitative approach was used to analyse the data which encompass two kinds of corpora (internal academic communication and external academic communication texts) as to better understand the nature and the dynamics of sense production revealed by this kind of discourses. Then, the structure of the texts, their communicative style, the *metadiscourse* have been investigated both at a textual and interpersonal level.

Moreover, metaphors have been analysed, arguing that these are not only nice poetic devices rather they shape the way people relate to reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The findings of the study are discussed below.

### **Strategies of self-promotional academic text: the academic endorsement letter**

The first half of the corpus, the 14 candidature letters of academics to the chancellor's position, gives a good example of *self promoting* text. All kind of communicative interaction which aims at self promoting is ventured to the circuit of the *winking communication* (Mininni, 2001). This textual typology switches the *winking communication circuit* through the *primus inter pares* rhetoric: the enunciator is bound to promote his/her self by underlining any similarity and affinity with the interlocutor.

The first general strategy does introduce the self/text relationship with a zero degree of emotionality. Differently from other persuasive situations, in this specific context, the enunciator doesn't appeal to feelings. On the contrary, the *emotional tenor* of discourse is filtered through the masked rationality of the candidature, which is depicted as a moral duty for the sake of the institution.

The beginning and the closure of the *self-promotional* text are the most *winking* phase, marked by specific stylistic features. The winking rhetoric makes reference to a sort of 'gentlemen's agreement', to a tacit deal between interlocutors and to common interpretative repertoires. The aim is to promote the self by strategically managing impressions and by conveying the best possible public image.

Although several *interpersonal* differences between candidates are to be observed (i.e. they are differently aged, they do belong to different Faculties, they declare different programs and show different political orientations), a similar structure and content

organization is observed. On the other hand, no *intra-individual* difference is remarkable since every candidate preserves his own personal style even through the years.

The structure of the texts could be summed up as follows:

- Direct address to the receiver: i.e. “Dear colleague” (a.y. 1997);
- Introduction and justification of the candidature: i.e. “Several Colleagues, Friends and Students have invited me to present my candidature and especially by such a difficult moment I cannot give up” (a.y. 1991);
- Explanation of the own competence and curriculum vitae: i.e. “I believe that you will already know my activities in service of the University of Bari” (a.y. 2000);
- Description of the scenario and of all the institutional issues which need to be urgently solved: i.e. “Besides all the experience I have matured within the academic world in the last years, I would like you to focus attention on some of the most urgent tasks which wait for our Institution” (a.y. 1997);
- Conclusion and claim for support: i.e. I would be glad if you would honour me with your trust thus contributing to the debate about the future of our Institution” (a.y. 2000);

The direct appeal to the receiver may have two formats: a formal and an informal one. Most part of the letters begins with a formal “dear colleague”, while some open with the traditional ‘dear’ followed by the surname of the receiver, thus conveying the idea of a more personal communication and invitation. The choice might depend on different variables such as for instance the kind of formal or informal relationship between interlocutors, the personal style or the age of the candidate.

Afterwards the letters briefly introduce the motivations to the candidature. More specifically, the communicative strategy could be further distinguished into two argumentative modalities: *a self-oriented* and an *other-oriented argumentation*. Some candidates do justify their candidature by underlining the pressure they received by

some colleagues, which do trust them and acknowledge them as trustworthy and reliable spokesmen. On the other hand, some other candidates explain that they have decided to compete for the chancellor's position only because they thought themselves worth of it, with respect to their high qualified career or simply because they feel this as a moral duty towards the *institutional family*.

By giving notice of their candidature to colleagues, the enunciators might use one of the following explicit discursive forms:

- Surrender to the others' pressures: e.g. "Several colleagues of both my faculty and of the other faculties of the University have pushed me to candidate my self" (a.y. 1991);
- Demand for reflection and consideration: e.g. "I have matured this intention after a conscious reasoning and a profound analysis of the situation we are living in" (a.y. 1997);
- Fulfilment of a pre-existing *cursus onerum et honorum*: e.g. "My candidature for the chancellor's position simply means to let my competence be still on service of our University" (a.y.1991);
- Declaration of the personal availability to consider the other within the program: e.g. "Within these 30 years I have had the chance to better understand the problems of our University and the expectations of the ones who work for it" (a.y. 2000);

In line with this, the following paragraphs do describe in detail the scientific and academic curriculum of the candidates, focusing on personal and social competence, on the charges the candidates have had in the past. This aims at showing their credibility and at gaining reliability to the audience's eyes.

This strategic effect is further amplified by the description of all the institutional issues which need to be solved as soon as possible. By this description we find a different articulation of the priorities which are considered as such by the candidates. This strategy hides a different conception of University meant as an accessible *ivory tower*, where knowledge resides very far from daily life or as a *modern firm* which produces

knowledge but also practical skills and competence. These two opposed *worldviews*, which will become more evident in the letters, actually refer to the traditional separation between the humanistic and scientific research perspective.

Finally, all the candidates conclude their letters by asking for concrete support, that is for the vote, thus showing availability to the dialogue in consonance with the most widespread *declared values* of collaboration and affiliation proclaimed by the Institution (Ex. 1, 2).

(1) “I would like to be considered as a co-ordinator rather than as an autocrat” (a.y. 1997)

(2) “I ask for your personal contribution of ideas and suggestions as to better define a program, which should be based on the needs of society, on the demands of our students and on our wish to produce science and welfare by consent” (a.y. 1991).

As for the analysis of *metadiscourse* a massive presence of *interpersonal* cues has been observed, both in attitude and person markers. This seems to be in consonance with the research hypothesis, since this kind of academic discourse aims at promoting the self (*pathos function*) and at constructing credibility (*ethos function*). That is why the candidates ground their discourse on personal (by using *person markers* such as the pronoun “I” versus “you”) and social identity (by using *attitude markers* such as “I believe”, “I consider”, etc.). *Textual metadiscourse* is merely restricted to the use of *code glosses*, which have the function to explain and to clarify demands and offers of this candidatures (e.g. “for instance”, “let’s think about”, “for what concerns”).

As for the use of rhetorical figures, the letters are rich in metaphors.

More specifically, three significant images of University as educational system recur.

Assuming that metaphor is much more than a mere poetic device, rather is a *way to*

*relate to reality*, a totally opposed conception of the academic Institution and of its development in time has been found out.

Before going into further details it should be underlined that the letters actually cover a very significant time-span in the history of University. Therefore, since the late 90ies University has gradually experienced a general renewal of its public image and of its social essence as knowledge producer. University has rethought itself in terms of educational offer and strategic role within the labour market dynamics.

In this sense, the metaphors used within the letters are very important cues in understanding how this process has taken place and how it has been experienced by its members. The use of metaphors is thus relevant to examine how academic members live University and how do they conceive it.

Therefore, two different images of the academic institution could be distinguished: an economic and pragmatic conception mirrored in the biological metaphor and a more humanistic and traditional one represented in the image of a knowledge temple. This is most interesting if it is stressed that these metaphors perfectly reflect the scientific membership of the candidates, that is for instance the candidates which do belong to the world of Economics use the first type of metaphors, the candidates which belong to the scientific domain depict University as a lively organism while the ones which work in the field of Humanities see University as the centre of research and knowledge. Obviously to use a metaphor rather than another means to project a different public image of the Academic Institution bringing about several different practical implications.

In other words, to see University as an economic firm to manage means to stress organisational values such as competition and benchmarking. This view is also

highlighted by the use of terms which belong to the so called *business*, that is the language of business such as “to develop strategic management tools”, “to maximise results”, “strategic vision and mission”, “to increase outputs”, “to be more efficient and competitive”. The traditional economical logic is thus applied to the academic world by recalling the commercial dynamic of request/offer within the world of education, since the academic offer for competence is seen as a response to a precise public demand (ex.3, 4, 5, 6).

(3) “The future of our University depends on the way in which we will be able to brush up our own didactic offer” (a.y.1991)

(4) “the detachment of the Polytechnic should be experienced as a challenge to do more and better” (a.y.1991)

(5) “We should prepare a portfolio of initiatives as to be ready when it is necessary to” (a.y. 1997)

(6) “We should move from the old conception of “Assisted University” to that of “Academic Firm” that is oriented not only to research but rather to the production of product and services” (a.y. 1997)

On the other, hand to depict University as an organism means to highlight organizational values such as growth, collaboration and affiliation. In this perspective, University is conceived as a social system which pays much attention to its inner balance as well as to the contact with the outer macro-social context. Any social and economic growth is meant as an advantage for the Institution which should abandon its



old image of distant Institution as to become more competitive on the market in comparison with the offers of other public and private institutions (Ex. 7 and 8).

(7) “Our University should be seen as an organism which is in synergical and balanced relation with the productive and social environment” (a.y. 1997)

(8) “This systemic perspective based on total solidarity allows for the growth of every compartment of the University which is functional to the growth of the others” (a.y. 1991)

Finally, it recurs the most traditional image of University as the seat of knowledge where students and teachers are seen as the essence of the academic organization more than mere employees or customers. The academic institution is depicted as a “big family” based on the reciprocal support and collaboration of its members (Ex. 9, 10, 11, 12).

(9) “The chancellor should count on the democratic, pluralist and transparent participation of all” (a.y. 1991)

(10) “A collective commitment is necessary thus involving every components of the University” (a.y. 2000)

(11) “this is the University of all of us” (a.y. 2000)

(12) “I would like to renew my commitment by respecting a democratic confrontation of ideas and by validating the trust you gave to me” (a.y. 1991).

Then, the communicative genre brought about by these texts could be classified as an original fusion of narrative and argumentation. These texts represent in fact both a *narrative of personal and collective identity* and a *strategic argumentation* in support of a specific purpose. Actually they are self and collective narrative as they report briefly both the personal story of each candidate and the story of the academic institution which is often depicted as their community. Moreover the aim of this discursive choice is to awake the sense of belonging by the receivers through the use of specific linguistic cues such as for instance the use of the personal pronouns ( i.e. “we”, “you”, “our” associated with “I”) thus conveying the idea that common goals could be achieved through this candidature. On the other hand they are argumentative in nature since in order to attain this goal they use communication strategically. In a sense, these letters could be considered as political texts if by this we mean texts which report issues of public interest and which are strategically oriented at manipulating the opinion the audience has about the object of discourse.

### **Strategies of public image promotion: the academic inaugural speech**

The other half of the corpus is made up by the chancellor’s inaugural speeches on occasion of the beginning of the academic year in 1998-1999, 1999-2000, 2001-2002.

These texts are quite different from the letters both in contents and nature. First of all, generally the inaugural speeches are written texts read out before a very special kind of audience which is both *intra-institutional* and *extra-istitutional*, that is composed both by internal academic members such as teachers, management staff and students and by many external stakeholders.

Therefore, the chancellor's inaugural speech could be conceived both as a *promotional genre* designed to construct and convey a specific corporate image to the media and to all the potential new customers as well as a form of *internal communication* whose rhetorical importance resides in building credibility and imparting confidence to the academic members.

Then the aim is double, that is to promote the public image of University and in the mean time to celebrate the Institution, which in turn is depicted as a family, whose father (the chancellor) here preserves. In other words, the academic inaugural speech is both a sort of 'living advertising' of the goods and of the services offered by the academic Institution and a public acknowledgement of all the efforts of its members which do contribute to the construction of this successful image of University.

Similarly to the corpus of letters, these texts too show several examples of both of *interpersonal* and *textual metadiscourse* which serve different strategic purposes. *Textual metadiscourse* makes use of *code glosses* and *logical connectives*, as to better explain the portfolio of competence offered by the academic Institution (*logos* function). On the other hand the relationship with the audience is strengthened through the use of some *interpersonal* cues such as for example *person* and *attitude markers* (*ethos* and *pathos* functions).

The contents of these public inaugural speeches is mostly focused on the state of art, on what has been realised and on future programs. As with the corpus of letters, a different articulation of the priorities and of the issues which are considered important is to be observed (i.e. educational offer, educational rights, demands for new buildings, relationships and collaboration with other Institutions). This is a significant cue as to analyse the different conception of University brought about by the interlocutors, who

do belong to different scientific communities and thus obviously are spokesmen of different organizational values.

In details, the corpus is made up of three inaugural speeches: two are proclaimed by a chancellor who belongs to the scientific community and one is spoken by a chancellor who belongs to the world of Economics. Therefore, they evoke and support completely different views of the academic Institution and of its radical renewal process we already spoke of.

Moreover, several *interpersonal* differences are to be observed between the two speakers. The first chancellor is older, he was a teacher in Mathematics, he has been chancellor three times and expresses a more conservative view of University meant as a traditional *ivory tower*, which is almost inaccessible from the outside. In opposition, the other chancellor is younger, he was a teacher in Statistics and supports an economical view of University, mostly based on the metaphor of a *modern public firm* oriented towards the customers' satisfaction philosophy, as a social arena where students could be concretely trained to work and to social life.

Nevertheless, no *intra-individual* differences between the two inaugural speeches of the first chancellor are remarkable. His style constructs and conveys an image of University as a close and distant world. The Academic Institution is depicted as a big family, whose inner harmony is shaped on the distrust towards the outer world, as an organism who fears every contact with reality since it could negatively influence its inner balance, which in turn is warranted by the synergical action of all components (ex. 13).

Then the chancellor focuses on the value of collaboration stressing the importance of research and the pivotal role of students. The articulation of his discourse is mostly based on the educational role which is traditionally attributed to University in our

society. He stresses the importance of the *tacit deal* which bounds students and teachers and which is based on the preservation and perpetuation of the knowledge's patrimony as to build up new generations.

In line with this, the value of autonomy which is the mark of the academic transition and renewal in the new millenium is experienced as a chance to improve the educational offer and to work for the quality of research. The *declared values* in these two inaugural speeches are those of abnegation, commitment and gratitude (ex. 14).

(13) "Our University has so many problems that actually everybody should synergistically commit himself" (a.y. 1998-1999)

(14) "If we continue to work together with the same commitment and abnegation we will create together the conditions for a happy transition to the new millenium" (a.y. 1999-2000)

Moreover, these two inaugural speeches are rich in quotations and in Latin words (ex.15, 16). This seems to mark a personal style hinting in the mean time at the academic curriculum of the speaker. Nevertheless, this communicative strategy plays also a very important rhetorical role since both the use of Latin words and that of quotations, very common and frequent within *academese*, do reinforce the image of University as a traditional and stable Institution, as the seat of pure knowledge and wisdom (Puggelli, 2000).

(15) "According to Gordon Leff two are the dimensions which does characterize the role of University: the ideological one as for the reproduction of ideas and the professional one as for formation. Modern University should absolutely add to these dimensions also an interaction role, that is stressing the importance of the relationship with the territory" (a. y. 1998-1999).

(16) "I declare officially open this *Dies Academicus*" (a.y. 1998-1999)

On the other hand, the second inaugural speech conveys a more modern image of University as a sort of knowledge industry which supplies external and internal customers with goods and services, this in line with the speaker's scientific origin. According to this chancellor the University of the third millenium should abandon its old image of high bell tower, should come out from its long-time isolation opening up to the market's demands (ex. 17).

(17) "The old image of the University of bell towers is far away then (if it has ever existed). On the other hand, the trust in collaboration, in interchange and integration of all components of the educational system of our region is growing up" (a. y. 2001-2002).

In this perspective, the self-government process is seen as a chance to change mentality and to foster a new and more modern view of the Academic Institution which by this becomes a forge of knowledge based on practical skills more than on theoretical notions.

(18) "Our University should become a social flywheel, a multiplier of human resources" (a.y. 2001-2002)

(19) "The firm dimension which is already part of us is easily understandable by counting all the employees of our University which are 3606: 1693 teachers and 1927 technical and management staff members: this data is sufficient to define University as one of the widest firm of the Region, with its duties of internal communication, of trade-union negotiation, and rigorous application of the agreed upon contracts" (a.y. 2001-2002)

(20) “The logic of the new reformation hints at competition thus demanding for a more efficient decision making processes which in the past were almost unknown to the Academy” (a.y. 2001-2002)

Moreover, this evolution is explicitly taken-for-granted (ex. 20) thus presupposing that all the academic members have already acknowledged and accepted this transition and moreover have espoused this new *worldview*. Competition is then the most emphasized *declared value*, the one which mark the differentiation with the past and with the *Academy* in contrast with the modern *educational firm* (ex. 20).

(21) “Students should be convinced about the quality of what they will find within our departments. We should convince the families who have to afford high expenses about the motives of their economical sacrifice. We should win on the widespread mentality that “the neighbour’s grass is always greener”. (a.y. 2001-2002)

Students are once more a privileged addressee of these inaugural speech but in this last case they play a different role. In consonance with the economical perspective, students are seen mostly as customers which merit first-class goods and services, as they pay for them. Then the quality of the educational offer should always be up-to-date as to satisfy every needs of the customer and to remain as competitive as possible (ex.21). That is why as by the traditional commercial campaigns the students and their families are the targeted interlocutors which need to be convinced and persuaded. As to sell his product the chancellor warrants about the quality and the distinctive features of the supplied services focusing on the credentials of the educational offer. To this purpose the

chancellor strategically evokes the traditional and reassuring image of University as culture producer even in competition with the other Atenei (ex. 22).

(22) “Science, high qualified skills, civic and democratic education are our most authentic credentials we learnt from our masters and we now transfer updated to our sons ” (a.y. 2001-2002)

This strategy is evident in the emphasis given to the improvement of the quality of academic life. More specifically the chancellor makes reference to the so called URP – Ufficio Relazioni con il Pubblico- (Public Relationship Organism) which in line with the customers’ satisfaction philosophy tries to answer to most urgent needs of the students in terms of both goods and services (ex. 23).

(23) “Nowadays the organisational innovation program is rapidly developing. Some results are already observable. The realisation of a remote secretariat system is going on as to facilitate the relationships between customers –first of all distant and working students- and the university structures” (a.y. 2001-2002)

Nonetheless, as by every promotional campaign besides the concrete distinctive features of the good/service supplied the chancellor emphasizes its emotional dimension by stressing the peculiarity of the own educational offer. University is then depicted as a corporate organization which is able to conjugate apparently opposed values, that is reason and passion. Moreover, such a reference recalls a traditional stereotype about southern Italians which are generally thought to be more passionate than the northern ones. This is an interesting device as to stress the differentiation and peculiarity of the



own educational offer, its distinctive features which aim at convincing the students about the quality of the own Ateneo which also reflects the own lifestyle (ex. 24).

(24)“This was and still is reason and passion for us and so with reason and passion I declare officially open the academic year 2001-2002” (a.y. 2001-2002)

### **Concluding remarks**

*Academese* does represent a discursive universe where the organizational culture of University as a Public Institution based on high education and research shapes it self. As a consequence, the analysis of *academese* helps in understanding the way through which University conceives its social function.

By talking as academic members, teachers mould a specific interpretative repertoire which switches beliefs and expectations related to the social and cultural role of the Institution they identify with. Actually, academic discourse is characterized by a double dynamics which aims at explaining the type of culture the academic organization has (or is) and moreover at investigating the modalities through which the Institution supplies symbolic resources as to face the tasks brought about by the social evolution.

Thus, the argumentative structure of *academese* is supported by a meta-discursive rhetoric of credibility, which aims in the mean time at warranting about its inner coherence and at promoting its external public image. Recently, these two sides which actually are intrinsic to the argumentative rhetoric of *academese* have found their common ground within an economical conception of the world. The most explicit index of this convergence is given by the nature of the root metaphor of University as “industry, firm, market of knowledge”.

Moreover, the various *diatexts* analysed in this contribution show how this process of radical evolution, which has changed the relationship between University and the macro-societal context within the last ten years, is reflected by some aspects of the argumentative rhetoric of *academese* it self. As a result, being active interpreters of this universe of discourse means to mould a new identity profile which allows to feel more efficient and productive, more responsible towards social needs, although less legitimised to aspire to freer and worthier “forms of life”.

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