Inaugural Speeches by Conservative Prime Ministers From 2010 to 2022: A Consolidated Rhetoric

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Abstract

The Conservative Party has been in power for more than 10 years in Great Britain, from 2010 until the time of writing this document and five Prime Ministers have succeeded from David Cameron to Rishi Sunak, now in office. The document analyzes and seeks to explain how Conservative leaders have informed the country and communicated with the people every time each of them took office and gave his inaugural speech. Through speech analysis I worked on each inaugural speech and tried to explain their differences and similarities even though the genre of inaugural speeches doesn't leave much space for the speaker to express their policies and measures in detail because it only lasts a handful of minutes and can give a simple indication of what the new PM will do. Surely the most interesting aspect of this type of discourse is the PM's sense of leadership and decisiveness which may or may not emerge from the words, syntactic structures and rhetorical figures they use to communicate their ideas to the country.

Keywords: inaugural speeches, UK, Conservative Party, Discourse analysis, political discourse

1. Introduction

This article deals with the study of a typical form of public discourse in the British political world that occurs when a new Prime Minister (PM) is elected or takes office and represents their first official appearance in public from the lectern at 10 Downing Street. These brief speeches, about 500 to 1,000 words, last only a few minutes, and give a first glimpse into what the new Prime Minister's intentions are; he/she discloses or reiterates the planned policies and measures of the government on economic, foreign affairs and social issues. This type of speech has both an informative function of publicly telling the nation that a new government is about to form, but also a persuasive one, since it serves the purpose of communicating the new PM's political priorities to the citizens, the opposition and the world as well. Bennett refers to these speeches as "rhetorical promises" and maintains that "the optimistic invocation of a better future […] constitutes a central feature not just of these speeches but […] of everyday political discourse" (2001, p. 49).

In this research I will examine the inaugural speeches delivered by the British Conservative PMs' from 2010 to 2022, who either saw their mandate end naturally, in the case of the first Cameron government, or prematurely, as for May, Johnson and Truss. Sunak, at the time of writing has recently taken office as Prime Minister, so is dealt with separately.

1.1 British Political Context Context 2010–2022

Politically, the British Conservative Party has been in power since 2010.First with David Cameron, who without an absolute majority governed in coalition with Nick Clegg's Lib-Dem for his five-year mandate. Cameron won a second term in the 2015 election after a stunning electoral victory. In his second term, the Conservative PM focused on the renegotiation of relations with the European Union which would lead to the referendum on the permanence of the United Kingdom in the EU in June 2016. It was the outcome of the referendum that caused his resignation on 24 June of that year as he had campaigned to remain and felt that he could no longer lead a government that would have to commit to leaving the EU. Thus, after the defeat at the Brexit Referendum he announced his resignation by saying: "I do not think it would be right for me to try to be the captain that steers our country to its next destination" (Note 1).

When Cameron resigned, Theresa May became the leader of the Conservative Party and the new UK Prime Minister. She was supposed to carry out the Brexit negotiations with the European Union, but after three versions of her draft withdrawal agreement were rejected by Parliament, she decided to resign and was succeeded by Boris Johnson, who remained in office for three years. Due to some ethical scandals such as breaking lockdown rules during the coronavirus pandemic, and after more than 50 members of his government resigned in protest against his misbehaviour, he reluctantly announced his resignation.

Liz Truss succeeded him but her premiership was really short. Amid a government crisis after less than 50 days in office she has become the shortest-serving Prime Minister in the history of the United Kingdom. In fact, backed by Mr Kwarteng, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, she announced a mini-budget that proposed cutting taxation significantly. This was poorly received by financial markets, blamed for a rapid fall in the value of the pound, and prompted a response from the Bank of England. The budget was also criticised by the International Monetary Fund, US President Joe Biden, the opposition Labour Party and many within Truss's party (Note 2). It was highly unpopular with the public, and contributed to a large fall in popularity of the Conservative party and for Truss personally. She was obliged to resign from office (Note 3).

Rishi Sunak replaced Truss as the new Leader of the Conservative Party and subsequently as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and he is still in office.

1.2 Literature on the Subject

In this research we will focus on the inaugural speeches of the five Conservative Prime Ministers from 2010 to 2022, to analyse their structure and their main linguistic features, notably in terms of modality and rhetorical tools. The speeches analysed are identified as follows:

David Cameron. 12 May 2010 = DC1

David Cameron, 8 May 2015 = DC2

Theresa May, 13 July 2016 = TM

Boris Johnson, 24 July 2019 = BJ

Liz Truss, XX September 2019 = LT

Rishi Sunak, YY October 2022 = RS

Research into inaugural speeches is fairly consolidated, in particular the analysis of the speeches given by American presidents (Pramadya, 2021; Jegede, 2020; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014; Taylor, 2021) (Note 4). Less literature exists on lesser-known figures, e.g., presidents of European institutions or prime ministers of single countries, whereas more relevance has been given to some issues dealt with by country leaders such as the management of Covid emergency (Jaworska & Vasquez, 2022; Musolf, 2022; Jarvis, 2022; Ward, 2021), Brexit (Wodak, 2018; Krzyżanowski, 2019; Partington & Zuccato, 2018; Schnapper, 2018), climate change (Willis, 2017)and others themes. Inaugural speeches have been addressed less (Nota 5).

British Prime Ministers' inaugural speeches share some structural and linguistic features with presidential speeches since in both cases they aim to make their political objectives clear, to build trust and hope, show empathy with their audience as well as reaffirm their policies in the domain of the economy, foreign affairs and social issues, but political, cultural and discursive differences between the American and the British contexts do exist.

Trosborg maintains that presidential inaugural speeches are not actually delivered by the individual leader but by the institution they represent. He also affirms that "inaugural speeches share common traits characteristic of the symbolic act of inauguration[but] one can also find specific traits contributed by the particular president" (1997, p. 137). and though he focuses on the American scenario, the idea may apply to all leaders who take power.

Pramadya is convinced that inaugural speeches are powerful tools for swaying public opinion and in so doing a political leader "can influence (or strengthen) the current power structure" (2021, p. 1).

2. Methodology

Discourse Analysis (DA) was used as a methodological research tool in the paper. DA explores language based on the context in which the communicative act takes place so it considers language in real-life use. Foucault (1969), the forerunner of discourse studies believed that the world around us is organised through knowledge. In particular, he thought that some people and social groups generate ideas about the world that they manage to transform into accepted truths that become laws. These laws are recognised as the norm whereby a set of notions is routinely accepted within a society, influence it and in turn society shapes and reinforces those notions. Of

course, since society changes what it postulates as true over time, it is central to understand the mechanisms by which certain people or groups of people are able to shape knowledge.

Some scholars such as van Dijk (1993), Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (2004) (Note 6) have focused on power, as people or groups who are in a position of power towards other people or groups who may instead be excluded, dominated and subordinated. They argue that discourse theory has to do with hierarchical institutional issues and their approach is named Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Here DA will be intended as a text-based qualitative analysis used to represent the way some political leaders (British newly-elected Conservative prime ministers) communicate with the nation in the very first phase of the mandate (inaugural speeches). The underlying principle of this paper is that language is a powerful means of persuasive communication and guarantees collaboration. It can change people's opinions and ideas and encourage behavioural changes by stimulating the recipient to adopt new attitudes.

The inaugural speeches under consideration may seem to have a merely symbolic function but they are important political speeches. In fact, though they are very short texts, they constitute a special moment in which the speaker is in front of an entire nation to express the idea of government they intend to establish, also mentioning the policies and fundamental principles for the development of the country during their mandate. Unlike American presidents, who are both head of state and head of the Government, British Prime Ministers are still important (international) representatives of their country both in the eyes of their citizens and their international partners. s.

To achieve credibility, they carefully choose their words and perfect their speeches by using precise linguistic strategies. Here I will focus on three elements that seemed to me most relevant in the inaugural speech of Conservative UK premiers between 2010 and 2022:

1) Clusivity, with the analysis of the pronouns through which politicians give or limit inclusiveness of the audience.

2) Modality, with particular reference to modal verbs

3) Rhetorical figures: with a focus on metaphor as a way of conceptualizing a particular idea in terms of another.

3. Analysis of the Speeches

There are common features in British PM inaugural speeches. Each of them makes reference to the Monarch's invitation to form a new government and their acceptance of the appointment. This is a fixed formula which only slightly differs for RS who is the first to refer to King Charles III following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Another typical element is the homage that every PM pays to their predecessor, regardless of whether they belong to another party, for example Cameron's homage to Brown or to the same party.

Despite slight variations in the structure of the speech, in most cases common elements exist. A reference to the programme the new PM is going to implement, focussing either on him/herself in person or on the government and the party supporting him/her. Then, some words are often dedicated to thanking and encouraging the people/the country/the British – regardless of the name used – by using hooray words that emphasise the strength, unity and peculiarities of the citizens of the United Kingdom. By 'hooray words', we mean lexis which has a social positive connotation, words that will easily find the audience's support. They refer to "ideals that everyone embraces, whatever they believe these ideals consist in" (White, 2003, p. 61) and the speeches are dotted with them: hope, future, better, strong, children are examples of these. Every speech ends with a promise, a motivational sentence and thanking.

3.1 Structure and Content of the Speeches

3.1.1 DC1

Cameron starts his 2010 inaugural speech by saying he has accepted the Queen's invitation to form a government. He then pays tribute to his predecessor without mentioning his name but by saying *the outgoing prime minister*. He recognises that the 13 years of Labour government have made Britain *more open at home and more compassionate abroad*.

He then explains the reasons for a coalition government, which has only taken place once in British history. After saying that a hung parliament is the result of having no overall majority in parliament, he focuses on the *deep* and *pressing* problems to solve by using a tricolon: *a huge deficit*, *deep social problems*, *a political system in need of reforms*. Through this he can justify a coalition government he defines as *proper* and *full*. He can provide his country with a *strong*, *stable*, *good* and *decent* government and he uses *I believe* and *I think* to support his theory. This gives the speech a sense of necessity: *…that I think we need so badly* or *…that we need today*.

Through bicolons he gives rhythm and symmetry to his words and makes them more credible:

*…**put aside party differences** and **work hard***

*…**for the common good** and **for the national interest***

The government needed is *strong* and *decisive*. He goes on to explain why he entered into politics and justifies this choice with the *love* for his country. The verbs *I think* and *I believe* follow one another and by means of a tetracolon, *to face up to…*, *to confront …*, *to take…*, *to lead…* he says the result of his action will be that *together we can reach better times ahead*.

When he talks about their tasks (he and the government) he refers to the need *to rebuild trust* in politics which must be pursued by *cleaning up expenses*, *… reforming parliament…*, *making sure people are in control*. A tricolon gives a pleasant sound to the speech and every element is preceded by a *yes that is about/yes it is about* which shows he is knowledgeable. He has no doubts. The sentence *politicians are always their servants and never their masters*, referring to the people, though banal and somewhat irrelevant, strengthens the idea of rebuilding trust in the political system.

He also conveys his conviction of individual accountability by stating that *real change* happens when everyone (not only the government) *pulls together*, *comes together*, *works together*. So the tricolon centres on togetherness and is followed by a tetracolon in which he refers to a sense of responsibility *to ourselves*, *to our families*, *to our communities*, *to others*.

From the second half of the speech Cameron uses the expression *I want* very frequently. Talking about (his)/the values of this government he says *I want to help try and build a more responsible society* and *I want to make sure that my government always looks after the elderly, the frail, the poorest*…(tricolon). Another tricolon follows in which he says *I want us to build an economy that…/I want us to build a society with…/I want a political system that…*

The government is built on clear values: *values of freedom, values of fairness, and values of responsibility* (tricolon). Before thanking the audience he makes a final reference to those values with another tricolon: *rebuilding family*, *rebuilding community*, *above all*, *rebuilding responsibility*.

3.1.2 DC2

In 2015 Cameron begins his speech by saying that he has been invited by the Queen to form a majority Conservative government. This contrasts with what he was compelled to do five years earlier when he announced the coalition government. He then pays tribute to Nick Clegg who was with him in the coalition government and thanks Ed Miliband, his Labour opponent for wishing him luck.

He refers to his previous government and says that he has laid the foundations for a better future so that now they must build on them. He is convinced that as a majority government they will be able to deliver all of it. Cameron reaffirms what his government wants to do such as *three million apprenticeships*; *more help with childcare*; *helping 30 million people cope with the cost of living by cutting their taxes*; *building homes that people are able to buy and own*; *creating millions more jobs that give people the chance of a better future*. Furthermore, he talks about the in/out referendum on Europe which would take place in 2016 and possibly allow Britain to leave the EU.

In relation to what happened in 2014, with the referendum on Scotland remaining or leaving the UK, the PM outlines the meaning of *governing with respect* and he says he wants *to bring our country together*. To him this means *recognising that the different nations of our United Kingdom have their own governments*, *as well as the United Kingdom government*.

As regards the economy, he tells the people that five years earlier he had found a country on the verge of *an economic crisis* and that now it is *so much stronger*. As in his previous inaugural address, the word *government* is very common, at the top of the frequency list with 8 occurrences followed by *country* with 7. In 2015, it was similar with 11 and 9 occurrences respectively. Unlike his previous inaugural speech, where opinion verbs such as *think* and *believe* prevailed, here the most recurrent verb is *means* (7 occurrences) so that Cameron's first purpose is apparently to explain things to the people. In fact, the manifesto and the measures are described through the 'means + ing' form, e.g.:

*That **means** ensuring this recovery reaches all parts of our country.*

*And indeed, it **means** rebalancing our economy.*

*…it **means** bringing together the different nations of our United Kingdom*

3.1.3 TM

Theresa May begins her speech by saying she has accepted the office given her by the Queen and then pays tribute to David Cameron and uses a tricolon to refer to what her predecessor has already done for the country: *stabilised the economy*, *reduced the budget deficit*, *helped more people into work*. May then states that Cameron's real legacy is social justice and that she plans to govern in that same spirit.

A part of her speech is devoted to reminding people that she belongs to the Conservative and Unionist Party, and that *unionist* means a lot to her. She makes the citizens feel her compassion by using the verb *I know* 4 times and in an impressive tricolon that reads:

I know *you are working around the clock,* ***I know*** *you are doing your best, and* ***I know*** *that sometimes life can be a struggle.*

What impresses most is the wide use of the auxiliary 'will' that occurs 14 times and is mainly used to promise better conditions for those who suffer by saying *we will* in order to refer to her and the government she leads:

We will do *everything we can to give you more control over your lives.*

When we take the big calls, ***we will think not*** *of the powerful, but you.*

When we pass new laws, ***we will listen not*** *to the mighty but to you.*

When it comes to taxes, ***we will prioritise not*** *the wealthy, but you.*

Although she mostly resorts to the 'we will + infinitive+ not' form in order to stress the contrast, she also uses the 'won't' form:

When it comes to opportunity, <u>we won't entrench</u> *the advantages of the fortunate few.*

She then mentions Brexit and the advantages it brings through motivational phrases such as *a time of great national change, ...we will rise to the challenge, ...we will forge a bold new positive role..., together we will build a better Britain.*

3.1.4 BJ

In 2019 BJ succeeds May and after informing the audience he has accepted the Queen's invitation to form a government he pays homage to TM, by congratulating her on her *fortitude*, *patience*, *sense of public service* and *efforts*.

Since his task is to achieve what May was not able to – leading Britain to implement Brexit – he uses the pronoun 'we' to say that *we are incapable of honouring a basic democratic mandate* instead of directly blaming her for the failure. Johnson addresses those who are sceptical by using a tricolon and calling them *doubters*, *doomsters*, *gloomsters* and reminding them that trust in democracy will be restored and promises will be fulfilled to come out of the EU on October 31. Surprising as it may seem, Johnson predominantly uses the pronoun 'we' rather than 'I' such as in *we will do a new deal, a better deal*. Here there is a crescendo since he first says that in 99 days things will be solved and then he raises the stakes by implying that Brexit will be completed in an even shorter period of time given that *we aren't going to wait 99 days because the British people have had enough of waiting*. The sense of urgency is conveyed via expressions such as *the time has come to act, to take decisions to give strong leadership and to change this country for the better*. In fact, he resorts to verbs like *to act*, *to take decisions* and *to change* which portray him as a problem solver. Urgency is also conveyed through the adverb 'now' which occurs 12 times in the text:

We will ***now*** *accelerate the work of getting ready*

So let us begin work ***now***

Let's start ***now*** *to liberate*

All this and more we can do ***now*** *and only no**w***

Also the noun 'time' (7 occurrences) suggests the idea that action is compelling such as in:

The ***time*** *has come to act*

It is ***time*** *we unleashed...*

It is ***time*** *we looked not...*

It is ***time*** *to change*

Another interesting element to point out is the 'let's' hortative form which occurs 6 times. Hortatives are

expressions used to encourage or discourage an action:

let's start *now to liberate the UK's extraordinary bioscience sector from anti genetic modification rules*

*and **let's develop** the blight-resistant crops that will feed the world*

let's get going *now on our own position navigation and timing satellite and earth observation systems*

Let's change *the tax rules to provide extra incentives to invest in capital and research*

*and **let's promote** the welfare of animals that has always been so close to the hearts of the British people*

*and yes, **let's start** now on those free trade deals*

This form is generally regarded as an imperative but it actually works as a hortative. Saddock (1994) maintains that imperatives give emphasis to the effective, social aspect of speech, whereas hortative forms express an affective, emotional aspect which aims to mainly show the speaker's feelings.

Later on BJ starts to make his presence felt though not explicitly using 'I'. He makes use of the expression *my job is…*which sounds less conceited and more linked to duties:

*…**my job is to** serve you, the people*

My job is *to make your streets safer…*

My job is *to make sure you don't have to wait 3 weeks to see your GP…*

My job is *to protect you or your parents or grandparents from the fear of having to sell your home…*

My job is *to make sure your kids get a superb education…*

Every statement is followed by the measures the government is going to take and in the last one, which does not follow the standard form *my job is…*he promises to work on the unity of the country:

And I will tell you something else about my job*. It is to be Prime Minister of the whole United Kingdom…*

3.1.5 LT

She accepted the invitation to form a government by the Queen and then paid tribute to Boris Johnson that in her words delivered Brexit, Covid, and stood up against the Russian aggression. She defined him as a *hugely consequential Prime Minister.*

She asserts why Britain is a great country through a tricolon: *a fundamental belief in freedom, in enterprise and in fair play* and why British citizens are also great; they possess *grit, courage and determination.* Then she addresses the difficult global situation we are living in through the metaphor *headwinds caused by Russia […] and […] Covid.*

After that she confronts the issues that should be tackled and repeats three times *we need (to)*in order to express a sense of necessity as regards infrastructure, investments and families.

Again, she refers to a weather metaphor, and talks about a *storm* to address the challenges expected but she is confident she will *ride out the storm*.

As regards agency she often uses the pronoun 'we' (21 times) which accounts for 4.05% of all tokens and 'our' (11 times) corresponding to 2.12%. She is capable of using 'we/our 'inclusively even when referring to things that are supposed to be done by the government and not by the people. Though this seems to be a way to make the audience feel a deeper sense of involvement in her words:

We need to build roads, homes and broadband faster.

*We need more investment and great jobs in every town and city across **our** country.*

We need to reduce the burden on families and help people get on in life.

3.1.6 RS

RS begins in a traditional way by saying that he has just accepted the job from King Charles III and then explains the reasons why he finds himself talking to his fellow citizens: the first is Putin's War and the second the consequences of Covid. As usual, he pays tribute to his predecessor, Liz Truss, cleverly arguing that *she was not wrong to want to improve growth in this country*, thus avoiding a direct accusation for a personal political fault. He prefers to use the passive form without agency *mistakes were made* and asserts that those mistakes need to be fixed and gives a sense of urgency to his words by adding that his work begins immediately.

Linguistically two elements prevail in his speech. First, the use of the personal pronoun 'I' which occurs 27

times in a text of only 567 words, with an overall incidence of 4.77%. In none of the other speeches is personal presence as prominent as in Sunak's. A second important element is the presence of 'will' (12) which in all cases takes the form *I will*:

I will *place economic stability and confidence at the heart of this government's agenda*

I will *unite our country, not with words, but with action*

I will *work day in and day out to deliver for you*

Sunak is able to persuade his audience by appealing to credibility (ethos) since he recalls his experience as Chancellor of the Exchequer as in *you saw me*. In the narrative, he uses stylistic forms such as the tricolon to reinforce his political qualities like *integrity, professionalism, accountability*. He argues clearly and with a causal link that *trust is earned, and I will earn yours* in which 'will' sets the phrase as a promise.

He refers to BJ who had initially obtained the mandate to govern through the 2019 elections and he wants to be faithful to that mandate inspired by the electoral manifesto. So through a series of concrete elements he expresses what he intends to do and in particular to have:

Stronger NHS, …safer streets, …better schools…,

Comparatives express a form of evaluation of the current situation and (implicitly) refer to what has not yet been achieved after many years of conservative governments. Through equally concrete verbs such as *control*, *protecting*, *supporting*, *levelling up* and *building* with references to immigration, the environment, the armed forces and of course the economy he talks about Brexit which is seen as an opportunity for companies to *invest*, *innovate and create jobs*. The speech concludes through his taking responsibility and he claims to be ready to lead the country towards the future.

4. Linguistic Analysis

4.1 Pronouns

Pronouns have a primary function to outline how the speaker decides to include or exclude the participants involved in the speech (citizens, government, opposition). It is no surprise that PMs make wide use of inclusive pronouns, since they aim to build rapport and cohesion with the audience who is supposed to feel an active part of the community. Molek-Kozakowska (2011) deals with territorialization in political discourse, and regards pronouns as linguistic means to include/exclude other agents in/from discourse. Clusivity focuses on inclusive and exclusive 'we'. Inclusive 'we' takes the addressee into account, it means 'you and I and possibly others', whereas exclusive 'we' expressly does not consider the recipient in which 'we' means 'he/she/they and I, but not you'.

4.1.1 'we' and 'our'

Table 1. Occurrences of 'we' and 'our'

Leader	DC (1) 12 May 2010	DC (2) 8 May 2015	TM 13 July 2016	BJ 24 July 2019	LT 6 Sept. 2019	RS 25 October 2022
We	14 (2,22)	13 (1,93)	22 (3,36)	40 (2,36)	21 (4,05)	4 (0,71)
Our	11 (1,74)	13 (1,93)	2 (0,31)	20 (1,18)	11 (2,12)	7 (1,23)

In the texts at issue leaders use the first-person plural pronoun 'we' as well as the possessive adjective 'our' to different extents. LT uses them more widely than her colleagues: 'we' (21 times) which accounts for 4.05% of all tokens and 'our' (11 times) corresponding to 2.12%. LT is capable of using 'we/our' inclusively even when referring to things that are supposed to be done by the government and not by the people. This seems to be a way to make the audience feel a deep sense of involvement in her words:

We need to build *roads, homes and broadband faster.*

We need more investment *and great jobs in every own and city across our country.*

We need to reduce *the burden on families and help people get on in life.*

We shouldn't be daunted *by the challenges we face.*

Our country was built by people *who get things done.*

We have huge reserves *of talent, of energy, and determination.*

*I am confident that together **we can***

***We can** rebuild our economy,*

Even TM resorts to 'we' in two different parts of the text but with a different purpose. At first talking about unionism as her leading value 'we' is a way to refer to the Conservative Party:

*It means **we believe in the Union**: the precious, precious bond between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.*

*it means **we believe in a union** not just between the nations of the United Kingdom…*

and then she widens the reference to all Britons:

*…but between all of our citizens, every one of us, **whoever we are** and **wherever we are from**.*

Later on she avails herself of 'we' to allude to the government:

***We will do** everything we can to give you more control over your lives.*

*When **we take the big calls**, **we will think not** of the powerful, but you.*

*When **we pass new laws**, **we will listen not** to the mighty but to you.*

*When it comes to taxes, **we will prioritise not** the wealthy, but you.*

*When it comes to opportunity, **we won't entrench** the advantages of the fortunate few.*

***We will do** everything **we can** to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you.*

4.1.2 'I'

Table 2. Occurrences of 'I'

Leader	DC (1) 12 may 2010	DC (2) 8 May 2015	TM 13 July 2016	BJ 24 July 2019	LT 6 Sept. 2019	RS 25 October 2022
I	22 (3,48)	14 (2,07)	11 (1,68)	17 (1,00)	15 (2,90)	27 (4,77)

The use of 'I' may say a lot in terms of political leadership but also of responsibility towards what one is saying. In none of the other speeches is personal presence as prominent as in RS's one. The personal pronoun 'I' occurs 27 times in a text of only 567 words, with an overall incidence of 4.77%. In seven cases it is linked to the auxiliary 'will' to outline promises and volition (Note 7):

***I will place economic stability** and confidence at the heart of this government's agenda*

The presence of the Prime Minister is also strong as regards his sense of responsibility and accountability towards the new task:

*And **I understand** too that **I have work** to do to restore trust after all that has happened.*

*All **I can say** is that **I am not daunted**. **I know** the high office **I have accepted** and **I hope** to live up to its demands.*

In his predecessors' speeches only DC1 shows a relative high number of 'I' occurrences (22), corresponding to 3.48% of the entire text but 'I' is usually followed by opinion verbs such as 'believe' and 'think':

***I believe that** is the right way to provide this country with…*

***I believe that** is the best way to get…*

***I believe it is** also something else.*

*But **I believe together we** can provide…*

*…the good and decent government that **I think we** need so badly*

***I think** its best days still lie ahead*

*And **I think** the service our country needs right now is…*

In some cases 'believe' means 'trust' or ''support':

***I believe** deeply in public service.*

This does not mean that Cameron avoids expressing volition, but in that case he usually resorts to 'I want' such

as in:

*And **I want** to help try and build a more responsible society*

***I want** to make sure that my government always looks after the elderly*

***I want** us to build an economy that rewards work*

***I want** us to build a society with stronger families*

*And **I want** a political system that people can trust*

4.1.3 'you'

Table 3. Occurrences of 'you'

Leader	DC (1) 12 may 2010	DC (2) 8 May 2015	TM 13 July 2016	BJ 24 July 2019	LT 6 Sept. 2019	RS 25 October 2022
You	1 (0,16)	3 (0,44)	31 (4,73)	13 (0,77)	1 (0,20)	6 (1,06)

In some cases, political leaders prefer to use the pronoun 'you' rather than the inclusive 'we' in order to convey a sense of proximity with the audience they are talking to. In this case they are not addressing the government, or the political actors involved in the process, but only the citizens. As can be seen from table 3 the second person pronoun is not used much in the speeches examined except for TM. What is notable is May's wide use of 'you' (31) compared to her colleagues DC1 (1), DC2 (3), BJ (13), LT (1), RS (6) although in many cases the pronoun refers to the impersonal form 'one' and not to the audience. Notably it occurs in if-clauses aimed at describing what happens in Britain if you live in a disadvantaged family or context which is often the result of social injustice, e.g.:

***If you** are a white, working-class boy, **you are less likely** than anybody else in Britain to go to university.*

***If you** are a woman, **you will earn less** than a man. **If you** suffer from mental health problems, there's not enough help to hand.*

***If you** are young, **you'll find it harder** than ever before to own your own home.*

In most cases TM compares the worst situation to the opposite and most favourable one by means of 'than if you':

***If you** are born black, **you are treated more harshly** by the criminal justice system than **if you** are born white.*

***If you** are at a state school, **you are less likely to reach** the top professions than **if you** are educated privately.*

4.2 Modality

Modality has been defined as a grammatical system through which speakers demonstrate how much they are committed to their ideas with regard to the fact that something happens or not, or that someone does something or not (Partington, 2017). Modality may be expressed through adjectives, adverbs and modal verbs and in Table 4 we see the amount of modal verbs in the texts and what type of modality prevails.

Table 4. Occurrences of modal verbs

Leader	DC (1) 12 may 2010	DC (2) 8 May 2015	TM 13 July 2016	BJ 24 July 2019	LT Sept. 2019	RS October 2022
Will	4	7 (1.04)	14 (2,14)	25 (1,47)	15 (2,90)	12 (2,12)
Must	1	3	0	1	0	1
Can	7 (1,11)	6 (0,89)	4	5	6	2
Need /s	4/2	0	0	2	4	1
May	0	0	0	0	1	0
Might	0	0	0	0	0	0
Should	2	0	0	0	0	0
Could	0	0	0	0	0	1

Even if our corpus is very short texts, we can sense how most political leaders use 'will' as a predominant form of modal expression. Since inaugural speeches are concise but dense contributions to what the new Prime Minister wants to do and given that as a rule of thumb a new beginning is often marked by enthusiasm, most

leaders seem to use 'will' because it meets specific needs. In fact, as an auxiliary, it serves the purpose to form the future tense. So, it may indicate futurity but it also indicates volition and prediction (and drawing conclusions), which has to do with the speaker's objectives on the measures and policies he/she will adopt towards something. Although predictions should be based on evidence, sometimes they are simply accidental. 'Will' is also used to make promises, but rarely is it linked to concrete and quantifiable actions. They may well be vague and blurred:

*Above all **it will** be a government that is built on some clear values* [DC1]

*Those are the things that **this government will** now start work on doing* [DC1]

*as a majority government **we will** be able to deliver all of it* [DC2]

*In this Parliament **I will** stay true to my word and implement as fast as I can the devolution that all parties agreed for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.* [DC2]

LT makes promises and 'I will' occurs 15 times (2.90%) 8 of which it co-occurs with 'I':

***I will pursue** three early priorities*

***I will get** Britain working again*

***I will cut** taxes to reward hard work…*

***I will drive** reform in my mission…*

***I will deal** hands-on with the energy crisis…*

***I will take action** this week to deal with…*

***I will make sure** that people can get…*

Even for RS 'will' (12) is a habitual element which often occurs in 'I will':

***I will place** economic stability and confidence at the heart of this government's agenda*

***I will unite** our country, not with words, but with action*

***I will work** day in and day out to deliver for you*

***I will bring** that same compassion to the challenges we face today.*

*Trust is earned. And **I will earn** yours.*

***I will always be grateful** to Boris Johnson for his incredible achievements as Prime Minister*

***I will deliver** on its promise*

'Will' also occurs in TM but is never preceded by 'I'. As previously said, it is accompanied by 'you' mainly to build impersonal sentences or by 'we' to refer to the government (Note 8).

Among other modals, the only one which occurs with a relatively high frequency is 'can' (6 times in LT) because s*he is convinced she will be able* to get things done*:*

*so that together **we can** reach better times ahead* DC1

*Real change is not what government **can do** on its own* DC1

*And I want a political system that people **can trust**DC1*

***we can** make Britain a place where a good life is in reach* DC2

*I will stay true to my word and implement as fast as **I can** the devolution* DC2

*Together **we can** make Great Britain greater still* DC2

*We will do everything **we can** to give you more control over your lives* TM

*We will do everything **we can** to help anybody* TM

*and **I can** assure you that under this government you will get the absolute certainty of the rights* BJ

*I am convinced that **we can** do a deal* BJ

*all this and more **we can** do now and only now* BJ

*Of course, it won't be easy. But **we can** do it.* LT

*I will make sure that **people can** get doctors' appointments* LT

*I am confident that together **we can**:* LT

***We can** rebuild our economy,* LT

*And **we can** become the modern brilliant Britain that I know we can be.* LT

*Together **we can** achieve incredible things.* RS

'Can' conveys a deep sense of motivation, especially when it is used in the first-person plural, particularly common in LT. All the other modal verbs in table 4 are nearly or completely absent in most texts. This is no surprise because in inaugural speeches the focus is on what the prime minister or the new government will do for the citizens so 'will' tends to prevail in frequency over the other auxiliaries. As previously said. it conveys futurity, will-power and promise. 'Can' is present to a lesser extent because it expresses the ability to do something and is often used with 'we' to encourage the public to participate in a change process, to make them more accountable and not least to push them to action.

This seems to explain why modal verbs of obligation, recommendation and necessity (must, should, need) tend to be absent as much as those expressing possibility or eventuality (may, might) which may convey a sense of uncertainty. Undoubtedly in this first phase of 'acquaintance' with the nation the new prime ministers do not want to present themselves either as rule-makers or as unresolved leaders incapable of making decisions.

4.3 Rhetorical Features: Metaphors

Rhetorically speaking Conservative PM inaugural speeches have some features that are worth analysing. Here I will focus on metaphors and in particular on some that I think deserve further attention. Metaphors are typical features of political discourse in general and they also play a significant role in the genre of inaugural speeches. Through them the speaker provides the listener with images of great visual effect and expresses his/her evaluation of what he/she wants to convey. Metaphor may be defined as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable" (Note 9). It can be examined based on two different methods of classification: the first simply considers it a rhetorical device whose aim is to embellish or decorate discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 25), whereas the second method regards metaphors as a cognitive element that allows one "understanding and experiencing one kind of things in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). The latter scholars elaborated the approach that was later to be known as Conceptual or Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT). Based on the idea that we use many metaphors in everyday language, metaphors strongly influence our concepts because they help us turn abstract ideas into more concrete elements. Conceptual metaphors are not consciously perceived and so they have a powerful role in persuasion. A typical example of conceptual metaphor are those related to construction:

*I want us to **build** an economy that rewards work* (DC1)

Dead metaphors are very common and have become stereotyped, conventionalised and crystallised expressions so they are no longer perceived as metaphors and penetrate into our subconscious mind:

*the battery technology that will help **cut** CO2 and **tackle** climate change* (BJ)

The idea of construction or reconstruction often applies to the economy and we see below that most PMs use this type of metaphor: DC, LT and RS. But the concept of building/rebuilding something is also used to refer to the political system, society, family, future, another government and so on:

*is to **rebuild** trust in our political system* (DC1)

***build** a more responsible society* (DC1)

*I want us to **build** an economy* (DC1)

*I want us to **build** a society* (DC1)

***rebuilding** family, **rebuilding** community, above all, **rebuilding** responsibility in our country.* (DC1)

*it **laid the foundations** for a better future, and now we must **build** on them* (DC2)

***building** that "Northern Powerhouse".* (DC2)

*and **build** an even prouder future* (DC2)

*we will **build** a better Britain* (TM)

*I am today **building** a great team of men and women* (BJ)

*We can **rebuild** our economy* (LT)

***building** an economy that embraces the opportunities of Brexit* (RS)

*To reach out and **build** a government that* (RS)

Among other metaphors used by PMs in inaugural speeches one by TM stands out:

*That means fighting against the **burning injustice** that, if you are born poor, you will die on average 9 years earlier than others.*

The idea of injustice as 'burning' conveys a sense of indignation and anger. As Kovecses affirms "the concept of fire […] is a common source domain for many target concepts […] For most people, the related concepts of fire and heat are primarily associated with the metaphorical comprehension of emotions, such as anger […]" (2010, p. 141).

TM uses another interesting metaphor to refer to working people. She says the following:

*I know you are working **around the clock**, I know you are doing your best, and I know that sometimes **life can be a struggle.***

'around the clock' belongs to the previously mentioned group of dead metaphors. They have become ordinary words or phrases, stagnant and clichés. The same might be said for 'life can be a struggle' which is used in the same sentence to convey a strong sense of suffering by the poor in which May's empathy is conveyed by the verb 'I know'.

BJ makes a wide use of metaphors in his speeches. The most significant one here is:

*my job is to **serve** you, the people because if there is one point we politicians need to remember it is that **the people are our bosses***

This is an organization metaphor (Ritchie, 2017, p. 121) for government that had already been used by Tony Blair in which he stated that the role of a PM is to serve the people, who are in fact the bosses. Another metaphorical expression used by BJ is:

*Never mind the backstop – the **buck stops** here*

With regard to the work done to implement Brexit and the issue with the Ireland borders he wants to take responsibility for his decisions and resorts to the metaphor the *buck stops here* also playing with the assonance of *never mind the backstop* as the expressions *backstop/buck stops* have an evident resemblance of sounds (Note 10).

LT makes use of climate metaphors and notably to adverse climatic context. She uses either 'headwinds' and 'storm'. The former literally refers to an opposing air current and by extension 'a force or influence that inhibits progress' (Note 11); something that excuses us from taking action since bad things are due to events beyond our control. Davidai and Gilovich (2016) affirm that "the greater salience of a person's headwinds can lead people to believe they have been treated unfairly and, as a consequence, more inclined to endorse morally questionable behavior". The 'storm metaphor' instead commonly defines a difficult period, something that must be braved:

*As strong as the **storm** may be, I know that the British people are stronger*

and solved:

Ride out the storm.

5. Conclusion

From the analysis of the inaugural speeches of the British Conservative prime ministers examined, it is possible to draw some conclusions that emerge from both the structure of the speeches and the linguistic and stylistic elements under analysis. From a structural point of view, we may observe that the speeches through which PMs interact with the public in this role for the first time follow a similar layout. The speech is a way to greet the nation and to briefly introduce oneself (except for those who start their second term). It is an inaugural address in which the procedure is substantially pre-established: first, there is a reference to the monarch's invitation to form a new government, then the acknowledgment of the outgoing prime minister, and next some references to what the new prime minister and government intend to do in the near future. The PM then leaves and everything is wrapped up in around three minutes.

As we stated previously, though brief, inaugural speeches have a great impact on the audience (both locally and internationally), so the newly elected tend to give a rough idea of the crucial points the new government plans to develop and, on a personal level, they give a clue about the type of leadership they are determined to exercise. From a strictly linguistic point of view, the first aspect analysed, clusivity, shows that the use of pronouns may give us indications of how the PM sees him/herself, the government and the citizens. As for 'we', LT and TM use

it more widely than their colleagues and LT seems to do it in a very inclusive way since she often refers both to the government and the citizens and this seems to be an effective way to build empathy with the recipient. If all PMs show a somewhat considerable use of this pronoun in their speech, one stands out for hardly using it, RS, who definitely resorts to 'I' instead.

The use of 'you' is highly predominant in TM compared to her colleagues and shows a strong attention to the recipient and seems to prove a great sense of interest in the British citizens. Even if she often uses it as a substitute for the impersonal form 'one', in many cases she gives the impression she wants to directly address the categories of people she is dealing with in the speech, e.g., workers, women, mentally-impaired, youth. Her colleagues do not choose this form of addressing the audience, which in some cases finds a replacement in lexical items such as 'people, 'country' or 'Britain'.

The pronoun 'I' is instead the prerogative of RS, who uses it to a greater degree than his predecessors and which strongly characterises his attitude as a leader who assumes responsibility for what he intends to do. 'I' is often followed by the auxiliary 'will' and verbs that are identified with taking charge of the required commitments. Though the first-person singular pronoun may outline a deep sense of the speaker's accountability towards the country and its citizens, as it does here, it is generally neglected in politics since it may echo a strong sense of self-centredness and excessive self-reliance. Some studies show that the strong use of 'I' pronouns in leadership communications may be related to narcissism and other forms of maladaptive leadership syndromes (Carey et al., 2015). LT uses 'I' followed by 'will' and more concrete verbs, often linked to targeted actions, including her promised tax cuts which probably made her pay a price in terms of credibility and face. As regards the other leaders examined, their use of the first-person singular pronoun is limited and restrained.

With respect to modality – which I chose to decline in this paper exclusively on modal verbs – the supremacy of 'will' over the other modals cannot be neglected. In this regard LT uses 'will' more conspicuously than her colleagues to make promises and express her strong determination that seems to be shared by RS too, though with milder traits. TM frequently uses 'will' but the auxiliary does not occur with the pronoun 'I' but rather it follows 'you' and 'we', so she shows no will to be in the spotlight and seems to be prudent. It may come as a surprise that BJ – often accused of pretentiousness and selfhood – while using 'will' 25 times, a high number in absolute terms but not in percentage as his speech is longer than the others, chooses 'I' only twice. In most cases it is found in contexts with neuter pronouns or with 'we'. No other modal verb is numerically relevant in the speeches except for 'can', which, in any case, occurs few times; its inherent connotation of boosting enthusiasm and drive seems to be more common in LT and occasionally in DC, negligible in the others.

As regards metaphors, PMs use them quite extensively since they are part and parcel of political discourse in general and of inaugural speeches as well. In such a limited amount of time inaugural speeches have to convey ideas and concepts that might not be so clear to the audience in abstract terms and they are turned into concrete images that, through the use of analogy, become easier to grasp and weighty. One of the most typical forms of image in the texts analysed has to do with the construction and reconstruction of the economy, politics, and trust in institutions that almost all leaders use; the idea is often conveyed by the verbs 'build' and 'rebuild' which have a positive connotation and suggest birth and rebirth. This representation is common in DC but is substantially shared by the others. However, many of the metaphors used by the leaders are dead metaphors, therefore forms that have entered the everyday English language for a long time and are now lexicalised as structures that are no longer perceived as such.

To conclude, the research shows that British Conservative inaugural speeches belong to a genre that is by nature concise though trying to give the "big picture". In order to do so, it follows a semi-fixed structure which does not give much freedom to the new PM, who in a handful of minutes needs to show his/her audience credibility, trustworthiness and leadership. This results in the use of pronouns that in most cases tends to include people, modal verbs which may convey a sense of volition, futurity and vision, and metaphors that clarify difficult concepts and create vivid images in the public.

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Notes

Note 1. Retrieved February 3, 2023, from https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eu-referendum-outcome-pm-statement-24-june-2016

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Note 7. See 4.2. Modality.

Note 8. See 4.1. Pronouns.

Note 9. Retrieved February 3, 2023, from https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100153175;jsessionid=3B0A4CA02E2BC87B29D4BC29FF74C91F

Note 10. It refers to the protocol of agreement developed by Theresa May and the EU that never came into force which would avoid a barrier or customs controls once between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland after the Brexit in case of lack of arrangement between the EU and the UK.

Note 11. Retrieved February 3, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/headwind