An Analysis of the Themes and Speech Acts in the Recent Inaugural Speeches by Leaders of the Countries with English as an Official Language

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Abstract

Inaugural speeches mark the beginning of a new leadership period and serve as powerful tools for leaders to convey their vision, goals, and aspirations to the public. Analyzing these speeches can reveal how leaders use language to communicate their political agendas, values, and visions. Focusing on recent inaugural speeches delivered by leaders of countries where English is an official language, this paper analyzed their predominant themes using the by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework and Searle's (1979) speech act theory. The data comprised 10 inaugural speeches from 10 countries, divided into five geographic groups: (1) North America, (2) Europe, (3) Africa, (4) Australia, and (5) Asia. To ensure inter-coder reliability, a second coder analyzed 20% of the data using Cohen's Kappa statistics. The results revealed prominent themes found in the top five themes in each speech, as well as ideologies and values embedded in these speeches. Additionally, the analysis uncovered associations between specific types of speech acts and themes, such as the common association between *future plans* and *commissive* and *assertive* speech acts and the less common association between *future plans* and *directives*. The findings provide insights into the strategies employed in modern public speaking, shedding light on leaders' use of themes, speech acts, and their underlying motivations.

Keywords: country leaders; ideology; inaugural speeches; speech acts; themes

Introduction

Inaugural speeches hold a significant place in a nation's political landscape, serving as a platform for leaders to articulate their vision, priorities, and goals upon assuming office (Ericson, 1997; Vassileva, 2021). These speeches can be defined as formal addresses delivered by individuals assuming prominent political positions, such as presidents, prime ministers, or heads of state, to mark the beginning of their tenure

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(Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012; Ericson, 1997; Liu, 2012). The significance of inaugural speeches in shaping public opinion and national discourse cannot be overstated. Inaugural speeches are crucial in transitioning leaders' positions, symbolizing the start of a new tenure and providing a stage to communicate their aims, purposes, and aspirations to the public (Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012). Through these speeches, country leaders have the opportunity to inspire hope, foster a sense of national identity, and outline their vision for a better future (Mehltretter, 2009; West, 2014).

Inaugural speeches possess distinct characteristics that set them apart from other forms of political oratory. They often involve a blend of rhetoric, persuasion, and political ideology, allowing leaders to establish their credibility, gain public support, and set the tone for their administration (Biria & Mohammadi, 2012; Hoffman et al., 2017). Among the distinctive features of an inaugural speech are its rhetorical use and symbolic meaning, marking a new beginning for a leader and denoting the assumption of office. Such speeches are frequently designed to promise, convince, and powerfully persuade audiences (Neustadt, 1990). These speeches often express gratitude toward citizens and others, address the nation's vital issues and challenges, emphasize the need for unity and collective action, and propose policies and initiatives to address societal concerns (Altikriti, 2016; Sameer, 2017; Velez, 2022).

Understanding the themes and speech acts conveyed in inaugural speeches is essential, as it helps the audience grasp the hidden meanings and identify the leaders' ideologies. This study aimed to explore the predominant themes and speech acts in the most recent inaugural speeches delivered by leaders of countries where English is an official language through thematic analysis and speech act analysis. This study provides insights into leaders' underlying motivations, objectives, and political agendas. It can facilitate a more informed analysis of political discourse and aid in deciphering the broader implications of leaders' chosen themes and speech acts.

Several studies have examined inaugural speeches in English through different analytical lenses. The first approach involved the use of thematic analysis to explore the underlying themes and messages conveyed in the speeches. A notable study by Bani-Khaled and Azzam (2021) analyzed the theme of unity in Joe Biden's 2021 inaugural speech. They used thematic analysis to identify themes of unity and highlighted the effectiveness of language in revealing this theme, exemplified by the recurrent use of the phrase "my fellow," which emphasized solidarity and collegiality. Another relevant study by Martin-Harewood (2024) analyzed speeches by former UK Prime Ministers (Theresa May, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, and Rishi Sunak) from 2016 to 2022. This study employed thematic content analysis to identify and categorize themes, while critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to uncover and interpret the underlying and implicit meanings within language as used in particular social contexts and situations. This study revealed 29 themes, with nine recurring themes such as *Brexit* and the *EU, challenges* and *difficulties, economy, education, employment, family, healthcare, unity,* and *future plans.* These themes emerged regularly due to the high expectations placed

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on the UK Prime Minister. Themes like *education, employment, family,* and *healthcare* are particularly relevant in inaugural speeches as they address fundamental aspects of society and the needs of citizens. The theme of *Brexit* and the *EU* is directly related to the specific temporal context of the speeches. Another prevalent theme is *challenges* and *difficulties*, which address both current issues and anticipated future challenges.

The second approach involves the application of speech act theory using Searle's classification framework to analyze inaugural speeches, with a focus on the performative function of language. For example, Mufiah and Rahman (2018) and Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) revealed that the inaugural speeches of Donald Trump and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua predominantly employed *assertive* acts, with each accounting for 46% and 60% of their speeches, respectively. Trump's *assertive* actions aimed to persuade audiences to act, while Yar'Adua emphasized and exercised his presidential power. Ahmed and Amir (2021) found that 34.965% of Joe Biden's speech acts were *directives*, showcasing his influence and superiority and convincing the audience to follow his lead. Moreover, Piscesco and Ambalegin (2023) analyzed the *commissive* acts in Joe Biden's inaugural speech, revealing a dominance of promising acts.

Based on previous studies, thematic analysis, and speech act analysis have been used to analyze inaugural speeches, but these studies have often been limited to a small number of speeches or leaders. This study expands the scope by examining the inaugural speeches of 10 country leaders from 10 different countries where English is an official language. It employs thematic analysis to identify main themes and sub-themes and speech act analysis to explore the associations in the speeches. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What themes are represented in the inaugural speeches by country leaders from countries where English is an official language?
2. What types of speech acts are revealed for each theme in the inaugural speeches by country leaders from countries where English is an official language?

Methodology

The research design of this study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze themes and speech acts in the most recent inaugural speeches delivered by country leaders from countries where English is an official language. The research aimed to gain insights into the themes and types of speech acts utilized in these speeches.

Data Collection

This study examined the themes and types of speech acts utilized in the most recent inaugural speeches of 10 leaders from 10 different countries where English is an

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official language. Focusing only on English inaugural speeches allows for comparisons among countries where English is the official language. In addition, English is accessible to international scholars; the research reaches a wider audience and contributes to a global understanding of political and rhetorical practices.

The selection criteria for this research are as follows:

1. The speeches were delivered in English and represent the first public address given by each country's leader upon assuming the position of prime minister or president.
2. The inaugural speech must be given by the current leader of each country.

   (In the case of Canada, the Prime Minister has been in office since 2015, and no new inaugural speech has been delivered since then, ensuring that the data used remains accurate and up to date.)

3. A video recording of the inaugural speeches must be available online.
4. The speeches were grouped into five geographic regions representing the five continents of the world ((1) Asia, (2) Australia, (3) Africa, (4) Europe, and (5) North America), with each region represented by two countries, based on the demographic distribution of English-speaking populations (World Data, 2024). Selecting inaugural speeches from five continents enables a comprehensive analysis of diverse political, cultural, and socio-economic contexts. By limiting the selection to two countries per region, the analysis remains focused and preserves depth, while still accounting for regional nuances. This method strikes a balance between inclusivity and practicality, ensuring that political and cultural diversity is reflected without overwhelming the scope of the study.

The inaugural speeches that meet the above criteria range from 7 to 26 minutes, with differences in duration attributed to the leader's style and delivery, as well as the cultural or institutional norms of each country. Despite these variations in length, the speeches consistently share the same core elements identified in previous studies, including a clear vision, purpose, commitment, and responsibility (Garifullina et al., 2021). These elements are essential in setting the tone for leadership and outlining the goals for the future, regardless of the speech's length or context.

Table 1

Data Source

Geographic Location	Country Leaders	Country	Year	Source	Time Length
Asia	Bongbong Marcos	Philippines	2022	*https://youtu.be/wyXg1 OgFQbk?si=OKlgVCB_ Aily4Dss*	25 minutes 29 seconds

Geographic Location	Country Leaders	Country	Year	Source	Time Length
	Tharman Shanmugaratnam	Singapore	2023	*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FlyP12rhIso*	12 minutes
Australia	Anthony Albanese	Australia	2022	*https://youtu.be/tuJeVZDr0YM?si=MReahaw5PqeiHcdf*	19 minutes 55 seconds
	Chris Hipkins	New Zealand	2023	*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58f-F7OhzwY*	9 minutes 4 seconds
Africa	Cyril Ramaphosa	South Africa	2018	*https://youtu.be/q11UYKrFy1Y?si=C9dl16vpG9w_fDo2*	15 minutes 33 seconds
	Hakainde Hichilema	Zambia	2021	*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6zHevhX-7w&t=557s*	19 minutes 51 seconds
Europe	Leo Varadka	Ireland	2022	*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7B2M349UAy8*	8 minutes 17 seconds
	Rishi Sunak	United Kingdom	2023	*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C42NkLdSjyY*	7 minutes 35 seconds
North America	Justin Trudeau	Canada	2015	*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKWyk86yWsQ*	24 minutes 7 seconds
	Joe Biden	United States	2020	*https://youtu.be/1AfNYztas2c?si=CsI85e53dRbc9wlK*	15 minutes 19 seconds

Data Analysis

The data were transcribed into written form, with the T-unit serving as the unit of analysis. The transcription process was done manually to ensure the accuracy and proper arrangement of the data. Various dictionaries and thesauruses were used to study the meanings of specific lexical items and examine sentence or phrase structures and verb behaviors. Each unit of analysis first underwent thematic analysis to identify themes within each sentence, followed by speech act analysis of each theme in the inaugural speeches.

Figure 1

Steps of Data Analysis

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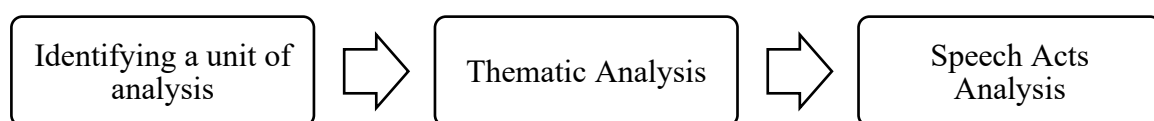
The first step is identifying a unit of analysis, which is the T-unit. A T-unit is defined as one main clause along with any subordinate clause or non-clausal structure embedded in it (Hunt, 1965; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). An example of a T-unit is *"I want an economy that works for people, not the other way around"* (Inaugural speech of Prime Minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, 2022).

The second step is analyzing a unit of analysis using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be defined as a method for systematically identifying, classifying, and gaining insights into patterns of meaning or themes across datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to King and Brooks (2018), thematic analysis is a flexible approach that allows researchers to focus on both the tangible and implied content of the data, making it suitable for a wide range of research problems and theoretical frameworks. This study used the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) as the guideline to analyze inaugural speeches, which has six steps to analyze the theme and the framework.

Figure 2

Steps of Thematic Analysis (Adopted from Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)
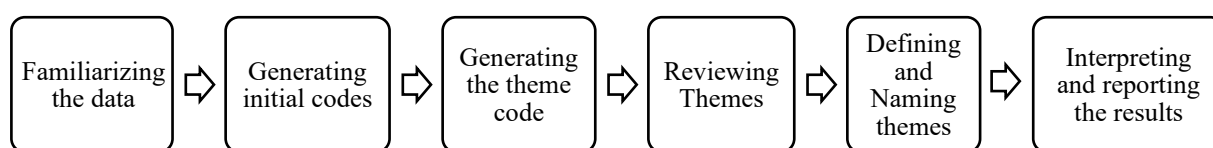
In thematic analysis, the first step is familiarizing the data, including data transcription accurately from the spoken data in video recording and re-reading the transcription to familiarize with the content. Secondly, generating the initial code process is proposed to code the appealing structures or ideas of the data and arrange data relevant to each code. After initial coding, the theme codes are generated by examining the connection between themes and codes and labeling them, including both main themes and sub-themes. Then, after reviewing themes, related codes are integrated into more extended thematic categories. The identified themes are then reviewed to ensure their accuracy in reflecting the content of the speech data. Then, themes are named and defined with specific topics (main themes and sub-themes). The naming process helped provide an understandable and brief overview of each theme's main components.

Table 2

An Example of One of the Main Themes, Descriptions, and Sub-Themes

	Themes	Descriptions	Sub-themes
1	Future plan	The strategy of planning something in the future is	Leader's good performance
			Solving the national problem
			Unity

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		Themes	Descriptions	Sub-themes
			conveyed by the leaders to develop their country.	Working with other individuals
				National economy
				Serving citizens
				Being a leader in the next period
				Respecting each other
				Meeting other individuals
				Making a good cabinet
				Defending the country
				Listening to other individuals
				International alliances
				Forgiveness
				Defending constitution
				Defending democracy
				Celebrating a holiday
				Leader's compassion
				Leader's discussion of the topic

Finally, the findings are reported, and the themes, interpretations, and supporting evidence are presented to narrate the results effectively. An example of thematic analysis for a T-unit is, *"Right now, our country is facing a profound economic crisis."* The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom would like to state that the United Kingdom was facing an economic crisis. This is coded as having a theme of *current national issues or problems*. This step aims to reveal the country leaders' frequently used themes and communication schemes in speeches. In this study, 21 main themes are identified. The full list of these main themes, sub-themes, and descriptions can be accessed through the *Figshare* website: *https://figshare.com/s/557047c44ff1b1dcd490.* In this paper, the analysis primarily focused on the top five themes, which allowed for a clearer understanding of the emerging patterns.

Then, after conducting a thematic analysis of the inaugural speeches, the data were examined through the lens of speech act theory. The speech acts are actions expressed through speech (Grundy, 2000; Mey, 2001). Searle's classification of speech acts provides a comprehensive framework for understanding various types of speech acts and their functions in communication. By categorizing speech acts based on their intention and effect, this classification system offers valuable insights into the complexities of language use and the underlying intentions of speakers. Searle (1979) categorizes speech acts into five main types: (1) *assertive* (making a statement or expressing their belief about something), (2) *directive* (giving a direct command to other people), (3) *commissive* (committing to doing something in the future), (4) *expressive* (expressing their attitudes, feelings, and emotions), and (5) *declarative* (intentionally speaking somethings that can affect immediate change). Each category has various sub-types: *assertive (starting, claiming,* and *describing), directive (commanding, suggesting, allowing, prohibiting,* and *questioning), commissive (promising, refusing, vowing, offering,* and *threatening), expressive (congratulating, excusing, thanking,*

wishing, attitude/gratitude, and *greetings),* and *declarative (resigning, appointing,* and *declaring).*

After analyzing themes and speech acts in the inaugural speeches delivered by country leaders, the results are interpreted using the socio-cultural and political context, highlighting the ideologies and values embedded within the speeches. This analysis provides a deeper understanding of how these leaders communicate and reinforce national priorities and ideologies.

For the final step, to enhance inter-rater reliability in this study, 20% of the data (approximately 219 T-units) were coded by a second coder who held a master's degree in applied linguistics, near-native proficiency, and expertise in content analysis. The coded data followed the minimum requirement for data percentage as specified by Cohen's Kappa reliability metrics. A Kappa reliability value approaching or exceeding 0.80 indicates a high level of reliability (Widhiarso, 2010). The inter-rater reliability analysis resulted in a Cohen's Kappa statistic of 0.851, indicating a very high level of agreement between the two coders.

Results and Discussion

This analysis examined the content themes and speech acts of inaugural speeches from country leaders who use English as an official language across five distinct geographical regions. The complete list detailing the percentages of all main themes and sub-themes is available through the *Figshare* website: *https://figshare.com/s/557047c44ff1b1dcd490*. However, focusing on the top five themes provides a clearer insight into patterns employed by country leaders in their inaugural speeches. This approach effectively captures the unique priorities and communication strategies of each country's leaders, providing a nuanced understanding of how inaugural speeches serve as a platform for articulating values within cultural and geopolitical contexts.

Table 3 presents the results of the thematic analysis of inaugural speeches delivered by leaders from 10 countries where English is an official language. The table highlights the five most prominent themes and their associated sub-themes. The number indicates the distribution of sub-themes within each main theme for each respective country. For instance, for the Philippines, the sub-theme of *solving the national problem* represents the largest share within the main theme of the *future plan*, comprising 31 out of the 83 units under this category. Additionally, there are other main themes present in the Philippines that do not fall within the five most prominent themes. These additional themes comprise 70 units, contributing to the total of 217 units identified in the Philippines' inaugural speech.

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Table 3

Dominant Themes of Each Inaugural Speech across 10 Countries

No	Theme	Sub-theme	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)
1	Future Plan	Solving the national problem	31	8	3	4	4	29	6	1	2	14
		Unity	15	6	8	-	2	3	3	2	-	16
		Leader's good performance	10	1	5	-	1	2	-	6	6	5
		National Economy	10	3	6	6	-	-	2	3	2	-
		Working with other individuals	7	12	3	-	2	-	1	-	5	10
		Serving citizens	4	1	1	-	3	5	-	1	1	1
		Listening to other individuals	3	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
		Making a good cabinet	2	1	1	2	1	4	-	-	1	-
		International alliances	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
		Being a leader in the next period	-	5	2	2	4	-	-	1	1	-
		Defending country	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
		Respecting each other	-	2	1	1	8	-	-	-	-	2
		Defending the constitution	-	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
		Meeting other individuals	-	-	1	5	1	-	-	-	-	-
		Forgiveness	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-
		Celebrating a holiday	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
		Leader's discussion of the topic	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
		Leader's compassion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
		Defending democracy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
		Total	**83**	**45**	**34**	**20**	**26**	**47**	**16**	**15**	**18**	**60**

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No	Theme	Sub-theme	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)
2	Current national issue/problem	Climate crisis	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		National economic problems	7	2	-	9	-	-	1	1	-	-
		Pandemic problem	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	4	-	5
		Citizens' basic needs problem	3	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
		War	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
		Cultural diversity problem	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
		Solving current national issue/problem	-	-	-	5	1	-	1	-	-	4
		Poverty problem	-	-	-	2	-	-	3	-	-	-
		Disagreement among country leaders	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
		Corruption problem	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
		Special need education problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
		Differences in political views problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
		A lack of unity problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
		Racism problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
		Total	**21**	**5**	**-**	**18**	**4**	**-**	**6**	**6**	**-**	**24**
3	(Personal) past actions	Having certain moments or performing certain actions with other individuals	9	-	4	-	11	-	-	1	8	-
		Action during the campaign	6	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-

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No	Theme	Sub-theme	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)
		Meeting/talking to (former leader; officers; individual citizens)	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-
		Being a hard-working person	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-
		Attending an invitation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
		Total	**17**	**-**	**5**	**-**	**11**	**-**	**-**	**3**	**18**	**-**
4	Past action of other individuals	Past action of former leader	5	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	1	-
		Past action of citizens/voters	5	-	4	-	-	21	-	-	24	-
		Past action of nurses	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Past action of government	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
		Past action of the leader's party members	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Past action of the members of parliament	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Past action of the leader's mother	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Past action of opposition	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
		Past action of media	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
		Total	**13**	**-**	**10**	**5**	**-**	**27**	**-**	**-**	**25**	**-**
5	Past national issue/problem	Pandemic	6	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	3
		National economic problems	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2

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No	Theme	Sub-theme	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)
		Democracy	3	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	3
		Neglected labor	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
		Total	**13**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**10**	**-**	**-**	**8**
6	Expressing gratitude	Citizens	-	2	9	1	9	9	6	1	7	5
		A Former Leader	-	1	-	4	-	2	1	4	3	2
		Officers	-	1	3	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
		All parties	-	-	3	-	3	2	-	-	-	-
		Ancestors	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		The members of parliament	-	-	2	-	3	-	1	-	-	-
		Media	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
		God	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
		Heroes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
		Total	**-**	**4**	**19**	**5**	**16**	**16**	**8**	**5**	**11**	**8**
7	Current international issue/problem	International economic problem	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Total	**-**	**4**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
8	Future problem	National economic problems	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Pandemic problem	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Threat to future generations	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Total	**-**	**3**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
9	A new start of the work/being a new leader	Assuming a new leader position (Readiness)	-	-	5	4	-	13	2	4	-	6
		Assuming a new leader position (Being proud)	-	-	3	3	-	-	1	-	-	-
		Assuming a new leader position (Reasons to be here)	-	-	1	1	3	3	1	1	-	1

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No	Theme	Sub-theme	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)
		Assuming a new leader position (Feeling humbled)	-	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	1
		Assuming a new leader position (Serving)	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
		Total	**-**	**-**	**10**	**9**	**5**	**18**	**4**	**5**	**-**	**8**
10	Introducing other members of the government	Introducing the officials	-	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**5**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
11	Citizens' desires/attributes	Citizens' desires/attributes (Having power toward the country)	-	-	-	-	-	15	-	-	7	-
		Citizens' desires/attributes (Living longer)	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
		Citizens' desires/attributes (Youth's role)	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
		Citizens' desires/attributes (Being disappointed)	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
		Citizens' desires/attributes (Being open-minded and optimistic)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
		Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**18**	**-**	**-**	**8**	**-**
12	The country's victory and progress	The country's victory	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15
		Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**15**
13	Asking the audience to do something or perform certain actions	Asking the audiences to work together	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
		Asking the audiences to join silent prayer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
		Asking the audiences to look around	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2

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No	Theme	Sub-theme	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)
		Asking the audiences to mark the leader's words	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
		Asking the audiences to stop talking	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	**11**
14	**Other themes**	-	70	6	15	9	12	34	8	6	23	33
	Total		217	67	93	71	74	160	52	40	103	167

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Future Plan and *Expressing Gratitude* as the Common Themes in the Inaugural Speeches

The common themes found in the inaugural speeches analyzed in this study are *future plans* and *expressing gratitude*. The theme of *future plans* appears as one of the top five themes in all 10 inaugural speeches, while expressing gratitude was found as one of the top five themes in nine of the speeches, excluding the Philippines. It is common for the *future plan* theme to dominate inaugural speeches since these speeches typically include leaders' purposes and aims for the future, directing audiences to take future actions, committing to pledges for a better nation, and outlining improvements for the country. Similarly, Martin-Harewood (2024) conveys that future plans are crucial themes in inaugural speeches detailing plans for addressing challenges and difficulties. An example of a *future plan* with a sub-theme of *working with other individuals* is *"As President, with a strong mandate you have given me, I intend to work with the government, community groups, and other voluntary organizations, and the entire nation to strengthen our multi-racialism and nurture a more inclusive society."* (Inaugural speech of Singapore's President, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, 2023); it means that the president, empowered by strong public support, plans to collaborate with the government, community groups, voluntary organizations, and the entire nation to promote racial unity and foster a more inclusive society.

Meanwhile, expressing gratitude is also a pivotal topic in inaugural speeches, as leaders often wish to show appreciation for the audience's dedication and respect (Liu, 2012). The findings of this study revealed that leaders convey gratitude towards citizens, former leaders, officers, members of parliament, various parties, ancestors, the media, God, heroes, teachers, and nurses. An example of *expressing gratitude towards citizens* is *"To my fellow Singaporeans, once again, I thank you for your strong endorsement."* (Inaugural speech of Singapore's President, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, 2023); this reflects the leader's gratitude towards the citizens.

Ideologies and Values Revealed Through the Thematic Analysis of the Inaugural Speeches

Based on the thematic analysis, various aspects of ideologies and values embedded in the inaugural speeches are revealed. Firstly, the speeches of Canada and Zambia focused on addressing citizens. Four key themes highlighted in these two countries' inaugural speeches are *the past actions of individuals*, who are mainly citizens or voters, *future plans* that focus on *serving citizens*, *expressing gratitude towards citizens*, and *citizens' desires/attributes* reflecting their power and influence over the country. In Canada, after almost a decade of Conservative leadership under Stephen Harper, Canadians were eager for change towards advanced policies and inclusive governance. Justin Trudeau's inaugural speech underscored the importance of citizens' participation and engagement, reaffirming Canada's democratic principles and supporting political active involvement to effect meaningful change; for example, *"Over 80 thousand Canadians got involved in the core of this campaign."* (Inaugural

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speech of Canada' Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, 2015); this reflects the leader's discussion of the past actions of the citizens. Similarly, Zambia's leader, Hakainde Hichilema, emphasized the significance and role of every Zambian citizen in establishing the nation's future. He highlighted Zambia's resilience and the collective passion and contributions of its people.

Secondly, Australia and New Zealand focused on the national economy within the *future plan* theme. Recent leadership under Prime Ministers Anthony Albanese and Chris Hipkins has strongly emphasized future national economic planning. Australia's need for robust economic strategies is highlighted by its natural resources, diverse economy, and role in international trade, aiming to encourage growth, manage environmental support, and address social inequalities. Australia's economic recovery post-COVID has seen significant growth and increased employment (Liberal.org.au, 2022). Similarly, New Zealand, known for its agricultural exports, tourism, and sustainability commitment, requires progressive economic policies to boost international competitiveness, foster innovation, and ensure social justice. Notably, New Zealand's highest export growth in 2022 was in milk powder, butter, and cheese, comprising 28% of total exports (Stats NZ, 2023). An example for the *national economy* in the *future plan* is *"We will continue to grow an economy that creates well-paying jobs that lift incomes and creates opportunities for current and future generations."* (Inaugural speech of New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins, 2023); it can be interpreted that the plan of the country's leader is about the national economy.

Thirdly, in the United States, the theme of *victory and progress* is uniquely prominent. President Joe Biden's speech commemorated the resilience and power of American democracy, emphasizing the importance of Election Day as a reaffirmation of democratic principles; for example, *"Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy."* This means that the leader emphasized that the celebration is not just about one person winning but about something bigger: the triumph of democracy itself.

Fourthly, in Singapore, the themes of *future problems* and *current national* and *international issues/problems* are uniquely significant. President Tharman Shanmugaratnam's inaugural speech highlighted these themes due to ongoing issues like the Ukraine conflict and the impacts of climate change. The Ukraine war, affecting global energy supplies and market prices, and climate change are critical future problems addressed by Singapore's leadership (Kilfoyle, 2023; Business Standard, 2023). An example of a *future problem* is *"Climate change will be a defining challenge for the world, especially for a low-lying island,"* which means that climate change will be a major global issue. It will be particularly challenging for low-lying islands, which are vulnerable to its impacts, such as rising sea levels and extreme weather.

Finally, in New Zealand, *the introduction of government members* is a unique theme in Chris Hipkins' speech, emphasizing transparency and accountability in governance (Mate, 2023); for example, *"I am delighted to announce that I intend to*

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appoint Carmel Cipolloni to that role"; it means that Chris Hipkins introduces Carmel Cipolloni as the Deputy Prime Minister.

Table 4 presents the findings on speech acts and their subcategories, as identified within the five most prominent themes employed by the leaders from 10 countries where English is an official language, based on their inaugural speeches. For instance, in the Philippines, two speech acts reveal a *future plan* theme: *assertive* (56.62%) and *commissive* (43.38%). Across a broader analysis of the *future plan* theme in 10 countries, the distribution of speech acts is categorized into three main sub-types: *assertive* (40.39%), *commissive* (53.57%), and *directive* (6.04%).

Table 4

Theme-Speech Act Associations in the Inaugural Speeches across 10 Countries

No	Theme	Speech acts	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)	Total
1	Future Plan	Assertive	47 (56.62%)	21 (46.67%)	10 (29.41%)	4 (20%)	5 (65.38%)	13 (27.66%)	7 (43.75%)	5 (33.33%)	8 (44.44%)	27 (45%)	147 (40.39%)
		Commissive	36 (43.38 %)	17 (37.78%)	24 (70.59 %)	16 (80%)	17 (19.24%)	30 (63.83%)	9 (56.25 %)	10 (66.67%)	10 (55.56%)	26 (43.33%)	195 (53.57%)
		Directive	-	7 (15.55%)	-	-	4 (15.38%)	4 (8.51%)	-	-	-	7 (11.67%)	22 (6.04%)
			83 (100%)	**45 (100%)**	**34 (100%)**	**20 (100%)**	**26 (100%)**	**47 (100%)**	**16 (100%)**	**15 (100%)**	**18 (100%)**	**60 (100%)**	**364 (100%)**
2	Current national issue/problem	Assertive	16 (76.20 %)	5 (100%)	-	15 (83.33%)	4 (100%)	-	6 (100%)	6 (100%)	-	16 (66.67%)	68 (80.95%)
		Commissive	5 (23.80 %)	-	-	3 (16.57%)	-	-	-	-	-	5 (20.83 %)	13 (15.48%)
		Declarative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 (12.5%)	3 (3.57%)
			21 (100%)	**5 (100%)**	**-**	**18 (100%)**	**4 (100%)**	**-**	**6 (100%)**	**6 (100%)**	**-**	**24 (100%)**	**84 (100%)**
3	(Personal) past actions	Assertive	17 (100%)	-	5 (100%)	-	11 (100%)	-	-	3 (100%)	18 (100%)	-	54 (100%)
			17 (100%)	**-**	**5 (100%)**	**-**	**11 (100%)**	**-**	**-**	**3 (100%)**	**18 (100%)**	**-**	**54 (100%)**
4	Past action of other individuals	Assertive	13 (100%)	-	10 (100%)	5 (100%)	-	27 (100%)	-	-	25 (100%)	-	80 (100%)
			13 (100%)	**-**	**10 (100%)**	**5 (100%)**	**-**	**27 (100%)**	**-**	**-**	**25 (100%)**	**-**	**80 (100%)**
5	Past national issue/problem	Assertive	13 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	10 (100%)	-	-	8 (100%)	31 (100%)
			13 (100%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**10 (100%)**	**-**	**-**	**8 (100%)**	**31 (100%)**
6	Expressing gratitude	Expressive	-	4 (100%)	19 (100%)	5 (100%)	16 (100%)	16 (100%)	8 (100%)	5 (100%)	11 (100%)	8 (100%)	92 (100%)
			-	**4 (100%)**	**19 (100%)**	**5 (100%)**	**16 (100%)**	**16 (100%)**	**8 (100%)**	**5 (100%)**	**11 (100%)**	**8 (100%)**	**92 (100%)**
7	Current International issue/problem	Assertive	**-**	4 (100%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**		**-**	4 (100%)
			-	**4 (100%)**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**4 (100%)**
8	Future problem	Assertive	**-**	3 (100%)	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	3 (100%)
			-	**3 (100%)**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**3 (100%)**
9		Assertive	**-**	**-**	10 (100%)	9 (100%)	5 (100%)	17 (94.44%)	4 (100%)	4 (80%)	**-**	7 (87.5%)	56 (94.91%)

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No	Theme	Speech acts	Philippines (2022)	Singapore (2023)	Australia (2022)	New Zealand (2023)	South Africa (2018)	Zambia (2021)	Ireland (2022)	United Kingdom (2023)	Canada (2015)	United States (2020)	Total
	A new start of the work/being a new leader	Declarative	-	-	-	-	-	1 (5.56%)	-	1 (20%)	-	1 (12.5%)	3 (5.09%)
			-	-	10 (100%)	9 (100%)	5 (100%)	18 (100%)	4 (100%)	5 (100%)	-	8 (100%)	59 (100%)
10	Introducing other members of the government	Assertive	-	-	-	3 (60%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 (60%)
		Declarative	-	-	-	2 (40%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 (40%)
			-	-	-	5 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	5 (100%)
11	Citizens' desires/attributes	Assertive	-	-	-	-	-	18 (100%)	-	-	8 (100%)	-	26 (100%)
			-	-	-	-	-	18 (100%)	-	-	8 (100%)	-	26 (100%)
12	The country's victory and progress	Assertive	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15 (100%)	15 (100%)
			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15 (100%)	15 (100%)
13	Asking the audience to do something or perform certain actions	Directive	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11 (100%)	11 (100%)
			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	11 (100%)
14	**Others**		70	6	15	9	12	34	8	6	23	33	216
			217	67	93	71	74	160	52	40	103	167	1044

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Theme and Speech Act Associations in the Inaugural Speeches

This section discusses the associations between speech acts and themes in inaugural speeches. Some themes are common and frequently addressed, while others are less common.

Common Theme and Speech Act Associations

The common theme and speech act associations include (1) *Past* themes with *assertive*, (2) *Issue/problem* themes with *assertive*, (3) *Future plans* with *commissive* and *assertive*, and (4) *Expressing gratitude* with *expressive*.

Past Themes with *Assertive* Speech Acts

Three themes associated with assertive speech acts are *personal past actions*, *past actions of other individuals*, and *past national issues/problems*, each occurring at 100%. Expressing *past national issues* through *assertive* speech acts allows leaders to present a clear narrative about the country's history, emphasizing lessons learned and progress made. Boakye (2014) found similar results in the inaugural speeches of Ghanaian presidents from 1993 to 2009, where assertive acts were used to describe the past of Ghana, often expressed in the form of statements. An example of the use of *assertive* in *claiming* sub-type in *past actions of other individuals* is *"The global village media was there"* (Inaugural speech of Zambia's President, Hakainde Hichilema, 2021).

Issue/Problem Themes with *Assertive* Speech Acts

Themes under this category include *current national issues/problems* (80.95%), *current international issues/problems* (100%), and *future problems* (100%). Leaders frequently use *assertive* speech acts to discuss these themes, as they serve to provide factual statements and establish the leaders' reliability and authority by demonstrating their awareness of crucial issues. Widiatmoko (2017) found that leaders often used *assertive* acts to reveal national issues such as liberty, freedom, cultural diversity, political parties, religions, and racism. An example of the use of *assertive* with *claiming* sub-type in *current national issues/problems* is *"The aftermath of COVID still lingers"* (Inaugural speech of the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, 2023).

Future Plans with *Commissive* and *Assertive* Speech Acts

Future plans are associated with *commissive* (40.39%) and *assertive* (53.57%) speech acts. *Commissive* acts involve the leader's pledges regarding future policies, aligning with studies by Lodhi et al. (2018) and Kyei et al. (2020), which found that promises (*commissive* acts) are a primary component of inaugural speeches. *Assertive* acts are used to persuade audiences of the leader's judgment and future achievements, as seen in the research by Nurkhamidah et al. (2021) and Mufiah and Rahman (2018) regarding Donald Trump's inaugural speech. These speech acts serve to set the tone for

the administration and establish a clear vision for the nation's trajectory, with *assertive* acts presenting the leader's beliefs and goals and *commissive* acts serving as promises and commitments. An example of a *commissive* with a *promising* sub-type is *"I want to seek our common purpose and promote unity and optimism, not fear and division."* (Inaugural speech of Australia's Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, 2022).

Expressing Gratitude with Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive speech acts (100%) are used to congratulate, excuse, thank, give wishes, show attitude, and greet. Griffin (2006)) found that a speaker's expression of understanding, belief, emphasis, and responsibility can shape the audience's belief. Leaders expressing gratitude in inaugural speeches perform a strategic act of communication that strengthens unity and goodwill among audiences, acknowledging collective efforts and sacrifices. An example of *expressive* with a *thanking* sub-type is *"I want to thank all those who've worked so hard for this victory."* (Inaugural speech of Australia's Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, 2022).

Less Common Theme and Speech Act Associations

Association of *Future Plans* with *Directive*

Future plans are typically associated with *commissive* and *assertive* speech acts (Yang & Wang, 2020). However, this study found that leaders in four countries, Singapore, South Africa, Zambia, and the United States, use *directives* for this theme (6.04%). Inaugural speeches are traditionally intended to motivate, unify, and shape a sense of collective aim among citizens rather than issuing immediate orders. Using *directive* acts can be perceived as authoritarian, potentially alienating segments of the population who might view such commands as arrogant or presumptive. Despite this general trend, leaders in Singapore, South Africa, Zambia, and the United States sometimes use *directive* speech acts in their inaugural addresses. The unique political, social, and historical contexts play essential roles in these examples; for instance, Singapore's pragmatic and direct communication style reflects its culture of efficiency and transparency in governance. In South Africa and Zambia, leaders use *directive* acts to address urgent socio-economic problems and rally the population towards national development goals, reflecting the need for immediate and coordinated action in post-apartheid and developing contexts. Similarly, in the United States, *directive* acts in inaugural speeches are often used during crises or significant national transformations. An example of a *directive* with a *commanding* sub-type is *"And, we must meet this moment as the United States of America."* (Inaugural speech of the United States President, Joe Biden, 2020).

Association of *a New Start of the Work/Being a New Leader* with *Declarative*

The association of *a new start of the work/being a new leader* with *declarative* speech acts (5.09%) is less common because this theme is typically associated with *assertive* acts (Mufiah & Rahman, 2018). This study found this association in the

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speeches of leaders from Zambia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Inaugural addresses include themes of *a new start of the work/being a new leader, which* often pledges new leadership but seldom employs *declarative* acts, which are straightforward statements of fact or goals.

Declarative statements, which highlight certain actions or outcomes, can risk alienating population segments, particularly in politically and culturally diverse nations. Furthermore, *declarative* statements can become pledges that may later prove infeasible due to unforeseen circumstances, thus jeopardizing credibility. However, there are important exceptions where leaders have used *declarative* speech acts effectively in inaugural speeches; for instance, in Zambia, a leader may use *declarative* statements to express a commitment to new leadership and articulate a clear purpose for change in response to significant socio-political challenges. In the United Kingdom and the United States, *declarative* speech acts in inaugural addresses can highlight new leaders' commitments to democracy, freedom, and continued leadership during national transition crises. An example of *declarative* with *declaring* sub-type is *"Today, we mark the swearing-in of the first woman in American history elected to national office - Vice President Kamala Harris."* (Inaugural speech of the United States President, Joe Biden, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study revealed common themes in inaugural speeches, ideologies, and values embedded in the speeches through thematic analysis, as well as common and less common theme-speech act associations. For the common themes, inaugural speeches tend to include the themes of *future plans* and *expressing gratitude*. Ideologies and values are also revealed through the thematic analysis of the inaugural speeches. For Canada and Zambia, their speeches place specific emphasis on *citizens* through various themes, reflecting the importance of citizen engagement and participation. Australia and New Zealand's speeches focus on the national economy in the *future plan*, portraying the main policy and priority of these countries. For the United States, the theme of *victory and progress* is associated with the concept of democracy, which is the ideal value prioritized in this country. For Singapore, the speech concentrates on discussing *future and current national and international issues* due to geopolitical conditions, such as the ongoing Ukraine conflict and upcoming challenges brought by climate change. For New Zealand, the speech emphasizes *introducing members of the government*, highlighting the prime minister's desire for transparency. For the Philippines, *expressing gratitude* is not as frequent due to the leader's strategic aim of establishing an image of firm and decisive leadership. As for the common theme and speech act associations, they include *past themes* with *assertive* speech acts, *issue/problem* themes with *assertive* speech acts, *future plans* with *commissive* and *assertive* speech acts, and *expressing gratitude* with *expressive* speech acts. The less common associations include *future plans* with *directive* speech acts and *new start of work,* such as *being a new leader* with *declarative* speech acts. The study provided insights into modern public speaking

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strategies and the linguistic choices of country leaders, revealing their motivations and the ideologies and values they seek to communicate.

This research focused solely on the inaugural speeches of 10 country leaders from English-speaking countries. While these addresses provided valuable insights, the findings may not be applicable to all leaders or countries. Future studies should examine the analysis of inaugural speeches from various countries, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of rhetoric and discourse on a global scale. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore the specific connections between these language patterns and social theories, such as neoliberalism, Marxism, and globalization, to provide deeper insights into the ideological frameworks that shape political communication.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Available accessed on *Figshare* website:
https://figshare.com/s/557047c44ff1b1dcd490

Table 1 *All Main Themes, Sub-Themes and Their Description*

Table 2 *All Main Themes, Sub-Themes, and Their Percentage across 10 Countries*