

Joe Biden's Inaugural Address Interpreted on Italian TV: Cultural and Pragmatic Aspects

Emanuele Brambilla, University of Trieste

Citation: Brambilla, Emanuele (2021) "Joe Biden's Inaugural Address Interpreted on Italian TV: Cultural and Pragmatic Aspects", in Giuliana Elena Garzone, Elena Liverani (eds) *Tradurre l'oralità. Aspetti pragmatici e culturali, mediAzioni 31: A33-A55*, <http://www.mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it>, ISSN 1974-4382.

Political thinkers, in general, can be divided into two classes: the Utopian with his head in the clouds and the realist with his feet in the mud.

(Orwell 2003/2004: 14)

1. Introduction

The following pages examine two simultaneous interpretations into Italian of an inaugural address delivered by a politician that George Orwell would probably consider a utopian, i.e. Joe Biden. This study does not stand on its own but is part of a broader project on the simultaneous interpretations of a series of inauguration speeches delivered by utopians and realists alike, including Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

The more or less visionary or pragmatic character of a speaker, their *ethos* or moral credibility (Charteris-Black 2005/2011: 7), their political orientation, the venue where and the moment when they deliver a speech are all factors that motivate specific discourse choices and, therefore, contribute to differentiating political speeches, thereby shaping and diversifying the tasks of the simultaneous interpreter, as well. In other words, thematic, situational and functional variables determine speech configuration and have direct repercussions on the specific

communicative tasks the interpreter is called upon to carry out (Viezzi 2001: 132-137). In this respect, political speeches are “sensitive texts” (Schäffner 1997: 131) that happen to be extremely diversified as far as topical selection, audience demands and presentational devices (van Eemeren 2010: 93) are concerned. Yet, speeches pertaining to the same genre often share and show similarities and patterns that help interpreters anticipate what a given speaker will say and how s/he will say it in a given communicative situation. Understood as “the prediction of speech units in a given situation” (Jörg 1997: 217), anticipation “reduces uncertainty [...] and thus also reduces processing capacity requirements in speech comprehension” (Gile 1995: 173-175). The inauguration speech delivered by the President of the United States is one whose accurate and effective rendition cannot be achieved without having acquired a certain familiarity with its generic features.

Since 1937, the inauguration ceremony of the American President has taken place in Washington D.C. on January 20th, the first day of the new term. During the ceremony, the President-elect “becomes the President of all Americans” (Trosborg 2000: 137) by taking the presidential oath of office and addressing the nation. Though sharing “many characteristics with political speeches in general, it [the inaugural address] also stands out due to the uniqueness of the situation” (*ibid.*: 121). The main feature that sets the inauguration speech apart from other political speeches is the fact that the President does not need to persuade the audience to vote for them; therefore, this aspect of political speeches is toned down in the address (*ibid.*), which is, thus, particularly strewn with sentences whose only aim is to attract the attention of the audience to their form rather than content. Most of these utterances are “tailored” to function as *soundbites* (*ibid.*: 136) in a world in which the mediatization of political communication (Norén 2013: 49) has broadened the audience of inaugural addresses to a planetary size.

An inaugural address is broadcast to millions of people around the world. The amount of effort invested in the preparation of the communicative event probably surpasses that put into any other speech event. The address is premeditated at length, and rhetorical features of the speech are particularly salient. (Trosborg 2000: 127)

Notably, the inauguration speech could not be broadcast to millions of people around the world without the aid of simultaneous interpreters, who enable world

audiences to listen to the words of the US President live and in their own languages. Previous research in simultaneous interpretations into Italian of the speeches delivered by Clinton, Obama and Trump has shown that the inaugural address is bound to “lose” at least part of its rhetorical force when it “leaves the USA”, as the interpreters’ renditions are characterised by the omission of several excerpts, the elimination of numerous rhetorical figures, the production of incomplete utterances or the production of expressions that are less evocative than those present in the SS (Brambilla forthcoming). Those who interpret the address in question, irrespective of the language pair involved, have been observed to have “difficulty in coping with the density and structural complexity of the speech, as manifested in various types of rhetorical structures” (Pöchhacker 2011: 34).

Therefore, the simultaneous interpretation of the rhetorical structures in the inaugural address appears as an instance of untranslatability (Hermans 2009: 301-303); yet, like all apparently untranslatable texts, i.e. “those that consciously exploit the idiomatic resources of a given tongue” (*ibid.*: 302), the inauguration speech delivered by the newly elected US President “begs and demands to be translated” (*ibid.*: 303), also by virtue of its global significance.

2. Materials and methodology

The work-in-progress project aims at analysing the simultaneous interpretations into Italian of inaugural addresses delivered by United States Presidents to explore the alleged untranslatability of rhetoric in political interpreting contexts. A parallel corpus has been assembled, which currently includes the following speeches and their interpretations into Italian, broadcast live on Italian television by the news programmes that are specified in the right-hand column of Table 1.

SOURCE SPEECHES (SSs) - English	INTERPRETED SPEECHES (ISs) - Italian
1. Inaugural address by President Bill Clinton (20 th January 1993)	TG4
2. Inaugural address by President Barack Obama (20 th January 2009)	RaiNews24
3. Inaugural address by President Donald Trump (20 th January 2017)	TGLa7
4. Inaugural address by President Joe Biden (20 th January 2021)	RaiNews24
	SkyTG24

Table 1. The corpus

The videos of speeches 1 and 2 were drawn from *CorIT*, the corpus of television interpreting developed at the University of Trieste, while speeches 3 and 4 were downloaded from the internet. The choice to analyse these specific speeches and their renditions was subordinate to the availability of recordings. Speeches 1, 2 and 3 were interpreted by three distinct interpreters; for speech number 4, the recordings of two renditions by two interpreters were included in the corpus. The present paper reports the findings of the analysis of these two interpretations into Italian of Joe Biden’s speech, which were broadcast live by Italian TV news programmes *RaiNews24* and *SkyTG24*. As was done with speeches 1, 2 and 3 in Brambilla (forthcoming), Joe Biden’s inaugural address has been examined considering the communicative functions (Jakobson 1960) pursued by the speaker, i.e. “the use to which language is put, the purpose of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes” (Savignon 1983: 31). Given that “poetic statements have been included in the [inaugural] speech to appeal to the hearers’ emotions” (Trosborg 2000: 126), the study is centred on the analysis of the poetic function of language, understood as “the set toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake” (Jakobson 1960: 356).

The ISs have first been transcribed with the software *WinPitch* (Martin 2005). The transcriptions have subsequently been analysed taking into account the specific challenges of interpreting in political settings (Viezzi 2001; Pöchhacker 2007) and the specific constraints of TV interpreting (Straniero Sergio 2003).

As regards the former, Pöchhacker (2011: 22) argues that most of the speeches the simultaneous interpreter is called upon to translate in political contexts are

“more often than not [...] speeches with a high level of information density as a result of careful preparation or scripting”. As anticipated in Section 1, Trosborg (2000: 127) contends that the inaugural address is also premeditated at length (*ibid.*: 127), implicitly suggesting that it is first written and then spoken, like most political speeches:

Speeches are normally “texts” [...] Usually, they are prepared in writing, although the wording of their verbal presentation may sometimes differ considerably from the written version. They are rarely produced *ad hoc* or spontaneously, and even the sporadic *ex tempore* speeches are never improvisations out of nothing. (Reisigl 2010: 243)

The written nature of political communication has specific implications for the interpreter and for this project, which explores a very specific and particular context of the translation of orality. Political speeches in general and inaugural addresses in particular are written to be declaimed; therefore, any analysis of the rendition of a political speech by an interpreter starts from the assumption that the source speech will present lexical, syntactic and pragmatic characteristics typical of a written text or, at least, of an oral text that is not delivered off the cuff or *ex abrupto*.

As Partington and Taylor (2010: 14) clarify, “the principal use of language in politics is for persuasion in debate”; in this regard, having their speeches carefully prepared in advance enables politicians to streamline and maximise the persuasive potential of their messages. Paraphrasing Charteris-Black (2005/2011: 9), persuasive political communication is ensured by means of the overlapping of diverse rhetorical strategies creating a powerful interplay; in this sense, political speeches are “among the least translatable texts” (Hermans 2009: 302), and it is precisely the written nature of political communication that gives rise to evocative and apparently untranslatable speeches, strewn with rhetorical strategies and poetic statements that compound the interpreter’s job.

As regards the specific constraints of TV interpreting, the TV interpreter – unlike the conference interpreter – does not generally share the communicative context of situation with the speaker and the primary audience¹.

Unlike what happens in conference interpreting, media interpreting is often characterized by *displaced situationality*. (Viezzi 2013: 384)

In a nutshell, Joe Biden delivers his speech in Washington, the primary audience is in Washington, but the interpreter is in Italy, translating Biden's words to the exclusive benefit of Italian TV spectators, who are merely informed of what is going on in the United States capital. This renders the interpretation of the inaugural address an example of "documentary interpreting" (*ibid.*).

Notably, the "product" offered by the TV interpreter must not be considered a "mere" interpretation but a real televised event (Pöchhacker 2011: 31), "where form is preferred over content" (Falbo and Straniero Sergio 2011: XIII) to meet the *infotainment* (Dal Fovo 2018: 158) needs of TV audiences. Hence, the transfer of the US President's inauguration speech depends on the interpreter's ability to render certain suprasegmental and paralinguistic elements (such as intonation, rhythm and fluency) that, in the context at issue, "turn out to be of overriding importance" (Falbo and Straniero Sergio 2011: XIII).

In addition, the analysis of the ISs must not overlook the fact that "in televised interpreted events they [interpreters] hardly ever have the opportunity to see the text" (Straniero Sergio 2003: 169-170); therefore, they are denied the opportunity to duly engage in "advance preparation" (Gile 1995: 144-145), i.e. one of the prerequisites to perform an accurate interpretation. As a result, in the context in question, the interpreter's expectations about the SS inevitably stem from preliminarily-acquired knowledge of the thematic, functional and situational specificities of the inaugural address.

¹ Reisiigl (2010: 257) distinguishes between *primary audience* (face to face), *secondary audience* (listening to a live transmission via mass media) and a *tertiary audience* (listening to a later transmission via mass media).

3. Interpreting Joe Biden's inaugural address

Based on relevant literature (Pöchhacker 2011; Trosborg 2000) and on the previous analyses of the speeches delivered by Clinton, Obama and Trump, the most frequently used rhetorical devices in inauguration speeches can be divided into two groups:

1. phonological, rhythmical and syntactic strategies;
2. lexical strategies.

The first group includes alliterations (Dupriez 1991: 23), three-part lists (Charteris-Black 2005/2011: 11; Partington and Taylor 2010: 71), anaphoras and anastrophes (Dupriez 1991: 40); the second includes metaphors, unusual collocations (Trosborg 2000: 129-130) and biblical allusions (Charteris-Black 2005/2011: 12).

The present paper focuses on the second group of rhetorical devices; particular emphasis is placed on metaphors and unusual collocations because the previous analyses of the speeches delivered by Clinton, Obama and Trump (Brambilla forthcoming) have revealed that the effectiveness of the interpreter's product and performance is not undermined by the elimination of alliterations, parallelisms or anaphoras, but rather by the omission of given lexical elements that, when combined in specific fashions, determine the pragmatic force of the SS. In his study of English-German interpretations of Barack Obama's first inaugural speech, Pöchhacker (2011) had already noted that the elimination in the IS of phonological, rhythmical and syntactic strategies did not affect the overall accuracy of the IS. In this respect, those rhetorical devices that concern the lexical dimension of the speech are particularly problematic for the interpreter, because their ineffective translation compromises not only the rhythm and musicality of the inauguration speech but also and especially its meaning, its rhetorical force and, therefore, its inherently poetic nature, understood as the prevalence of the poetic function stemming from the regular recourse to the above-mentioned rhetorical devices.

3.1. Metaphors

Metaphors are “representative of figurative speech” (Trosborg 2000: 129) and, therefore, proliferate in inaugural addresses, especially in those delivered by “utopian” or idealistic politicians². Previous analyses (Brambilla forthcoming: 141-143) have revealed that the metaphors found in inauguration speeches are often translated ineffectively into Italian, as they are either generalised or misunderstood, often because of the presence of evocative, unusual and unexpected lexical items. In certain cases, though, the interpreters manage to preserve the propositional content and rhetorical effectiveness of metaphors. This happened in 1993, when the interpreter of Clinton’s speech reproduced the metaphor (*ibid.*: 141) whereby the President addressed the need to change in terms of “forcing the spring”:

The notion of change is introduced in the beginning of the speech and supported by reference to weather and the seasons. By contrasting “in the depth of winter” with “spring”, [...] he implies that he wants to change the state of affairs from winter to spring. (Trosborg 2000: 128)

This discursive practice of depicting the imperfect present as a winter was later emulated by Barack Obama who, in his 2009 inaugural address, summoned Americans by mentioning the “depth of winter” first conjured up by Founding Father Thomas Paine and then by asserting “America, in the face of our common dangers, *in this winter of our hardship*, let us remember these timeless words”.

Like Clinton’s and Obama’s speeches, Biden’s speech also contains an extended metaphor whereby the current moment of crisis is compared to winter, namely to “this winter of peril and possibility” firstly and “this dark winter” secondly.

² Donald Trump’s inauguration speech is characterised by the presence of fewer and different metaphors as compared with the other speeches analysed (Brambilla forthcoming: 142).

SS – Joe Biden’s Inaugural address	IS – Transcription of interpretation 1 (<i>RaiNews24</i>)	IS – Transcription of interpretation 2 (<i>SkyTG24</i>)
We will press forward with speed and urgency, for we have much to do in <i>this winter of peril and possibility</i> .	noi spingiamo per andare avanti (.) perché dobbiamo fare tanto con urgenza (.) in <i>questo (.) momento di pericolo e di possibilità</i>	davanti a noi (.) c’è un futuro (.) lo affronteremo con grande velocità e con un senso di urgenza lo faremo perché <i>davanti a noi abbiamo delle significative possibilità</i>
We will need all our strength to persevere through <i>this dark winter</i> .	avremo bisogno di tutta la nostra forza (.) ←per perseverare in <i>questo</i> → <i>oscuro inverno</i>	per perseverare per andare avanti (.) in <i>questo: francamente lungo inverno</i>

Table 2. Metaphors³

As shown in Table 2, the interpreter on *RaiNews24* manages, in the second case, to translate the metaphor by opting for the literal and evocative “questo oscuro inverno” but, in the first case, “this winter of peril and possibility” becomes “questo (.) momento di pericolo e di possibilità” (“this moment of peril and possibility”). The interpreter on *SkyTG24*, instead, fails to preserve the rhetorical effect of the metaphor in both cases, as he talks of “questo: francamente lungo inverno” (“this frankly long winter”) and claims that “davanti a noi abbiamo delle significative possibilità” (“before us we have significant possibilities”). This last excerpt seems to suggest the problematic character of metaphor translation, as the interpreter’s choice appears to be a *parallel formulation*, i.e. a textual unit “compatible with the rest of the source-language speech but not a faithful reflection of the problematic source-language speech” (Gile 1995: 201). The most problematic aspect of the rendition provided by the interpreter on *SkyTG24*, though, lies in the fact that a positively-connoted equivalent is chosen to replace a metaphor whereby Biden warns against the dual nature of the current crisis. Incidentally, this metaphor makes intertextual reference to a 1959 speech delivered by John F. Kennedy in

³ Among the adopted transcription conventions, (.) and other parentheses containing the exact number of seconds signal pauses and, occasionally, their duration; - points out false starts; : indicates a vowel or consonant stretch; →← and ←→ indicate, respectively, accelerated and decelerated paces of delivery.

Indianapolis⁴, during which the speaker mentioned the Chinese pictogram for crisis, composed of two characters standing for “danger” and “opportunity”.

In this respect, the analysis of Biden’s speech and its interpretation into Italian confirms that the occurrences of metaphors mark particularly demanding passages for the interpreter (Spinolo and Garwood 2010). Notably, Table 2 shows that in three out of four cases the interpreters’ renditions are characterised by the presence of pauses, vowel lengthening or slowed pace of delivery, which suggest that the interpreters experience cognitive strains, stop, wait or take time to process the SS and/or think about suitable equivalents. Error analysis in interpreting research is inherently speculative (Falbo 2002: 115), but by observing Table 2 a direct question arises: how can the simple and ordinary terms *winter*, *dark*, *peril*, *possibility* destabilise interpreters to such an extent that the rhetorical effect of the excerpt in which they occur is irreparably lost?

The answer to this question can only be assumed. What is sure is that only familiarity with the generic features of the inaugural address, in particular, and political speeches, in general, helps the interpreter anticipate the content of the SS and minimise the risk of producing inaccurate renditions. For instance, knowledge of political discourse patterns reveals that *winter* can be considered a political term (Chilton 2010: 226), i.e. a term that can and does crop up in given political speeches delivered by given speakers belonging to a given culture. Clinton’s inaugural address is a case in point, but the British Winter of Discontent provides another example and further proves that political discourse is not averse to poetic language.

The analyses carried out during the first phase of this project revealed that more and less skilled interpreters alike struggled to rapidly provide effective translations of the metaphorical messages that United States Presidents launched by means of simple terms, such as *spectre* (Obama) or *ravages* (Trump). Like *winter*, these terms can be perceived as “strong” or “out of place”

⁴ Kennedy’s speech, entitled “Remarks at the Convocation of the United Negro College Fund” and delivered on 12th April 1959, can be found on the website *John F. Kennedy – Presidential Library and Museum*. Online at: http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFKSpeeches/Indianapolis-IN_19590412.aspx.

by any interpreter who is not acquainted with the lexical routines of politicians. Notably, when interpreting an inaugural address, the interpreter's expectations are limited to their individual preparation, as they typically do not have access to the script from which the speech is delivered (Pöchhacker 2011: 23).

3.2. Unusual collocations

As is the case in the interpretations of Clinton's, Obama's and Trump's speeches, the loss or mitigation of rhetorical force observed in the translation of the metaphors used by Biden often seems to occur in those passages where "unusual collocations" (Trosborg 2000: 129-130) – such as Clinton's *forcing the spring* – are used.

Collocations are, by definition, "usual"; as such, they are part of the linguistic and syntactic knowledge every interpreter gathers as a first- or second-language learner. In this respect, they play a crucial role in favouring recourse to anticipation, i.e. the ability to predict speech units in a given communicative situation.

Linguistic and syntactic knowledge enable the interpreter to make predictions on how a sentence may unfold. Expectations will be based on knowledge of the grammatical structure of the language. Semantic cohesion and syntactic structures are closely related, specific verbal collocations will help to anticipate sentence structure. (Riccardi 1998: 174)

The collocations that are typically found in inaugural addresses (and in political speeches, in general) are, instead, atypical because they are "unusual" and, therefore, functional to the exhibition of a certain language creativity, understood as "the bending and breaking of rules that is at the heart of originality in style" (Crystal 2017: 260).

Metaphors and unusual collocations attract the attention to the expression, thereby underscoring the significance of the message. At the same time, they make the text interesting to read or listen to. (Trosborg 2000: 130)

On the one hand, Table 3 shows that, like his predecessors, Biden does not refrain from using this discursive tool for rhetorical purposes; on the other, it

suggests that unusual collocations appear to be extremely problematic in interpreting contexts precisely because of their unusual and unexpected character.

SS – Joe Biden’s Inaugural address	IS – Transcription of interpretation 1 (<i>RaiNews24</i>)	IS – Transcription of interpretation 2 (<i>SkyTG24</i>)
Our “ <i>better angels</i> ” have always prevailed.	gli <i>angeli migliori</i> hanno sempre prevalso	il bene (.) è sempre riuscito a prevalere
The right to dissent peaceably, within <i>the guardrails of our Republic</i> , is perhaps our nation’s greatest strength.	u- un diritto ad avere una pacif- un pacifico dissenso (1 SEC)	OMISSION

Table 3. Unusual collocations

Among the unusual collocations used by Biden, the one whereby he claims that even in the most dramatic and painful moments of American history “our better angels have always prevailed” is one of the most significant. These “better angels” also enrich the IS produced by the interpreter on *RaiNews24*, but not that of his colleague on *SkyTG24*, who seems to generalise the SS propositional content and mitigate its pragmatic force.

The other unusual collocation displayed in Table 3 creates a problem to the first interpreter, as well, because “the guardrails of our Republic” is not reproduced in either of the ISs; the interpreter on *RaiNews24* starts translating Biden’s words but stops for a second after hearing the phrase at issue; he then omits “is perhaps our nation’s greatest strength”, probably because the unusual collocation absorbed his cognitive energies preventing him from listening to the conclusion of the message; the result is the production of an incomplete utterance. The interpreter on *SkyTG24*, instead, omits the entire passage. Notably, the unusual collocation in question plays a quite important role in the SS, as it is one of the linguistic instruments used by Biden to evoke the idea of lawfulness and condemn the United States Capitol attack of January 6th, 2021. This example, therefore, also clarifies that the overall comprehension of Biden’s speech (and that of any inauguration speech) depends on knowledge of specific cultural references, i.e. the analysis of what Reisigl and Wodak (2001/2009: 93) call the *narrow context*

and the *broader context*, i.e. the context of situation and the socio-political, cultural and historical context.

3.3. Cultural aspects

The main themes addressed in Biden’s speech are the Covid-19 pandemic and American unity. In general, references to the pandemic are accurately rendered by the two interpreters; yet, their struggles, evident throughout their ISs, to reproduce the references to the recent political crisis affecting the United States suggest that certain pragmatic problems are also caused by the occurrence of unknown cultural references, i.e. discursive aspects that have to do with the interpreter’s general knowledge and preparation (Snelling 2009).

SS – Joe Biden’s Inaugural address	IS – Transcription of interpretation 1 (<i>RaiNews24</i>)	IS – Transcription of interpretation 2 (<i>SkyTG24</i>)
And now, a rise in <i>political extremism</i> , white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat. To overcome these challenges – <i>to restore the soul and to secure the future of America</i> – requires more than words.	l’ascesa dell’ <i>estremismo politico</i> suprematismo bianco il terrorismo domestico che dobbiamo affrontare e che noi sconfiggeremo per superare queste sfide (.) per <i>ripristinare</i> (.) <i>(il) il futuro dell’America</i> (.) serve molto di più delle parole	combattiamo anche la supremazia bianca il nostro terrorismo a livello nazionale (.) servono per fare questo non solamente dei buoni propositi non solamente delle parole

Table 4. References to the United States Capitol attack (1)

In the excerpt displayed in the left-hand column of Table 4, Biden hints at the political divisions that are besetting the country by talking of “political extremism” and the need to “restore the soul and to secure the future of America”; the middle and right-hand column of Table 4 show that while reference to political extremism can only be found in the IS produced by the interpreter on *RaiNews24*, none of the two interpreters expresses the need to restore the soul and secure the future of America. Actually, an attempt at translating this excerpt to the benefit of the Italian audience can at least be observed in the IS produced by the interpreter on *RaiNews24*; he disrupts the parallelism in the parenthetical sentence by

refraining from translating the evocative object “soul” and the verb “to secure”, and mentioning a need to “ripristinare il futuro dell’America” (“to restore the future of America”) that was certainly not expressed by Biden. Especially in light of the omission of the noun “soul”, the choices made by the interpreter in this passage result in a significant mitigation of the SS rhetorical force.

The considerable problems encountered by both interpreters in rendering references to the dangerously polarised political climate are further shown in Table 5.

SS – Joe Biden’s Inaugural address	IS – Transcription of interpretation 1 (<i>RaiNews24</i>)	IS – Transcription of interpretation 2 (<i>SkyTG24</i>)
And here we stand, just days after a <i>riotous mob</i> thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people, to stop the work of our democracy, and to drive us from this sacred ground.	e noi siamo qui (1.5 SEC) do- dopo un tentativo HESITATION (.) di attaccare i:l lavoro della nostra democrazia (.) di portarci via da questa terra sacra	Ebbene noi siamo qui (.) siamo esattamente qui (.) pochi giorni dopo →avere visto così tanti (!) violenza← esattamente qui davanti a queste colonne all’interno eh di questo edificio
our children and our children’s children will say of us: [...] They <i>healed a broken land</i> .	i nostri figli: i nostri nipoti (.) diranno di noi [...] che <i>hanno curato u:na terra (1 SEC) problematica (2 SEC)</i>	I nostri figli i figli dei nostri figli (.) potranno ricordarci tutti e dire [...] ci hanno regalato questo paese <i>ci hanno dato questa terra</i>

Table 5. References to the United States Capitol attack (2)

The subject liable for the assault on the US Congress, a not-clearly identified “riotous mob”, is mentioned on neither Italian TV programmes, preventing the Italian audience from appreciating the newly elected President’s invective. Moreover, Italian spectators are also denied the opportunity to hear Biden’s call for enabling future generations to view contemporary Americans as those who “healed a broken land”. In the first case, the noun phrase is turned into “una terra (1 SEC) problematica” (“a problematic land”), with the one-second pause indicating the interpreter’s extraordinary cognitive effort in tackling this unusual collocation; the result is another collocation that does not misrepresent the SS message from an informative point of view but distorts its pragmatic meaning.

In the second case, instead, the “broken land” that in Biden’s opinion needs healing turns into a mere “land” (“questa terra”) that contemporary Americans will hand over to their children. This rendition by the interpreter on SKYTG24 further confirms that premodifiers are often omitted in simultaneous interpreting (Ghiselli 2018), determining not only a substantial loss of information but also a considerable mitigation of the pragmatic force of the SS. Although it is unlikely that the interpreters were not familiar with the recent events, the excerpts displayed in Table 5 prove that the renditions of references to the *broader context* in which the speech was delivered were rather troublesome.

More broadly, the excerpts in question further suggest that the creative and poetic association of lexical words, i.e. the occurrence of unusual collocations that is a cornerstone of the inaugural address, issues a challenge to the simultaneous interpreter. The language creativity inherent in unusual collocations, coupled with detailed references to the socio-political juncture, may compound the interpreter’s tasks. These problematic aspects of the TV interpretation of political speeches are not surprising (Pöchhacker 2011; Straniero Sergio 2003; Viezzi 2001). More surprisingly, the interpreters fail to grasp and reproduce certain cultural references that were already present in the inaugural addresses delivered by (at least a few among) Biden’s predecessors.

SS – Joe Biden’s Inaugural address	IS – Transcription of interpretation 1 (<i>RaiNews24</i>)	IS – Transcription of interpretation 2 (<i>SkyTG24</i>)
I have just taken <i>the sacred oath</i> each of these patriots took [...] My fellow Americans, I close today where I began, with a <i>sacred oath</i>	ho appena fatto <i>il giuramento sacro</i> (.) che hanno fatto tutt-i (.) questi patrioti [...] finisco dove ho cominciato con un <i>giuramento sacro</i>	ho appena giurato eh <i>ho fatto un giuramento</i> così come tanti altri patrioti hanno fatto [...] beh l’America è iniziata tra virgolette al:cuni: eh secoli fa bene con un <i>giuramento</i> questo giuramento lo ripetiamo senza virgolette oggi

Table 6. Frequently-recurring cultural references (1)

The noun phrase “sacred oath” occurs in every inauguration speech delivered by US Presidents; it can, therefore, be considered a lexical pillar whose recurrence

in the address is determined by the *narrow context* of speech delivery and does not depend on the choices of specific speakers. Therefore, any interpreter who is called upon to process and translate a new inauguration speech would be expected to gather information concerning the discursive routines of American Presidents during this highly institutionalised and formalised event. Yet, Table 6 shows that one out of the two interpreters, namely the one on *SkyTG24*, fails to reproduce the frequently-recurring noun phrase; the very specific and unambiguous “sacred oath” becomes an indistinct “giuramento” (“oath”), unqualified by any adjective. Despite being far more appropriate and effective, the rendition provided by the interpreter on *RaiNews24* raises a few doubts about his actual preparation for the event in question; a slight familiarity with the discursive patterns characterising inaugural addresses is enough to highlight the recurrence of the phrase “to take the sacred oath” and to lead the interpreter to consider that the most appropriate equivalent would be “prestare il giuramento sacro”, rather than the less elegant “fare il giuramento (sacro)”. In this respect, the analysis confirms the results gathered during the initial phase of the project, suggesting that certain interpreters of inaugural addresses were even unfamiliar with the formal, but certainly not niche, term *oath*.

SS – Joe Biden’s Inaugural address	IS – Transcription of interpretation 1 (<i>RaiNews24</i>)	IS – Transcription of interpretation 2 (<i>SkyTG24</i>)
In another January in Washington, on New Year’s Day 1863, <i>Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation</i> .	in un altro gennaio del Capodanno del 1863 <i>Lincoln</i> (.) <i>segnò la proclamazione</i> (1 SEC)	in un giorno di gennaio (.) Lincoln che ci ha: beh dato una sorta di benvenuto in questo che poi sarebbe diventato il nostro paese
Here we stand across the Potomac from <i>Arlington National Cemetery</i> , where <i>heroes who gave the last full measure of devotion</i> rest in eternal peace.	eccoci (3.5 SEC) vicino a <i>un cimitero</i> : (.) <i>dove</i> (.) <i>degli eroi</i> (.) riposano i- (.) in pace in eternità	siamo davanti a <i>un cimitero</i> (.) con centinaia migliaia di eroi: eroi che hanno dato la loro vita la loro devozione la loro dedizione alla causa della pace e della libertà

Table 7. Frequently-recurring cultural references (2)

References to Abraham Lincoln regularly shape the speeches of “utopians”, such as Martin Luther King (Charteris-Black 2005/2011: 86) and Barack Obama (*ibid.*: 307), but also frequently crop up in the addresses delivered by “realists” such as

Ronald Reagan (*ibid.*: 153; Guerra 2016: 73); therefore, they are a cornerstone of American political discourse, associating Democrats and Republicans across the board. However, Table 7 shows that the two interpreters appear to be destabilised by Biden's mention of the sixteenth President of the United States and his *Emancipation Proclamation*, freeing all slaves in Confederate states. This landmark document in the history of the United States and the world becomes, in the first case, a vague and unspecified proclamation ("la proclamazione"), which is followed by a pause whereby the interpreter on *RaiNews24* produces an incomplete sentence which is not convincing for the listener. In the second case, the interpreter on *SkyTG24* confines himself to mentioning Lincoln and does not attempt to hint at the proclamation in Italian. He ventures a parallel formulation ("ci ha: beh dato una sorta di benvenuto in questo che poi sarebbe diventato il nostro paese" – "he well gave us a sort of welcome to this land that would later become our country") that does not do justice to the specificity and rhetorical force of the SS.

The third row of Table 7 reveals another cultural reference that had already been quoted by Barack Obama in his 2009 speech. Mention of the Arlington National Cemetery is functional to evoking the bravery and sacrifices of American soldiers and also "reminds us of the 'holy ghost' of John F. Kennedy" (Cooper 1989: 90); that is why it is not uncommon to hear it in American political communication (especially in speeches delivered by politicians of the Democratic Party). Despite its rhetorical importance, this reference is omitted in both renditions, since the interpreters fail to convey the name of the Arlington cemetery, which becomes "un cimitero" ("a cemetery"). Moreover, the interpreter on *RaiNews24* adds a further element of vagueness by translating "heroes" with "degli eroi", as the Italian partitive article *degli* contributes to turning praised soldiers into an indeterminate group of "heroes in a cemetery".

Together with the other cultural references and rhetorical devices that have been shown (in sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3) to be either omitted or altered, these inaccurate renditions of Biden's reference to the US national military cemetery contribute to providing the Italian TV audience with a less poetic and less emotional speech than the one that was conceived to arouse the positive feelings of Americans.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the two simultaneous interpretations of Biden's inaugural address confirms the results obtained from the observation of the TV interpretations into Italian of the inaugural addresses delivered by Presidents Clinton, Obama and Trump (Brambilla forthcoming: 148). Similarly to these previously analysed ISs, the interpretations of Biden's speech can be said to show a recurring pattern: in those passages where the poetic function is predominant, the interpreter's rendition is characterised by the elimination of speech portions, the production of incomplete utterances or the production of utterances that are less evocative than those present in the SS.

The TV interpretations of the inaugural addresses delivered by the Presidents of the United States that are part of this study show a considerable mitigation of the rhetorical effectiveness of the SS in the IS; this rhetorical pauperisation is often caused by the presence of unpredictable lexical combinations in the SS that prevent the interpreter from anticipating the propositional content of the speaker's messages. For instance, the phrase "from this joyful mountaintop of celebration" found in Bill Clinton's speech appears to be unpredictable even for the most scrupulous interpreter who, uninformed about the textual content and rhetorical specificities of the SS, is bound to produce a "safe" and unpoetic rendition like "in questo giorno di festa" ("on this day of celebration"). The same comment applies to countless other cases; for instance, when faced with the concise, alliterative and sadly realistic sentence "A once-in-a-century virus silently stalks the country", one of Biden's interpreters could not but produce the less aphoristic and vivid "il virus il virus del secolo il virus che ha bloccato anche il nostro paese" ("the virus the virus of the century the virus that has stopped our country, too").

Therefore, the present analysis further corroborates the fact that accuracy in interpreting is a relative concept, because there is always a "tension between what is translationally desirable and what is feasible under the circumstances" (Pöchhacker 2007: 129); notably, the interpretation of the US President's inauguration speech is carried out under adverse circumstances, as the

translation difficulties stemming from the rhetorical character of the SS add to those determined by the constraints of TV interpreting.

The observation of Biden's speech as delivered to American audiences and as broadcast on Italian TV, though, offers additional insights into the diachronic analysis of inaugural addresses and their simultaneous interpretations. It highlights that, while it is true that certain discursive traits of the inauguration speech cannot be anticipated because their rhetorical power precisely lies in their unexpectedness, it is also true that other elements are quite predictable, as is the case with political speeches in general (Zarefsky 2009: 115). In particular, it reveals the presence of limited yet significant lexical and discursive threads connecting inaugural addresses across decades and politicians across generations and political orientations. From an interpreting point of view, this paper, therefore, suggests that the preliminary study of the genre features and recurring cultural references characterising inaugural addresses can partially compensate for the "depletion" of textual content and weakening of the poetic function that, to a certain extent, can be deemed the inevitable price to pay to broadcast the US President's message in another country, to another audience speaking another language.

For instance, the noun phrase *sacred oath* has been shown to be recurrent in the SSs and problematic in interpreting contexts; hence, this phrase and its equivalent in Italian ought to become part of the general knowledge of any interpreter who is called upon to process and translate an inaugural address, in particular, and political speeches, in general. However culturally-specific, familiarity with the Arlington National Cemetery and the rhetorical power of mentioning it during a political speech delivered in times of crisis enriches the general knowledge of the interpreter, thereby reducing uncertainty and cognitive load during simultaneous interpreting.

Furthermore, the study of Biden's speech has deepened the understanding of the metaphoric nature of inaugural addresses. In particular, *winter* has been further demonstrated to be a powerful "political term" (Chilton 2010: 226), which is recurrently and metaphorically used to describe a cold and overcast present and promise a warmer and brighter future. Use of this metaphor appears to be a

prerogative of “utopian” or idealist politicians, i.e. Democrats Clinton, Obama and Biden, as more realistic and pragmatic Trump opted for a more limited number of metaphors evoking different themes, such as protectionism and American supremacy (Brambilla forthcoming: 142). Yet, these conclusions can only be confirmed through a broader and more punctual diachronic study on inaugural addresses and their interpretations into Italian over the decades. Only thus could Interpreting Studies benefit from clearer insights into the rhetorical habits of utopian and realist politicians, providing interpreters with sound data that favour the dissemination of the SS rhetorical force through the screen, to strike a chord with Italian spectators.

Works Cited

Brambilla, E. (forthcoming) “La funzione poetica nel discorso politico e il suo destino in interpretazione”, *Testo a Fronte* 63: 131-149.

Charteris-Black, J. (2005/2011) *Politicians and Rhetoric. The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd edition.

Chilton, P.A. (2010) “Political Terminology”, in R. Wodak and V. Koller (eds) *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*, Berlin & New York: de Gruyter Mouton, 225-242.

Cooper, M. (1989) *Analyzing Public Discourse*, Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Crystal, D. (2017) *Making Sense. The Glamorous Story of English Grammar*, Oxford: O.U.P.

Dal Fovo, E. (2018) “European Union Politics Interpreted on Screen: A Corpus-based Investigation on the Interpretation of the Third 2014 EU Presidential Debate”, in M. Russo, C. Bendazzoli and B. Defrancq (eds) *Making Way in Corpus-based Interpreting Studies*, Singapore: Springer, 157-184.

Dupriez, B. (1991) *A Dictionary of Literary Devices. Gradus, A-Z*, Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press. Translated and adapted by Albert W. Halsall.

Falbo, C. (2002) "Error Analysis: A Research Tool", in G. Garzone, P. Mead and M. Viezzi (eds) *Perspectives on Interpreting*, Bologna: CLUEB, 111-127.

Falbo, C. and F. Straniero Sergio (2011) "Editorial", *The Interpreters' Newsletter* 16: XI-XX.

Ghiselli, S. (2018) "The Translation Challenges of Premodified Noun Phrases in Simultaneous Interpreting from English into Italian", in *TRAlinea Special Issue: New Findings in Corpus-based Interpreting Studies*.

Gile, D. (1995) *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Guerra, D.P. (2016) "Preserving America's written Constitution: Federal Courts and President Reagan's Defense of Ordered Liberty", in E.D. Patterson and J.H. Morrison (eds) *The Reagan Manifesto. "A Time for Choosing" and Its Influence*, New York: Springer, 61-76.

Hermans, T. (2009) "Translatability", in M. Baker and G. Saldanha (eds) *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, London & New York: Routledge, 300-303.

Jakobson, R. (1960) "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics", in T.A. Sebeok (ed) *Style in Language*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 350-377.

Jörg, U. (1997) "Bridging the Gap: Verb Anticipation in German-English Simultaneous Interpreting", in M. Snell-Hornby, Z. Jettmarová and K. Kaindl (eds) *Translation as Intercultural Communication*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 217-228.

Martin, P. (2005) "Linguistique de l'oralité: description de la prosodie et analyse instrumentale", *The Interpreters' Newsletter* 13: 15-24.

Norén, C. (2013) "Doing Politics or Doing Media? A Linguistic Approach to European Parliamentary Debate", in K. Fløttum (ed) *Speaking of Europe*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 43-64.

Orwell, G. (2003/2004) *The Observer Years*, London: Atlantic Books, 2nd edition.

Partington, A. and C. Taylor (2010) *Persuasion in Politics. A Textbook*, Milano: LED.

Pöchhacker, F. (2007) "Coping with Culture in Media Interpreting", *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 15(2): 123-142.

----- (2011) "Researching TV Interpreting: Selected Studies of US Presidential Material", *The Interpreters' Newsletter* 16: 21-36.

Reisigl, M. (2010) "Rhetoric of Political Speeches", in R. Wodak and V. Koller (eds) *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*, Berlin & New York: de Gruyter Mouton, 243-269.

Reisigl, M. and R. Wodak (2001/2009) "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)", in R. Wodak and M. Meyer (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: SAGE Publications, 87-121, 2nd edition.

Riccardi, A. (1998) "Interpreting Strategies and Creativity", in A. Beylard-Ozeroff, J. Králová and B. Moser-Mercer (eds) *Translators' Strategies and Creativity*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 171-179.

Savignon, S.J. (1983) *Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice*, Reading (MA): Addison-Wesley.

Schäffner, C. (1997) "Political Texts as Sensitive Texts", in K. Simms (ed) *Translating Sensitive Texts. Linguistic Aspects*, Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 131-138.

Snelling, D. (2009) "The Interpreter's General Knowledge", *The Interpreters' Newsletter* 14: 91-98.

Spinolo, N. and C. Garwood (2010) "To Kill or Not to Kill: Metaphors in Simultaneous Interpreting", *Forum* 8(1): 181-211.

Straniero Sergio, F. (2003) "Norms and Quality in Media Interpreting: The Case of Formula One Press Conferences", *The Interpreters' Newsletter* 12: 135-174.

Trosborg, A. (2000) "The Inaugural Address", in A. Trosborg (ed) *Analysing Professional Genres*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 121-144.

van Eemeren, F.H. (2010) *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Viezzi, M. (2001) "Interpretazione e comunicazione politica", in G. Garzone and M. Viezzi (eds) *Comunicazione specialistica e interpretazione di conferenza*, Trieste: EUT, 131-231.

----- (2013) "Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpreting (Non-conference Settings)", in C. Millán and F. Bartrina (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies*, Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 377-388.

Zarefsky, D. (2009) "Strategic Maneuvering in Political Argumentation", in F.H. van Eemeren (ed) *Examining Argumentation in Context. Fifteen Studies on Strategic Maneuvering*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 115-130.