NATIONAL IDENTITY AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE UNITED STATES AND INDIA

Meera S. Singh

Department of English, University of Hyderabad

Hyderabad, India

Abstract: This article compares the discursive construction of national identity and collective agency in two official English-language political texts: the inaugural address delivered by United States President Donald Trump on January 20, 2025, and the official English rendering of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reply to the Motion of Thanks in the Rajya Sabha on February 6, 2025. Using qualitative critical discourse analysis, the study examines personal pronouns, lexical evaluation, modality, metaphor, temporal positioning, and representations of political opponents. Both texts connect national renewal to an imagined collective subject, but differ in their rhetorical organization: the American address foregrounds restoration, sovereignty and the presidential capacity to act, whereas the Indian parliamentary address combines developmental aspiration with historical argument and the discursive inclusion of citizens in a national project. The article argues that apparently shared expressions of unity accomplish distinct political functions within different institutional and multilingual contexts. The conclusions are interpretive rather than statistically generalizable.

Keywords: political discourse, critical discourse analysis, United States, India, national identity, collective agency, pronouns, metaphor.

I. Introduction

Political speech is not merely the transmission of policy information. It organizes relations between speakers, institutions and audiences by giving linguistic form to collective identities and proposed courses of action. Expressions such as "we," "our nation" and "the people" appear immediately inclusive, yet their referents are shaped by the surrounding argument. A first-person plural may designate citizens as a whole, a governing party, a political movement, or a more restricted community invited to recognize itself in the speaker's account.

Comparing the United States and India is particularly productive because English is an influential language of official political communication in both settings, although its sociolinguistic position differs substantially. In American national rhetoric it ordinarily functions as the principal language of the address. In the Indian case, an official English rendering often mediates speech originating in another language and makes it accessible to domestic and international readerships. Therefore, formal similarities between published English texts do not establish identical speech-production conditions.

This article investigates how two high-profile official texts construct nationhood, legitimate political action, and distribute responsibility between leadership and collective subjects. The American primary text is President Donald Trump's January 20, 2025, inaugural address as published by the White House. The Indian primary text is the English rendering of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's February 6, 2025, Rajya Sabha reply published on the Prime Minister's official website. The texts are close in date but differ in genre, audience and institutional function:

an inaugural address marks the assumption of executive office, while a parliamentary reply responds to debate.

The research asks three questions: how do pronouns and forms of address construct political belonging; which metaphors and evaluative expressions organize national trajectories; and how is agency assigned to leaders, institutions, opponents and citizens? Its objective is not to rank democratic systems or infer public reception. Rather, the study identifies linguistic mechanisms observable in the publicly accessible texts and situates those mechanisms within the affordances of their respective genres.

II. Literature Review

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) connects textual choices with social practices and relations of power. Fairclough (1992) shows how linguistic patterns can be considered in relation to discourse practice and sociocultural context. Wodak and Meyer (2016) emphasize methodological pluralism and the importance of historically situated interpretation. These approaches discourage treating isolated words as transparent indicators of ideology.

Van Dijk (1997) identifies political discourse as a field in which group membership, legitimation and conflict are enacted through language. Group labels, presuppositions and contrasts between "us" and "them" help organize the standpoint from which a political account becomes plausible. Such contrasts need not be expressed through explicit personal attacks; they may emerge through a grammatical opposition between past failure and projected recovery.

Chilton (2004) approaches political language through the cognitive organization of space, time and value. Leaders can portray a desirable future as near, an opponent as outside the legitimate collective, or a policy as the only available route to security. Cap (2013) similarly examines proximization, through which a threat is discursively represented as approaching a valued political center. These perspectives illuminate references to borders, constitutional order and national danger.

Conceptual metaphor theory provides a further analytical vocabulary. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that recurrent metaphorical mappings structure reasoning rather than simply embellishing expression. In political speech, journey, rebuilding, growth and struggle are familiar frames for processes of governance. Charteris-Black (2011) shows that metaphor also contributes to political persuasion by connecting abstract claims to culturally resonant images.

Pronoun use requires contextual attention. A first-person plural is not inherently democratic or inclusive: “we” can merge speaker and audience, designate state institutions, or align the listener with a partisan coalition. The distinction between inclusive and exclusive reference must therefore be inferred from adjacent propositions, the addressee and the genre of the utterance. Similarly, “they” may perform neutral reference or construct an adversarial out-group.

The case of India also invites attention to multilingual political communication. The official English version of a parliamentary statement is a mediated political text, and findings about its English wording should not automatically be attributed to the precise lexical selections of the original-language delivery. This qualification is methodologically

significant when comparing translated or rendered materials with a speech delivered and published in English.

III. Methods

The study adopts a qualitative, comparative design based on purposive sampling of two official documents issued within the first quarter of 2025. The United States text is the White House transcript of the presidential inaugural address dated January 20, 2025; the Indian text is the Prime Minister of India website's English-language rendering of the February 6, 2025, reply in the Rajya Sabha. Both documents were selected because they articulate governmental legitimacy and collective national projects in public institutional settings.

The unit of interpretation is the local stretch of discourse: a clause or short group of sentences considered together with its surrounding argument. The analysis proceeds through five categories: (1) pronouns and participant roles, (2) evaluative lexical choice, (3) modality and temporal claims, (4) conceptual metaphors, and (5) the naming and representation of political opponents. Each category is applied to both texts, while allowing the presence or significance of particular strategies to differ between cases.

A close-reading procedure was used rather than an automated corpus count. Passages were identified through repeated examination of the official texts, categorized according to their immediate rhetorical functions, and compared with attention to genre. Examples in the discussion are short quotations or close paraphrases, and the primary documents are identified in the references. No invented interview material, statistical frequencies, survey respondents or effectiveness measurements are introduced.

Comparability has limits. A presidential inaugural address commonly seeks broad national identification and ceremonial authority, whereas a parliamentary reply also responds to contestation and criticism. Furthermore, the Indian text is an English rendering, not necessarily an exact lexical transcript of a speech originally delivered in English. Results therefore concern these two published English-language documents, not the whole political discourse of either country.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Pronouns, address and the boundaries of collective identity. In the American inaugural address, the repeated deployment of "we" and "our" builds an image of a unitary national community oriented toward renewal. The promise that "our sovereignty will be reclaimed" places the nation in the grammatical position of a dispossessed entity whose rights require restoration. The passive construction leaves the implied responsible agent temporarily open, while the subsequent emphasis on executive measures identifies the incoming administration as the means of accomplishing the promised change.

The same address moves between first-person singular and plural formulations. The singular "I" is prominent in pledges of action and executive direction, whereas plural assertions refer to a people whose destiny is presented as shared. This alternation constructs a rhetorical division of labor: the leader undertakes decisive institutional acts while citizens are constituted as the beneficiaries and moral constituency of those acts. It also blurs the boundary between an administration's project and a national project, a recurrent feature of leadership discourse.

In the Indian parliamentary statement, collective agency is organized through the vocabulary of national development and civic participation.

The official English rendering presents the ambition of a developed India as a collective undertaking rather than the exclusive responsibility of a government or an individual. The term "Viksit Bharat" is important because it links a prospective developmental condition with an indigenous national name. Its retention within English prose illustrates the bilingual texture of the mediated document.

The Indian statement's form of address is also institutionally distinctive. Parliamentary references to the presiding officer and to fellow members position the speech inside a deliberative chamber. These forms create an interactional frame different from the American ceremonial address to citizens at large. Even where Modi appeals to all Indians, he does so within an argument directed partly toward parliamentary opponents; his collective pronouns therefore operate simultaneously at a national and a parliamentary level.

Neither speech offers an unproblematic, all-inclusive "we." In the American text, identity is sharpened through contrasts between the restored nation and prior political failure. In the Indian text, shared development is defined alongside criticism of particular oppositional stances. Discursive inclusion and contestation coexist: the community is invited to unite around a positive future while alternatives are differentiated from that project.

4.2. Evaluative vocabulary and the production of legitimacy. The American document relies heavily on antithetical appraisal. National pride, safety, strength and prosperity are assigned positive value, while crisis, decline, disorder and governmental incompetence describe the condition that supposedly preceded the inauguration. The resulting before-and-after

scheme makes the electoral transition itself a turning point in a larger narrative of national recovery.

This evaluative organization is not merely descriptive. It offers a rationale for rapid action: the more severe the diagnosed breakdown, the greater the apparent necessity of corrective measures. When a text portrays institutional conditions as exceptional, audiences may be invited to accept exceptional urgency. Such an inference is about rhetorical function, not a verification of claims regarding crime, migration, inflation or administrative performance.

The Indian speech similarly uses polarized evaluation, but its dominant constructive vocabulary foregrounds development, constitutional commitment, opportunity and social participation. The official summary connects educational reform, mother-tongue access and the aspirations of disadvantaged groups with the governmental narrative of inclusive progress. The positive values are tied to programs and historical arguments rather than to a single inaugural moment.

The Indian address also contains sharp criticism of previous governments and political opponents. Its references to earlier restrictions on expression and to administrative constraints establish an interpretive contrast between the present developmental program and a problematic historical legacy. The temporal horizon is thus extended backward through political memory, while the American inaugural address turns more centrally on immediate national restoration. Both organize legitimacy through contrast, although the structure and institutional audience of the contrasts differ.

4.3. Metaphor, movement and political time. The American inaugural text repeatedly imagines political change through movement and

reconstruction. The expressions of a new golden age, rebuilding and renewed national ascent combine an evaluative image of exceptional prosperity with a trajectory out of crisis. A nation is presented as a subject capable of returning to its rightful position. The associated temporal logic is restorative: the desired future is authorized by an account of national greatness that must be recovered.

In the Indian rendering, the developed-nation project is represented as a shared destination requiring sustained effort. References to advancing, progressing and reaching new heights map political development onto a journey or vertical movement. These images allow broad social sectors to be positioned as participants in an extended national task. The destination is aspirational rather than simply a return to an earlier condition, even though historical precedents are extensively invoked.

The contrast between restoration and development should not be overstated. American rhetoric also envisages future innovation and national expansion, while Indian rhetoric may draw on cultural and constitutional continuity. More accurately, the texts assign different relative prominence to these temporal orientations. The American address makes the inauguration itself a dramatic break; the Indian parliamentary reply frames policy as a continuing collective trajectory.

4.4. Modality and the authorization of action. In the American address, categorical future statements and commitments communicate certainty. Frequent constructions with “will” advance from evaluation to promise, connecting presidential authority with expected political transformation. The linguistic effect is to reduce the apparent distance between announcement and outcome, although the achievement of those outcomes remains outside the scope of discourse analysis.

In the Indian document, statements about what citizens should do, collective duties and the resolve necessary for development carry a different configuration of modality. Instead of centering every action on an executive "I," the argument distributes moral obligation across public institutions and the citizenry. Such appeals make developmental participation appear normatively required and establish nonparticipation as a politically consequential position.

Modality also interacts with genre. At an inauguration, definitive promises are institutionally expected because a newly inaugurated president announces a program. In a parliamentary response, justification, rebuttal and prospective commitment appear together. The speech event therefore influences the relative proportion and pragmatic force of statements of certainty, obligation and possibility.

4.5. Opponents, otherness and rhetorical polarization. Both texts employ adversarial positioning, but opponents occupy distinct grammatical and institutional roles. The American address represents an unspecified past establishment and previous governance as sources of crisis, thereby offering a target against which the incoming administration's legitimacy is constituted. Descriptions of threats also create a boundary between the protected national interior and forces represented as harmful or external.

The Indian parliamentary reply names political opponents within an explicitly legislative context and disputes their interpretation of constitutional values and governance history. Its rhetoric is adversarial not because political conflict is absent from the idea of unity, but because unity is defined through a particular policy and historical narrative. The distinction matters: parliamentary debate structurally anticipates opposition in a way that inaugural ceremonial rhetoric does not.

These patterns are consistent with CDA accounts of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, but neither category can replace specific textual interpretation. Some criticisms may concern policies, others political actors or institutions; their implications differ. Likewise, language about the nation and citizens should be read in relation to the actual sequence of propositions rather than classified as persuasive solely because a collective noun is present.

4.6. English as medium and the methodological question of translation. The comparison illustrates that "English-language political discourse" includes more than one production process. The White House document records a speech delivered in English; the Indian government publishes an English rendering associated with a multilingual institutional practice. Lexical choices in the latter may include translation decisions, conventionalized official phrasing and retained Indian-language expressions.

This difference has consequences for claims about style. A researcher may legitimately analyze how the publicly available English text positions its readers, but should avoid inferring with certainty that a metaphor or pronoun is identical to the wording in the original delivery. In particular, studies interested in precise metaphor frequencies, deixis or pragmatic particles should compare source-language transcripts with official English versions. The present qualitative comparison explicitly limits itself to the accessible English documents.

Across the five analytical categories, the central finding is a common discursive mechanism with contrasting rhetorical emphases. Both texts transform government projects into representations of collective national purpose. The American inaugural address foregrounds executive

decisiveness and restoration; the Indian parliamentary text foregrounds developmental mobilization and historically grounded policy justification. These distinctions are outcomes of the selected documents and speech genres, not immutable characteristics of American or Indian political cultures.

V. Conclusion

This comparative analysis demonstrates that personal pronouns, evaluative vocabulary, conceptual metaphors and modality do more than decorate official political speech. They make national communities visible as linguistic actors, distribute the authority to act, and connect political agendas to emotionally and historically meaningful narratives. The texts analyzed present collective identity as a desirable basis for political action while also drawing boundaries around rival interpretations of the national interest.

The January 2025 American inaugural address gives particular prominence to restoration, threatened sovereignty and the promise of executive action. The February 2025 Indian parliamentary reply places comparatively greater weight on collective developmental obligation, constitutional and administrative history, and participation in the aspiration designated as "Viksit Bharat." These differences are mediated by genre: inauguration and parliamentary rebuttal assign different communicative responsibilities to a speaker.

The study contributes a focused interpretive comparison of two closely dated official English texts and draws attention to the special status of Indian government renderings in multilingual political communication. Its limitations include the small purposive sample, the absence of audience-response data, and the lack of a systematic source-language comparison.

Future research could assemble genre-matched corpora, investigate translations against delivered versions, and test the consistency of these qualitative patterns across multiple administrations and parties.

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Reviewer:

Shokhista R. Khakimova

PhD, Associate Professor

Gulistan State University, Uzbekistan