Attracting the Audience's Benevolence: Introductory Formulas in Political Speeches

Valentina CURELARIU
University of Suceava

Résumé: Dans le discours politique, l'emploi des appellatifs en tant que moyen rhétorique de captatio benevolentiae a, simultanément, une fonction psychologique et une fonction sociale. Par la suite, ils peuvent s'adresser à tous les citoyens, réduisant la distance entre le locuteur et l'auditoire et les barrières naturelles qui existent entre eux. Cet article analyse les appellatifs standardisés, les appellatifs de type collectif et les formules de remerciement. En plus, il y a les appellatifs qui s'adressent à d'autres catégories spéciales d'auditeurs, en général des personnes officielles présentes à un certain événement. Une autre catégorie d'appellatifs réunit les deux formules, tout en s'adressant premièrement aux instances officielles et secondairement aux collectivités. En même temps, une accumulation d'appellatifs est possible et, dans ce cas, l'attention est dirigée vers les personnalités mentionnées individuellement.

Influencing people's thoughts, emotions and actions, that is, *persuading* / *dissuading*, *seducing* or *inciting* them, respectively, always requires that these people should be *sympathetic* with the speaker / locutor and they should be *attentive* and *receptive* to the speech. Attracting the audience's *benevolence* from the outset has always been one of the most difficult tasks that orators have had to undertake in their art of speech delivery. The success or failure of their speeches depends to a great extent on their *fame*, their *charismatic attitude* and *pleasant appearance*, but the first words they utter in front of their listeners are crucial in this respect.

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Irrespective of the topic of the speech, finding the appropriate introductory words is one of the golden keys to the listeners' minds and hearts. Among the rhetorical strategies that politicians use at the beginning of their speeches, the **introductory noun-phrases in the Nominative of Address** are commonplace.

These **introductory formulas / appellatives** develop a **double function**: a **psychological** one, and a **social** one. **Psychologically**, they draw everybody's attention so that they focus their listening: listeners are signalled the moment they are supposed to start concentrating on the speaker and on what he says, as their role as recipients is now acknowledged by both parties in such a speaking process. **Socially**, introductory formulas are sometimes used to show respect to some important members of the audience and then to the whole of it; other times they establish the contact with the whole audience directly, without distinguishing between different categories of addressees.

In what follows, some frequent types of **introductory formulas** are analysed. They are grouped according to whether they single out any specific listeners or categories of listeners in the audience or not.

1. Appellatives That Address the Whole Audience

Employing familiar formulas that address the whole audience at the beginning of a speech has the effect of reducing the distance between the orator and the audience; the psychological barriers between the rostrum and the audience, i.e., between 'I', the famous and more knowledgeable figure, and 'you', the large mass of indefinite common people, are broken down to a great extent. Many times these formulations sound colloquial as they do not single out any specific category of listeners. They are preferred by orators especially when issues of national and social importance are tackled. The main aim of such speeches is that of *persuading* large masses of listeners about the importance of these issues and of the steps to be taken from then on as far as

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they are concerned. Getting closer to the listeners' minds and hearts is one effective way of persuasion as friendly advice is followed more goodwill than orders. Moreover, ideas presented in a language familiar to everybody both in terms of complexity and of register are more likely to be understood and adopted by those addressed. Here are the most frequent such formulations:

1) *Friends* and *fellow citizens*…[1]
2) *Fellow citizens of the Senate* and *of the House of Representatives*…[2]
3) My *fellow-citizens*…[3] (2 times)
4) *Fellow citizens*…[4]
5) My *fellow Americans*…[5]
6) My *friends*…[6] (2 times)
7) *Ladies and gentlemen*…[7] (3 times).

Some of these phrases have been used more frequently than others; thus, they have reached the status of linguistic clichés or

[1] Susan B. Anthony, 1873, *On Women's Right to Vote*, http://www.history-place.com/speeches/anthony.htm.

[2] George Washington, 30 April 1789, *First Inaugural Address*, http://douglass.speech.nwu/wash_a35.htm.

[3] Theodore Roosevelt, 4 March 1905, *Inaugural Address*, http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres42.html.

Also Edward Moore Kennedy, 25 July 1969, *Chappaquiddick*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/tedkennedychappaquiddick.htm.

[4] Frederick Douglass, 4 July 1852, *The Hypocrisy of American Slavery*, http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/douglass.htm.

[5] Richard Milhous Nixon, 23 September 1952, *Checkers*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixoncheckers.html.

[6] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 20 December 1940, *The Great Arsenal of Democracy*,http://www.americanrhetoric.com/fdrarsenalofdemocracy.html.

Also *idem*, 12 March 1933, *First Fireside Chat,* http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrfirstfiresidechat.html.

[7] Robert Francis Kennedy, 4 April 1968, *Remarks on the Assassination of Martin Luther King*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/rfkonmlkdeath. html.

Also Gerald Rudolph Ford, 8 September 1974, *National Address Pardoning Richard N. Nixon*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/geraldfordpardonofnixon.-htm.

and Ronald Wilson Reagan, 28 January 1986, *Shuttle "Challenger" Disaster Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/ronaldreaganchallenger.htm.

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stereotypical appellatives, e.g. *(my) fellow citizens/ Americans*, (*my) friends, ladies and gentlemen*. However, they have not lost their seductive effects entirely. Even though these appellatives belong to a less formal register of language, usually employed in talks between people of the same social status - such as friends, acquaintances, colleagues - they are felt both warm and respectful formulations as the intention of the high social status locutor who uses them is not to look down on the addressees or to lower the tone unduly, but to show them that they are acknowledged as equals.

Sometimes, these appellatives are not the first words that orators address the audience. In many situations the appellatives come after **a thanking formula**, a case in which the locutor may address the whole audience, as in the following examples, or, more usually, he may mention the name of some remarkable figures present together with the reason why he is grateful to them.

8) **Thank you very much**, *ladies and gentlemen*.[8]

9) **Thank you**, *ladies and gentlemen*, for a very warm reception.[9]

10) **Thank you very kindly**, *my friends*…[10]

When beginning to deliver a speech, it is not unusual to greet the audience and then to address them collectively, as in:

11) **Good evening**. Today, *our fellow citizens*…[11]

12) **Good evening**, *my fellow Americans*…[12] (4 times)

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[8] Bill Clinton, 11 September 1998, *Speech at the Annual White House Prayer Breakfast for Clergy Following his Testimony and Address to the Nation on the Monica Lewinsky Affair*, Washington, D. C., http://www.pbs.org/great-speeches/timeline/index.html.

[9] Barbara Charline Jordan, 12 July 1976, *1976 DNC Keynote Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barbarajordan1976dnc.html.

[10] Martin Luther King Jr., 3 April 1968, *I've Been to the Mountaintop*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm

[11] George W. Bush, 11 September 2001, *Address Delivered to the Nation*, http://www.votd.com/bu11.htm.

[12] Dwight David Eisenhower, 17 January 1961, *Farewell Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/dwightdeisenhowerfarewell.html.

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13) **Good evening**, *my fellow citizens*…[13] (2 times).

When such **collective appellatives** are used, the content of the whole speech is organised and formulated linguistically in a less formal and complex way than in the case when the speech begins with a more formal introductory formula. This means that these appellatives can be considered a reliable mark of the form of the whole speech as far as the register used by the locutor in the speech argumentation is concerned.

The appellatives analysed hitherto do not bear any mark of political colour: they have been used by politicians of various political convictions along the time, be them liberals, democrats, republicans, etc. Moreover, they do not distinguish between the addressees' social class, gender, or religion; they are politically correct formulations. However, there exist some formulations, much fewer, that can be described as marked from this point of view; the introductory formulas in the examples below suggest that the locutor expects the main part of the audience to be made up of listeners that share the same political convictions as he does. This is so as the first noun phrase in the sequence of Nominatives of Address is a wooden-language term used only by socialists and communists, or the first appellative phrase contains a noun referring to the locutor's political appurtenance, as in the following two examples, respectively:

14) *Comrades*, Ladies and Gentlemen…[14]

Also Lyndon Baines Johnson, 31 March 1968, *On Vietnam and Not Seeking Re-Election*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/lbjvietman.htm.

and Richard Milhous Nixon, 3 November 1969, *The Great Silent Majority*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixongreatsilentmajority.html

and *Idem*, 30 April 1970, *Cambodian Incursion Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/richardnixoncambodia.html.

[13] John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 10 June 1963, *American University Commencement Address.* http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkamericanuniversityaddress.html.

Also *idem*, 22 October 1962, *Cuban Missile Crisis Address to the Nation*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkcubanmissilecrisis.html.

[14] Eugene Victor Debs, 23 May 1908, *The Issue*, http://douglassarchives.org/debs-a80.htm.

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15) My fellow *Democrats*, and my fellow Americans…[15]

In both these last examples the locutors are aware that there are listeners whose political creed is not the same as theirs and they address these categories with less specific appellatives: *ladies and gentlemen*, and *my fellow Americans.* Besides their being stereotypical formulations, these appellatives are said to show the speakers' concern about getting everybody's bene-volence, and last but not least, their good manners.

If in most of the cases the appellatives refer both to *female* and *male* listeners (*ladies and gentlemen*) or they are *dual gender noun phrases* (*friends, citizens, fellows*), in the following ones the locutors address only *male* listeners:

16) Fellow-Country*men*…[16]

17) *Gentlemen* of the Congress…[17]

18) *Gentlemen* of the Jury…[18]

In 1865, when Abraham Lincoln delivered his *Second Inaugural Address*, politics was a male's job only; that is why he addresses the audience using the appellative *fellow country**men.*** It was only later that women won the right to vote and express their political ideas and options legally. Nowadays such a word sounds politically incorrect to the feminist movements; at that time, however, it was the only existent one in such a context.

Similarly, in the following excerpt George Washington addresses the listeners using a masculine appellative as the audience is made up of only male listeners and the issue approached is only their concern:

19) *"Gentlemen*,

[15] Edward Moore Kennedy, 12 August 1980, *The Cause Endures*, http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/tedkennedy.htm.

[16] Abraham Lincoln, 4 March 1865, *Second Inaugural Address*, http://www.wisc.edu/english/jdfleming/english550-lincoln.html.

[17] Thomas Woodrow Wilson, 2 April 1917, *War Message*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wilsonwarmessage.htm.

[18] Emma Goldman, 9 July 1917, *Address to the Jury*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/emmagoldmanjuryaddress.htm.

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By an anonymous summons an attempt has been made to convene you together."[19]

Given the social and political context of the past times in which the last four speeches were delivered, in none of the situations mentioned is the locutor himself disrespectful of the female part of the audience: the system as such was.

2. Appellatives That Address Specific (Categories of) Listeners

In the following examples, one or several high officials or remarkable persons in the audience are addressed **individually**, without any other reference to the rest of the audience:

1) *Your Honor*…[20]

2) *Mr. President*…[21]

3) *Mr. Chairman*…[22]

4) *Reverend Meza, Reverend Reck,* I'm grateful for your generous invitation…[23]

5) *Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Mr. President*…[24]

6) *Mr. Speaker*…[25]

7) Thank you, *Mr. Chairman*. *Mr. Chairman*…[26]

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[19] George Washington, 15 March 1783, *Preventing the Revolt of His Officers,* http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/washington.htm.

[20] Eugene Victor Debs, 18 September 1918, *1918 Statement to the Court,* http://www.marxists.org/archive/debs/works/1918/court.htm.

[21] Robert Marion La Follette, 6 October 1917, *Free Speech in Wartime,* http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/robertlafollette.htm.

Also Margaret Chase Smith, 1 June 1950, *Declaration of Conscience,* http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/margaretchasesmithconscience.html

[22] Joseph N. Welch, 9 June 1954, *Have You No Sense of Decency?* http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/welch-mccarthy.html.

[23] John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 12 September 1960, *Houston Ministerial Association Speech*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkhouston-ministers.html.

[24] Edward Moore Kennedy, 8 June 1968, *Eulogy for Robert Francis Kennedy,* http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ekennedytributetorfk.html.

[25] Shirley Anita St. Hill Chisholm, 10 August 1970, *For the Equal Rights Amendment,* http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/shirleychisholmequal-rights.htm.

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8) Thank you, *President* and *Mrs. Clinton* and *Chelsea*…[27]

9) Thanks very much, *Barbara Mikulsky*, for your very eloquent, your eloquent introduction.[28]

This is not to say that these orators disregard the rest of the audience; their resorting to such **individualising appellatives** is strictly related to the content of their speech whose main issue is, most of the times, if not a matter of only these individuals' concern, then it is one of general concern to which these individuals have contributed or can contribute a great share.

3. Appellatives That Address Both Specific (Categories of) Listeners and the Whole Audience

The greatest majority of introductory formulas consist of examples in which the locutor first addresses one or several most important officials present and then the rest of the audience collectively, sometimes using two or more plural noun phrases.

When more than one individual official is nominated, they seem to be arranged according to some rhetorical rules of politeness; in the largest number of cases, the current president or the most important person present is mentioned first, then the other prominent figures in the state, individually or collectively, and then the rest of the audience, collectively:

1) "**Mr. Speaker**, **Mr. President Pro Tempore**, members of Congress, and *fellow Americans…*"[29]

2) "**Your Honor**, *ladies and gentlemen…*"[30]

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[26] Barbara Charline Jordan, 25 July 1974, *Statement on the Articles of Impeachment*,http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barbarajordanjudiciarystatement.htm.

[27] Edward Moore Kennedy, 23 July 1999. *Tribute to John F. Kennedy Jr.*, http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/ted-kennedy-jfk-jr.htm.

[28] Ted Kennedy, 12 July 1980, *1980 DNC Address*, http://www.american-rhetoric.com/speeches/tedkennedy1980dnc.htm.

[29] George W. Bush, 20 September 2001, *Freedom and Fear Are at War*, http://www.douglass.speech.nwu.edu/bush_c01.htm.

[30] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, 2 February 1953, *Statement at the Smith Act Trial*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/elizabethgurleyflynn.htm.

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3) "**President Hoover**, **Mr. Chief Justice**, *my friends*…"[31]

4) "**Vice President Johnson**, **Mr. Speaker**, **Mr. Chief Justice**, **President Eisenhower**, **President Truman**, **Reverend Clergy**, *Fellow citizens*…"[32]

5) "**Mr. President**, **Mr. Speaker**, Members of the 77th Congress…"[33]

6) "**Mr. Vice President**, **Mr. Speaker**, Members of the Senate, and of the House of Representatives."[34]

7) "**Mr. President**, **Mr. Speaker**, Members of the Congress of the U.S.A."[35]

8) "**Mr. President**, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Convention, *My Fellow Citizens*…"[36]

9) "**Mr. President**, *fellow delegates*…"[37]

10) "**Mr. Chairman** and *fellow countrymen*…"[38]

11) "**Mr. Chairman** and Members of the Notification Committee…"[39]

12) "**Mr. Chairman**, *ladies and gentlemen*…"[40] (2 times).

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[31] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 4 March 1933, *First Inaugural Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrfirstinaugural.html.

[32] J. F. Kennedy, 20 January 1961, *Inauguration Speech*, http://bcn.boulder.co.us/government/national/speeches/inau3.html.

[33] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 6 December 1941, *The Four Freedoms*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm.

[34] *Idem*, 8 December 1941, *Pearl Harbor Address to the Nation*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrpearlharbor.htm.

[35] Harry S. Truman, 12 March 1947, *The Truman Doctrine*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/harrystrumantrumandoctrine.html.

[36] Adlai Ewing Stevenson, 26 July 1952, *Presidential Nomination Acceptance* Address, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/adlaistevenson1952dnc.html.

[37] Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, 9 December 1948, *Adopting the Declaration of Human Rights*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/eleanorrooseveltdeclarationhumanrights.htm.

[38] Thomas Woodrow Wilson, 6 September 1919, *League of Nations Final Address*,http://www.americanrhetoric.com/wilsontheleagueofnations.htm.

[39] William Jennings, 8 August 1900, *Against Imperialism*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/wjbryanimperialism.htm.

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13) "**Mr. Chairman**, fellow Democrats, *fellow Americans*…"[41]

Comparing the transcripts of some political speeches with their audio recordings, one example stands out from the rest:

14) "**Madam President**, *Members of the General Assembly*…"[42]

If only the written form of this speech were taken into account, this example of appellative would belong to the category considered here. But the audio recorded speech, which is the broadcast version that was actually delivered by President Eisenhower to the United Nations General Assembly, does not contain the first noun-phrase appellative; it addresses only the whole audience without referring to the official presiding this assembly. The fact that the transcript mentions it may be either a proof of its existence on the original written version and of the fact that President Eisenhower, out of various reasons, omitted it, or of its omission on both the original script and the radio broadcast version, and its subsequent insertion on the written form preserved for the posterity. No matter what the explanation may be, what is more important is the fact that the person who transcribed it felt it necessary to 'correct' the mistake and insert this appellative. This proves that such standard formulations are considered necessary when a speech is delivered to an audience formed of specific listeners, and not to the whole nation.

In the following three examples, the list of noun phrases in the Nominative of Address is uncommonly long, as if the locutor did not want to omit anybody:

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[40] Margaret Thatcher, 18 June 1991, *The International Economy & the New World Order*, Economic Club of New York, http://www.margaretthatcher.com/display/index.php?action=display&document=6&id=2798.html.

Also Margaret Higgins Sanger, March 1925, *The Children's Era*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/margaretsangerchildrensera.html.

[41] Hubert Horatio Humphrey, 14 July 1948, *1948 DNC Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/huberthumphey1948dnc.html.

[42] Dwight David Eisenhower, 8 December 1953, *Atoms for Peace*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/dwightdeisenhoweratomsforpeace.html.

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15) "**Vice President Johnson**, **Mr. Speaker**, **Mr. Chief Justice**, **President Eisenhower**, **Vice President Nixon**, **President Truman**, **Reverend Clergy**, *fellow citizens…*"[43]

16) "**President Hatcher**, **Governor Romney**, **Senators McNamara and Hart**, **Congressmen Meader and Staebler**, and other members of the fine Michigan delegation, members of the graduating class, *my fellow Americans…*"[44]

17) "**President Pitzer**, **Mr. Vice President**, **Governor**, **Congressman Thomas**, **Senator Wiley**, **and Congressman Miller**, **Mr. Webb**, **Mr. Bell**, scientists, distinguished guests, and *ladies and gentlemen…*"[45]

Even though the lists of appellatives are long in these last three examples, they can be considered expansions of the type considered in this sub-section. A possible explanation to this rhetorical device of **accumulation of appellatives** may be that the locutor, by remembering and mentioning everybody's name and political, professional or social appurtenance, shows great respect to every important person or groups of people present without disregarding the majority, who are mentioned last in the list with no exception.

The rhetorical style of the next two examples is different from that in all the previous ones. Because they integrate the appellatives in a more extended piece of discourse in which they alternate with a thanking formula, they are not as succinct as those belonging to the types mentioned above:

18) "Well, thank you. Thank you for that terrific welcome. Thank you, *Bobby,* for that kind introduction and let me also recognize *Dr. Morris Chapman* and *Dr. Richard Land.* I want to

[43] John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 20 January 1961, *Inaugural Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkinaugural.htm.

[44] Lyndon Baines Johnson, 22 May 1964, *The Great Society*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/lbjthegreatsociety.htm.

[45] John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 12 September 1962, *We Choose to Go to the Moon*, http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/jfk-space.htm.

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thank *all of you*…"[46]

19) "Thank you very, very much, *President Keohane*, *Mrs. Gorbachev*, *Trustees*, *faculty*, and I should say, *Julia Porter*, *class president*, and certainly my new best friend, *Christine Bicknell* – and, of course, *the class of 1990*. I am really thrilled to be here today, and very excited, as I know all of you must be, that *Mrs. Gorbachev* could join us."[47]

As this type of variation to the stereotypical formulas categorised above is rather rarely used, it stands out as stylistically marked from a rhetorical point of view. It may be so because most of the times political speeches are read out and their written form conforms to the rhetorical rules so long established. In each of the last two examples above it can be argued that the locutor adjusts herself to the situation (i.e. to the long series of welcoming applauses[48]) and improvises the introductory formulation. The pauses between the names of the officials she particularly addresses are filled in with polite remarks that show her appreciation of these people and, possibly, give her more time to think ahead of their name and, last but not least, delay a little the moment when the actual argumentation begins. This is necessary especially when the locutor is welcomed by the audience with long rounds of applauses. This ability to improvise quality introductions to the speeches can be considered a measure of the public speaker's eloquence. *Eloquence* is directly related to *spontaneity*, both of them being oratorical skills praised by the great majority of people, be them public speakers or listeners, therefore with highly persuasive, thus manipulative undertones and effects.

Very frequently, the public speakers choose not to use any introductory formulas at all, but to go directly to the introductory

[46] Condoleeza Rice, 14 June 2006, *Remarks at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting*, http://gos.sbc.edu/r/rice2.html.

[47] Barbara Pierce Bush, 1 June 1990, *1990 Wellesley College Commencement Address*, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barbarabushwellesleycommencement.htm.

[48] This is clear from the mp3 audio recordings of the same speeches to be found at the same Internet addresses, respectively.

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paragraph of their speech. This usually happens when the locutor intends to lay more stress than usual on the issues being communicated and tackles them without delay. This is to say that not using appellatives at the beginning of the speech is in itself a rhetorical device whose main aim is to signal the locutor's great concern for the informational content of his argument.

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