IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL?
A LINGUISTIC ACCOUNT OF THE PERSONALIZATION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL
COMMUNICATION
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The personalization of political communication refers to the foregrounding of politicians (including their public and private lives and activities) rather than political groups, e.g., parties or administrations. Importantly, political personalization is considered as a process: as we move forward in time, an increasing amount of personalization can be detected in politics.

Political personalization is a widely researched area of political communication. Yet, no consensus has been established as to which features of political discourse can be applicable across countries, political systems, and elections to indicate the personalization of political communication. This research aims to fill this gap by applying a linguistic framework: it hypothesizes that the increase of political personalization can be detected via language use and more specifically, in the use of first-person pronouns.

To interpret the relationship between personal pronouns and political personalization, the thesis adopts the experiential view of deixis, which claims that deixis (expressions such as *here*, *now*, and *I*) is derived from the actual physical act of pointing to things (Marmaridou 2000). Accordingly, we can "point" to things which are closer to us in terms of language use when we use the word *here*, and to things which are further away when we say *there*, for example. While this is apparent in terms of expressions referring to space, is it possible that there is a symbolic distance when we speak about humans? According to Rees (1983, cited by Jobst 2010), the distance of pronominal reference can be determined relative to the speaker, namely *I*. The model states that in English, the first-person plural pronoun follows the first-person singular, while the third-person plural pronoun is the furthest from the subjective *I*.

Building on Rees' model (1983, cited by Jobst 2010), the thesis investigates the occurrence of the first-person singular and first-person plural pronouns in American political communication. First-person plural language use is considered as a direct manifestation of political personalization. However, political communication research distinguishes multiple referents of the first-person plural pronoun; accordingly, it can refer to the politician and a group of people (e.g., family, or political party), the politician and the nation, and even the politician and the whole of humanity as well. The thesis distinguishes four first-person plural categories: we_{Family}, we_{Party}, we_{Nation}, and $we_{Humanity}$ to distinguish among pronominal references in US politics.

How can we conceptualize the relative distance of these groups to politicians? The experiential view claims that deixis can be interpreted relying on the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema (Marmaridou, 2000). The CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema is a cognitive phenomenon which conceptualizes our bodily experience of being in the center of own perception on the one hand, and, on the other hand demonstrates that things which are further from us are placed towards the periphery both physically and symbolically (Lakoff, 1987). Therefore, the people who are closer to us (e.g., our family) are placed closer to the CENTER as compared to looser relations, e.g., the whole nation. This is captured by the INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS / SOCIAL DISTANCE IS SPATIAL DISTANCE conceptual metaphor, indicating that the physical distance we keep from other humans is mapped onto the conceptual and linguistic system. Thus, the research places the category of we_{Family} closest to the individual politician, followed by we_{Party}, we_{Nation}, and $we_{Humanity}$. The reason for this is that family members are usually the closest to the individuals, as compared to the other categories.

The corpus of the thesis is comprised of Democratic and Republican presidential nomination acceptance speeches between 1932 and 2020. The results showed that political personalization can indeed be detected via pronominal reference. First-person singular references showed an increasing tendency, indicating an increased focus on the individual. We_{Family} references also increased, from the 1980s onwards. We_{Party} references decreased from the 1980s as well, referring to the backgrounding of political groups. Instead, there is a tendency for politicians to focus on the whole nation as potential voters, which is reflected in the growth of we_{Nation} references. Finally, there was no significant number of $we_{Humanity}$ references in the corpus.

The thesis provides new results in terms of theory and methodology as well. The following points summarize the novelties explored in this research.

1. The thesis provides a linguistic account on the personalization of political communication. More precisely, it offers an analysis of subjective first-person references in the context of personalized political communication. **By setting up the analytical categories of first-person references (namely, I, we_{Family}, we_{Party}, we_{Nation}, $we_{Humanity}$), the thesis provides a novel framework for future research on personalized political discourse** in a wider range of text types (e.g., genres of political communication, including other campaign speeches, inaugural speeches, etc.) and languages.

2. The theoretical framework draws on cognitive linguistic research, including image schema theory and conceptual metaphor theory. Based on the experiential view of deixis, which claims that deixis is based on the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema (Marmaridou, 2000), it provides a spatial interpretation of pronominal references through the INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS / SOCIAL DISTANCE IS PHYSICAL DISTANCE conceptual metaphors. The analyzed first-person pronoun categories (I, we_{Family}, we_{Party}, we_{Nation}, $we_{Humanity}$) are placed on a radial model of pronominal distance from the speaker's I which was created on the basis of Rees's (1983, cited by Jobst 2010) linear model. **The thesis offers a modified version of Rees' model. The radial model that is adopted in the thesis allows for the conceptualization of personal pronouns in terms of the metaphorical distance from the speaker, providing a basis for further data-driven analyses of pronominal distance in political discourse**.

3. A common criticism of image schema theory is the omission of socio-cultural considerations (Kimmel, 2005). The present study relies on the cultural and political context of the United States of America, along with the social changes which contributed to the personalization of political communication. **In doing so, the thesis embeds the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema (which provided the ground for interpreting first-person pronoun relations) in the context of American political communication**.