



BEYOND THE WORDS – THE VERBAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL- MILITARY PERSONALITIES’ SPEECHES –

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Within the article, I intend to approach politicians’ speeches from the point of view of word analysis, in order to discover what lies beyond the apparent message. Often, the information space is assimilated to a battlefield where words, like projectiles, fly to all sides to reach their target.

The analysis of political discourses complements and validates the distant assessment of political leaders’ personality traits. Thus, we can determine whether or not the generated language patterns reflect their decisions.

The neurolinguistic studies show that grammatical choices are not made consciously, thus we can discover important information about the personality of a political person. Moreover, it can be validated or not by comparison if the author of the speech is the same as the one who promotes it.

This method of verbal communication analysis complements the remote psychological evaluation of political-military personalities on the ways in which they assume decisions.

Keywords: remote psychological analysis; political personality; cognitive complexity; verbal analysis; political crisis;

INTRODUCTION

Remote political personality assessment was developed as a method to present a relevant image of the political leader within the context. It capitalizes on the political leader’s personality in the course of his life in terms of decision-making behaviour and his ability to influence the course of history. Thus, in addition to the traditional elements of clinical psychology, the assessment of remote political personality includes the following: management style, negotiation, taking strategic decisions in crisis situations. The radiography of the styles listed above provides important information about the cognitive and rhetorical aspect of the evaluated leader, each of these aspects being shaped by the socio-cultural context.

Within personality theory and research, cognitive complexity is generally associated with resilient behaviour in ambiguous or confusing situations. Hermann (1980) assessed cognitive complexity (remote psychological profiles) by calculating the ratio of words to phrases identified as being of high importance of words and phrases designated as of low importance. In the analysis of speeches from the point of view of psychological impact, cognitive complexity thus defined is connected with positive feedback associated with discourse addressed to other nations.

The cognitive complexity theory involves differentiation first and then integration, Suedfeld and his colleagues (e.g., Suedfeld and Tetlock 1977) adapting a measure of integrative complexity for remote research. (Whereas this integrative complexity is conceptually related to Hermann’s). Several studies have demonstrated that integrative complexity is linked to peaceful resolution (versus conflict escalation). Suedfeld and Tetlock (1977) compared communications and statements from two crises that ended in war (1914 and 1950 outbreak of the Korean War) and three crises resolved peacefully (Morocco crisis of 1911, Berlin airlift crisis of 1948, and 1962 Cuban missile crisis).



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As expected, they found higher levels of integrative complexity when war was averted. Suedfeld, Tetlock, and Ramirez (1977) studied United Nations (UN) discourses on the Middle East for over thirty years and found significant decreases in specific integrative complexity during the periods just before the outbreak of wars in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973.

USEFULNESS OF VERBAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL SPEECHES

The analysis of the verbal communication of political speeches is compared with the assessment of the politician's personality traits, with what is already known about him. It determines whether speech patterns generated by words analysis reflect the public behaviour of political leaders.

The grammatical choices are not made consciously, consequently personality traits can be highlighted, which cannot be identified by direct psychological evaluation. The used method is based entirely on available information provided by the media.

The speech can be studied from a variety of points of view. The linguistic component can be divided into the following disciplines: (1) phonology, the way sounds are put together to form words; (2) syntax, how sentences are made up of words; (3) semantics, which deals with interpreting the meaning of words; and (4) pragmatics, how we participate in conversations.

The paraverbal behaviour includes variables such as frequency, pauses, amplitude and tone. Of the speech facts available for analysis, syntactic variables and certain language variables are best suitable for the study of personality traits. Semantic variables, on the other hand, have only limited utility for identifying common behavioural responses. The speakers differ in their choice of vocabulary, but such preferences are influenced by situational variables, especially the topic of conversation (Laffal 1965, p. 93)

The method of analysing verbal behaviour is based on three arguments:

- Patterns of thinking and behaviour are reflected in speech styles;

- Under stress, the speaker's choice of grammatical structure reflects characteristic coping mechanisms;
- Personality traits are revealed by grammatical structures that have a slow frequency of change.

COMMUNICATION SHALL BE MEDIATED BY VERBAL CATEGORIES:

The category of qualifiers includes expressions of *uncertainty* ("I think I'll go to the ball game today"); modifiers that weaken statements without adding information ("That old house is kind of scary"); and phrases that contribute to a statement with a sense of vagueness or lightness ("Then we enjoyed what you might call an evening of relaxation").

The qualifiers are almost always spoken before the verb. The message is therefore reduced before it is transmitted. When they occur frequently, ratings indicate a *lack of decisiveness or avoidance of commitment*. Psychological studies have shown that the use of grades increases with anxiety (Lalljee, Cook 1975).

In his study of post-World War II presidents' speech patterns, Gerald Ford used significantly more qualifiers than others, giving his speaking style a touch of indecision (Weintraub 1989, 161). A very low frequency of qualifiers takes instead dogmatic speech.

It is important for such analysis that examples from speeches to be selected in the same way when comparing the use of qualifiers by speakers. In a study of the use of ratings, it has been shown that the use of this category is negatively associated with vocational training. Qualifiers serve as fillers, words, and phrases that are used when speakers search their memories for words (Weintraub, Plaut, 1985). A previously prepared speech will contain far fewer qualifiers than a spontaneous press conference.

Retractors, also called **adversarial expressions**, weaken or reverse previously spoken remarks. They include phrases such as: *but*, most often used retractor, *however*, *yet*. Frequent use of retractors suggests a difficulty in adhering to previously made decisions and gives a tinge of impulsivity to the speaker's style (Weintraub, Aronson, 1964).



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Compared to other post-World War II presidents, Richard Nixon used significantly more retractors (Weintraub 1981, pp. 130-131). It was especially true during anti-Vietnam demonstrations, when Nixon showed marked changeable behaviour. Impulsivity is not the only personality trait associated with frequent use of retractors. Many speakers use retractors to achieve “*pseudo-consensus*”, an apparent but inauthentic agreement with another speaker’s point of view. An example of pseudo-consensus is the following statement: “*I agree that your note is not a good idea. It deserves to be raised from to <A>, but as the principal of the school, I have to support your teacher*”. Moreover, the use of “*We*” in political discourse, when the speaker seems to reflect the need to present oneself either as oneself (high point/score, low score) or as a speaker for a cause (low/score, high score). Using *we* instead of *I* is a custom of kings and is unusual for Republican politicians.

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The negatives. The most common examples of using the negatives category are: *no, never and nothing*. Speakers who use many negatives tend to be in *opposition and stubborn all the time*. They may also overuse denial mechanisms. In his study of the Watergate transcripts, H. R. Haldeman, known in Washington political circles as “*The Abominable Nobody*”, used more negative words, significantly more than the other Watergate conspirators (Weintraub, 1981, p. 124).

Explanators. The category of explainers includes words and phrases that suggest causal connections or justification of the speaker’s thoughts and actions. The most common explainer is *because*. Other commonly used explanations therefore include *when*. Speakers who use many explanatories have a *didactic, apologetic or rational verbal style* (Lorenz, 1953). Those who use few explanations can be considered categorical and dogmatic. Part of Hillary Clinton’s didactic speaking style is due to her frequent use of explainers as expressions

of feelings. All causes in which the speaker attributes own feelings to oneself are punctuated. Examples are “*I love working outdoors*” and “*Jack’s behaviour frustrates me*”. The use of expressions in which the speaker explains how he feels are associated in the listener’s mind with emotional persons (Weintraub, 1989, pp. 49-72). In contrast, speech without such explanations of emotions reflects a distant, cold verbal style. Ronald Reagan’s cold and flawless speech style was due, in part, to his rare use of expressions of feelings.

Adverbial enhancers. They include all adverbs that potentiate the force of the statement. The commonly used ones are: *very, really, so and so*. Adverbs intensify and add colour to the speaker’s remarks. When used frequently, they produce a *dramatic, almost histrionic* effect. Speakers who use very few adverbial enhancers are perceived by listeners as *bored and gentle*. Among normal speakers, those in the middle-aged (fifteen to seventeen) adolescent group have the highest frequency of adverbial enhancers. Women use this category significantly more frequently than men among both normal and psychiatric patient groups. Patients with depression use this category more than other groups of patients (Weintraub, 1989, pp. 64-70).

Direct references include all explicit references within and in the context of the interview. The examples are: “*As I said in response to your previous question, I do not intend to run for public office in 1996*” and “*It is a pleasure to meet you in such a beautiful conference room*”. A large number of direct references reflect the verbal behaviour of a trained, perhaps manipulative speaker, one who avoids a particular topic by talking about the interview and not about what he was asked. When the frequency of observations addressed to the interviewer is very high, the speaker may appear *intrusive and in control*. A very low number of direct references may indicate that the speaker is *shy or distant*. In studies of post-World War II presidents, it has been found that the greatest use of direct references was by friendly and involved presidents Eisenhower and Reagan. Not surprisingly, the somewhat shy and aloof Jimmy Carter scored lowest in this category (Weintraub, 1989, p. 170). Among psychiatric patients, depressed and impulsive patients make the most direct references because they seek assistance from the interviewer (Weintraub, 1981, p. 31).



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Personal references are used in situations whose topics include the speaker and people he or she knows. “*I liked President Kennedy*” and “*Gerald Ford was my close personal friend*” are personal references. The situations whose topics are unknown to the speaker are qualified as non-personal. An almost exclusive use of non-personal references suggests *detachment from the listener*. Less use of non-personal references may reflect a tangible concern for oneself and one’s immediate environment. John F. Kennedy made little use of personal references. It increased the impression of a *cool, detached, situational leader*.

Creative or colourful expressions. This category includes all occurrences of intelligence, metaphor, and idiosyncratic use of language. If the colourful expressions are of high quality, they can reflect the presence of an original mind. Original or not, colourful expressions are perceived by most listeners as entertaining. Examples of creative expressions would be “*an unbroken purple sky*” and “*scenes of ravaged dissipation*”.

Emotional speech. Expressions of feelings have previously been identified as a category that conveys emotion, but it is not the only category of its kind. Listeners associate the following categories to convey emotion: (1) using *me* rather than *us*; (2) intensifying adverbs; (3) direct references and (4) personal rather than non-personal references. Most emotional speakers will use several of the categories of feelings to convey warmth.

PERSONALITY TRAITS ARE REFLECTED IN SPEECHES BY GRAMMATICAL CHOICES

Judgment. Readiness for decision can be measured by the frequency of occurrence of ratings. Numerous ratings suggest indecision, anxiety. Analysis of speeches reveals that among post-World War II presidents, Gerald Ford scored highest in this category.

Reconsideration or reversal of decision is best reflected by moderate use of retractors.

Frequent use of retractors and negatives is associated with **impulsivity** in many cases. During the Watergate crisis, Richard Nixon occasionally acted impulsively. This trend was reflected in the increased use of retractors and negatives.

The speakers in **angry moods** frequently become irritable during interviews. Occasionally, they explode if provoked by the interviewer. In such cases, the use of qualifiers may disappear completely. In extreme anger, all evidence of indecision disappears. Another characteristic of angry speech is negativity. In some samples of angry speech, the use of negatives can be up to five times greater than normal speech. Other noteworthy findings are the use of rhetorical questions and direct references, indicating aggressive listener involvement. Angry speech is unusual for world leaders, who generally try to present themselves peacefully and in control of themselves to their listener.

The speakers who have emotional control. Emotionally controlled people tend to score low in most or all categories of feelings. Speakers who are perceived as expressive or warm score high in sentiment categories. The speech of oppositional or stubborn speakers is characterized by the presence of many negatives.

Behaviour control. This personality trait is reflected verbally in at least two ways. Controlling speakers are often emotionally controlled, meaning they rarely use categories of feelings. To avoid finding themselves in an uncontrolled situation, controlled speakers try to prepare for interviews by limiting journalists’ questions to certain topics for which they have studied carefully. Such training will be revealed by a low frequency of ratings.

Inactivity. The most useful verbal reflection of inactivity is probably the frequent use of the personal pronoun *I*. *I* is almost always used as the object of a verb and is therefore the recipient rather than the initiator of the action.

Domineering behaviour. Verbosity, the use of many connections (qualifiers, retractors and explanators) and interruptions best characterize domineering conversational behaviour. When domineering behaviour becomes intimidating, commands and offensiveness can occur in the speaker’s verbal behaviour. Of the post-World War II presidents, Lyndon Johnson was the most dominant in his verbal behaviour.

Creativity. How can we measure verbal creativity? According to Richard Ohmann (1967), there are three ways creativity can be expressed in language. A writer or speaker can create new words; can make new syntactic associations, that is, put words together in novel ways; and can express itself in original metaphors.



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Familiar behaviour. The verbal manifestations of familiar's behaviour include the use of the first names, a favourite routine of Ronald Reagan (Weintraub, 1989, pp. 174-75), comments about the interviewer's personal life, and allusions to events or people known to the interviewee. These verbal mannerisms can be reflected in a high score of direct references. Familiar people frequently use teasing and clowning in their relationships with others, a tactic that many listeners find embarrassing and inappropriate. Lyndon Johnson was the most familiar of post-World War II presidents (Ib., p. 144).

Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from unfortunate situations, failure. This characteristic can be assessed by measuring a speaker's ability to lose and then regain their verbal style over the course of an interview or, even better, over several interviews spanning days or weeks. A vulnerable speaker may be so traumatized by a failed verbal performance that their ability to answer questions publicly may be impaired for a while. Richard Nixon temporarily lost his usual style of speech during the Watergate scandal. His verbal behaviour resembled that of a depressed patient. After the crisis was resolved, he regained his usual way of speaking.

Stress response. This trait is best measured when verbal data has been gathered during stress interviews. The speaker's answers to challenging questions are scored and compared to the individual's other scores when answering neutral questions. If, for example, a speaker's use of both qualifiers and retractors increases in response to stress questions, we can conclude that the speaker becomes less decisive in crisis situations. If, in response to confrontational questions, a speaker uses the pronoun "I" more and the pronouns "we" less, it is likely that in crisis situations that individual will rely more on his own resources and less on the help of others. On the other hand, a speaker who cannot accept sole responsibility for crisis situations is likely to react in reverse, using more "we" pronouns and less "I" pronouns.

CASE STUDY: JIMMY CARTER AND RONALD REAGAN

Specifically, the analysis of verbal behaviour is based on identifying personality traits that we decide to evaluate and highlight. In describing the method, certain personality traits have already been emphasized, such as impulsivity, determination, vulnerability, taking responsibility etc.

In 1986 another verbal analysis of political leaders was published. Using randomly chosen samples from their presidential press conferences, they compared the spontaneous speech styles of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. There were significant differences between the verbal behaviour of the two presidents. Carter's use of verbal categories showed him to be shy, distant, competitive, and defensive when challenged. Instead, Reagan was engaging, generous, confident, entertaining, and detached with the White House press. Under pressure, Reagan showed a tendency to deny unpleasant aspects of reality and, in some cases, to reverse previously made decisions (Weintraub, 1980).

CONCLUSIONS

A benefit of analysing the speeches of political leaders, especially in crisis situations, just resides in the possibility of outlining the framework of negotiations to bring adversaries to a constructive dialogue aimed at ending hostilities.

Another reason for studying the speeches of political leaders is the possibility for those who produce such documentation to analyse beyond the thematic contents of their speeches, their memoirs, their letters, their transcribed conversations. Analysis of the personality of a political leader based entirely on the content of a narrative can be influenced by the subjectivity of the author and contain errors. This method that can compare, in a systematic way, behaviour and speech styles can be useful to historians and biographers.

The analyst can develop a complex profile of the leadership's style and decision-making that the political leader will present. Personality traits in conjunction with the frequency of verbal expressions used provide important information about the leader's actions, whether he will respect or challenge constraints, be open or closed to information in the environment, focus more on problem solving or community building, and be tougher or more resilient.

The speed at which international conflicts can "become critical" and the catastrophic consequences of miscalculations make it imperative that accurate assessments of the psychology of leaders should be developed quickly and closely monitored during crises.



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