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## Abstract

This article aims to fill a gap in the existing research by analysing the construction of leadership and group identity in a corpus of 13 party conference speeches by the party leaders of the German SPD and the British Labour party between 1997 and 2003. The comparative approach chosen will demonstrate the context sensitivity and strategic use of the pronominal self-references. The article will demonstrate how changes of pronominal self-reference in party conference speeches can be understood as strategic changes of footing (Goffman, 1981) to foreground either the voice of the party leader or the voice of the party. It will conclude with the results of an analysis of the combination of pronominal self-references and verb forms construing competence and responsiveness, as suggested by Fetzer and Bull (2012), and demonstrates that these verb forms are used differently in combination with the various forms of self-reference, a fact neglected in their analysis.

## Keywords

Discourse analysis, political discourse, party conference speeches, contrastive analysis, German, English, Germany, United Kingdom, third way, New Labour, SPD, competence, leadership, footing, political culture, pronominal self-reference, verb semantics,

## Biographical Note

Michael Kranert is Lecturer in Languages at Edinburgh Napier University. He works in the field of political linguistics applying linguistic research methods such as Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Metaphor Analysis to political discourses. His latest project undertakes a comparison of the discourses of New Labour and the German SPD at the turn of the twenty-first century, explaining linguistic and discursive differences with reference to differences in the political cultures of Germany and the UK.

# **‘Today I offer you, and we offer the country a new vision’. The strategic use of first person pronouns in party conference speeches of the Third Way<sup>1</sup>**

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*Who am I? – and if so, how many?  
(Precht, 2011)*

## **Introduction**

Political speeches are not only intended to influence decision-making by voters or politicians (deliberative speech), or to defend or to accuse (judicial oratory), but also to honour and commemorate, and to celebrate the membership of a political group (epideictic oratory). Therefore, they are “interactional contributions to identity politics and accomplish the two political purposes of inclusion and exclusion” (Reisigl, 2008: 251) and support the formation of a group identity. Speeches of party leaders, particularly at party conferences, also need to convey a sense of leadership. Time and again, analysts of language in politics have described how first person pronouns are used in political discourse to construct leadership and group identity (Wilson, 1990; Fina, 1995; Pyykkö, 2002; Skarżyńska, 2002; Fetzer, 2014). Fetzer and Bull (2012) also demonstrated, how leadership is construed through combinations of self-reference and one of four verb forms.

This article aims to fill a gap in the existing research by analysing the construction of leadership and group identity in a corpus of 13 party conference speeches by the party leaders of the German social democratic party (SPD) and the British Labour party between 1997 and 2003. The comparative approach chosen will demonstrate the context sensitivity and strategic use of the pronominal self-references. The timespan of the corpus was chosen to treat ideology as a controlled variable, as both Schröder and Blair were aiming to transform their party into post-ideological social democratic parties of the Third Way (2010). I will demonstrate how changes of pronominal self-reference in party conference speeches can be understood as strategic

changes of footing (Goffman, 1981) to foreground either the voice of the party leader or the voice of the party. Furthermore, I will argue that Fetzer and Bull's (2012) verb forms are used differently in combination with the various forms of self-reference, a fact neglected in their analysis.

## Theoretical background: Party conference speeches and the construction of leadership and groupness

Leader's speeches at party conferences belong to the genre of political speeches. Modern political speeches are multi-authored (Kammerer, 1995) and multi-addressed (Kühn, 1995), as party leaders usually speak on behalf of complex networks of political institutions such as their party, their parliamentary group or indeed the government. But party leaders also have to convey a clear image of themselves as an individual. In order to master this complex task, they employ researchers and speech writers. The reception conditions of modern political oratory are equally complex. Since all important political occasions are covered by the media, contemporary political speeches are almost always addressed to multiple audiences. What is more, the speeches' intention and addressee are not only defined by the speaker, but by the individuals or organisations who are affected by the argument made and their reaction. An utterance intended as an advertising element within an election campaign might well be understood as an accusation by an opposition politician, which in turn forces her to respond to it. Observers abroad might interpret it as a provocation, and so on and so forth (Kühn, 1992: 57).

Similar to political speeches in general, the function of party conferences is not restricted to deliberation and communication of the ideological position of a political party, but plays an important role in identity-building within the party as a social institution, as these conferences are chances to "regenerate social bonds through shared intense emotions" (Faucher-King, 2005: 72). Leader's speeches at party conferences are therefore particularly good examples of hybrids of deliberative and epideictic oratory. While, as a piece of deliberative oratory, they focus on arguments for policies; as a piece of epideictic oratory they aim to strengthen groupness of party, celebrating values and successes, and arousing emotions of the audience in order to rally for support for the party's policies.

In the reception of party conferences, party members and the public naturally focus on the leader's speech, which is expected to unite the party as well as present the leader as a visionary (Gaffney, 1990: 107; Klein, 2000: 750). Fulfilling the expectations of such a complex audience,

the leader needs to carefully balance the need for expressions of leadership and the discursive formation of group identity. With her speech, the leader needs to move the present primary audience emotionally, as each member wants to be represented within the group forming 'we' (Faucher-King, 2005: 86). Externally, the speech addresses the general public. The pronoun 'we' is furthermore used by leaders for validity claims – i.e. description of reality, argumentation for certain policies – in the name of the party. In this case, the leader acts, metonymically, in the name of the party as a group. Sometimes, however, the leader uses an inclusive 'we', suggesting an equivalence between the party and the nation. Finally, the leader's speech needs to stimulate the general audience's imagination of power as not remote or abstract, but embodied by famous, heroic characters that they can connect to. Thus, the leader needs position himself in the speech, pointing to his political stance using the first person pronoun 'I'.

The importance of the use of first person pronouns in political discourse has been acknowledged before. Wortham (1996: 333) argues that 'we' represents the speaker as a central or defining member of the group that he speaks on behalf of and explains this effect based on the double indexicality of personal pronouns also posited by Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990: 92): Personal pronouns are spatial-temporally anchored in the here-and-now and also in the pragmatic domain of the speaker's responsibilities for illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects. That we-pronouns are connected to the establishment of social groups is demonstrated by Helmbrecht (2002: 42).

Wilson (1990: 47) argues that the choice of pronouns in every day speech can mostly be interpreted as a sociolinguistic fact, for example in the choice of 'you' or its regional version 'yous' for the second person plural. The use of 'I' and the inclusive or exclusive 'we' by politicians, however, is often a pragmatic manipulation and thus strategic, as it exploits the ambiguity of 'we' (St. Clair, 1973) based on implicatures inferred and interpreted by the hearer. These interpretations can always be denied by the speakers when they are confronted with interpretations of their words later ("I didn't mean/ say that"). Fetzer (2014: 336), for example, argues that the use of 'we' aligns the speaker with supporters of a political party irrespective of the party's ideology: "Because of the indeterminate referential domain of first-person-plural self-references, supporters may interpret favorable messages as addressed to them, and unfavorable messages as being directed towards others." (Fetzer, 2014: 345–346) The basis of this effect is the ambiguity of the reference of 'we'. Although various distinctions of the scope of 'we' are discussed by grammarians – Quirk et al. (1985: 350–351) for example suggest five "special uses of we", two main references can be distinguished on the basis that many non-

European languages have this distinction in their paradigm of personal pronouns: the distinction between an inclusive and exclusive ‘we’ (Mühlhäusler and Harré, 1990; Wales, 1996; Zifonun, 2001; Daniel, 2005). While exclusive ‘we’ refers to the speaker and the group he aims to represent, but excludes the audience, inclusive ‘we’ refers to the speaker, the groups he represents and the audience.

Returning to the multi-authored and multi-addressing properties of party conference speech genre (Kammerer, 1995; Kühn, 1995; Faucher-King, 2005), I suggest that these various effects of using first person pronouns in political speeches can be best understood as changes of footing, a concept developed by Goffman (1981) in order to deconstruct the category speaker. Instead of the speaker as a single unit that addresses hearers, Goffman (1981: 144–145) analyses the production format of utterances instead and distinguishes three roles:

- the principal: whose position is established in the words spoken;
- the author: selector of sentiments expressed and words encoding them;
- the animator: ‘talking machine’, producing the sound.

This allows us to understand the use of ‘I’ as well as exclusive and inclusive ‘we’ in party conference speeches in the following way:

Self-reference used	‘I’	Exclusive ‘we’	Inclusive ‘we’
Definition		Refers to a group including the speaker and the group he represents, but excluding the hearer	Refers to a group including speaker, hearer and others
Principal of the utterance	THE LEADER	THE PARTY	THE NATION
		THE GOVERNMENT	

*Figure 1: Self-references and footing*

Figure 1 illustrates that the party leader, using ‘I’, construes herself as the principal of the propositions uttered. This is a necessary strategy to present the persona of the leader and to demonstrate her qualities as a leader. But speaking at a party conference, the leader must also demonstrate her ability to speak as the voice of the party, posing the animator for the party as principal. And finally, the speaker has the option of construing the nation as the principal, using the rhetorical ‘we’ suggested by Quirk et al. (1985: 350). This footing demonstrates that the party and its leader are able to speak metonymically for the nation and are therefore worthy being elected into government. Of course, the interpretation of ‘we’ is not always clear cut, as the ambiguity of the footing of exclusive ‘we’ in Figure 1 indicates. Chilton and Schäffner

(1997: 218), for example, observe in John Major's party conference speech of 1994 that some forms of 'we' have an "indeterminate meaning" that could refer to the party, the government or the country and can be interpreted as a "some indefinite equivalent of 'one'".

In this paper, I will ask whether the quantity of these self-references changes according to the contexts of the individual speeches such as the timing of the conference pre-election or post-election and the socio-historical context of the speech. As the literature discussed above has almost exclusively focused on political discourse in English, and because there are also no systematic descriptions of the I/we relationship in German political discourse that I am aware of, this paper also aims to demonstrate the mechanism described applies to both German and English.

But I aim to go a step further in the analysis of footing and its connection to leadership and groupness. Fetzer and Bull (2012: 132) demonstrate that "doing leadership is intrinsically connected with the predication to which the self-reference is anchored. The predication is linguistically represented with a verb phrase". They therefore argue that "the semantics of the verb phrase lie at the heart of doing leadership." The authors base their analysis on the notion that party leaders rely on being perceived as competent and aim to convey this in their speeches. From studies of voter ratings of political leaders in the British general elections of 1987 (Stewart and Clarke, 1992) and 2001 (Clarke et al., 2004), Fetzer and Bull deduce two categories of competent leadership: 'responsiveness' and 'competence'. They argue that leaders can construe their competence explicitly and on-record, talking about their competencies, or do so implicitly and off-record by reporting their actions. The predication of competencies is in both cases construed via a combination of self-referring pronouns and verb forms. In Fetzer and Bull's (2012) concept, four verb forms are distinguished that are involved in the construction of leadership: Self-references collocating with verbs of communication and subjectification demonstrate the responsiveness of the leader, as they demonstrate her communications skills and emotional responses, while event and intention verbs indicate competence, as they communicate political actions and plans (Fetzer and Bull, 2012: 133).

According to Fetzer and Bull, *event verbs* construe material action and represent 'the dynamics of a changing scenario' (2012: 132). The verb 'introduce' in the following example construes a change in the education system attributed to the speaker's party: "We introduced two and a half hours' free nursery education". However, the authors do not offer detailed definitions of their distinction, thus some cases can be doubtful, especially if verbs are used metaphorically. For the purpose of this analysis, I have categorised event verbs that are used in a metaphorical



sense according to the literal meaning in the source domain, rather than the target domain, which could be open for interpretation.

In Fetzer and Bull's definition of *intention verbs* such as 'intend' or 'want', it remains unclear whether verb forms denoting future actions were included in this category. I decided to do so in this analysis, if the future tense denoted plans and intentions, since this will give a clearer indication which speeches of the corpus focused on current or past actions and which were used to announce future intentions. In German, this also includes sentences in the present tense that indicate a future tense through time adverbials ('nächsten Monat' / 'next month'), as the present tense in German can also indicate the future (Helbig and Buscha, 1991: 146–147). I have also included forms of 'promise' / 'versprechen', such as 'I vow'.

Communication and subjectification verbs are much easier to define and to identify: *communication verbs* denote language production and language reception (e.g. say, tell, hear), while *subjectification verbs* construe mental processes (e.g. assume, think) and emotions (e.g. feel, like, fear).

Leadership dimension	Verb category	Revised definition	Examples
Competence	<i>Event verbs</i>	material action	reclaim, canvas, add, appoint
	<i>Intention verbs</i>	verb forms that express intention, including verbs denoting future actions if they denote intention	intend, want, promise, vow
Responsiveness	<i>Communication verbs</i>	verbs of language production and language reception	say, tell, ask, hear
	<i>Subjectification verbs</i>	verbs denoting mental processes and emotions	believe, feel, hope

Figure 2: Verb forms in the construction of leadership

In their analysis of 15 political speeches of leading politicians from the three major political parties in the UK between 2004 and 2006, the authors demonstrate that event and subjectification are the prime candidates for doing leadership in speeches. However, their analysis conflates all forms of pronominal self-reference, rather than distinguishing the functions of 'I', exclusive 'we' and inclusive 'we'. This article aims to revise their results by introducing this distinction as it will allow us to differentiate between the competences that are attributed to the party and the competences that are attributed to the leader. I will ask whether

in the corpus analysed, the use of the different verb forms changes according to the footing of the speech, and will explain differences between the speeches with reference to the socio-political context.

## Text and context of the corpus of Third Way party conferences speeches in Germany and the UK

The corpus for this analysis was chosen in order to control the variable party political ideology as far as possible and therefore exclude differences in ideology from the interpretation of the results. In the 1990s and early 2000s, both the British Labour Party and the German SPD underwent a significant ideological change, focusing more on overcoming the division between left and right, on rights and responsibilities of the individual, welfare-to-work regimes, as well as on the positive role of the markets (Bastow and Martin, 2003; Nachtwey, 2009; Turowski, 2010). The main differences between the changes in the two parties concern the time frame: While Blair modernised his party before the victorious general election in 1997, the SPD in Germany was still in the middle of the modernisation process when it won the 1998 election. Three core figures of the two parties at the time are represented in the corpus: Firstly, Tony Blair, the leader of the Labour Party between 1994 and 2007 and British Prime Minister between 1997 and 2007. The German part of the corpus features speeches of Gerhard Schröder and Oskar Lafontaine: Schröder was Chancellor candidate and later German Chancellor between 1998 and 2005. Oskar Lafontaine, however, was the party leader at the time of Schröder's election. Both politicians led the election campaign of 1998 – Schröder aimed to persuade more conservative voters with his Third-Way politics, while Lafontaine as a Neo-Keynesian aimed at the more traditional social democrats. When Lafontaine realised that Schröder's Third-Way politics had become hegemonic in the parliamentary SPD, he stepped down from all offices on 11 March 1999.

The 13 texts of the corpus of 67,296 words represent party conference speeches in different situations: it contains three speeches from regular conferences, three from pre-election conferences, three from post-election conferences and four speeches from crisis conferences. We will later see how the leadership and groupness construction differs in pre- and post-election speeches. But they differ even more in what I termed the crisis conference speeches. Blair's project of 'party renewal' culminated in the surprising announcement of a redraft of Clause Four in the Labour Party's constitution, which at the time committed the party to the common ownership of the means of production. Although Clause Four used to be widely

regarded as irrelevant and did not result in nationalisation policies, the actual change of the text was highly controversial, especially in the left wing of the Labour Party. Although the decision was reached by an electoral college, the Labour Party also held a special conference to debate the change, and Blair's speech at this conference and at the following regular conference are represented in the corpus as crisis speeches, as both speeches defend the redraft of the Clause Four.

The crisis in the German SPD came with the announcement of the Agenda 2010 in 2003, which changed the German welfare state significantly and resulted in deep cuts in welfare payments. Announced in parliament by Chancellor Schröder, this reform did not result from a policy discourse within the SPD. It therefore took considerable efforts by the party's leadership to convince the party that it was in line with the party's ideology. To this purpose, four regional conferences in April 2003 were held, followed by special party conference on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2003, where the reform was confirmed by 90% of the delegates. But efforts to convince the party of the new course could not end there, since in November 2003 the regular biannual party conference with elections for the party leadership was still to come. Schröder's speech at this conference is therefore also deemed a crisis speech.

From the texts of the corpus, I now turn to their socio-political contexts. As the institution 'party conference' differs in form in function in the two countries, it is to be expected that the leader's speech genre in Germany and the UK differs as well. The specific differences discussed in this article - the use of self-references and verb forms to construe leadership and groupness – therefore need to be understood against the background of these institutional and cultural differences.

Party conferences in the UK are highly ritualised events as the conferences of all parties reoccur annually. The party conferences of the three major political parties in Britain are held in the 'conference season' in September and October of every year, and are an integral part of the political diary of the country comparable to the opening of Parliament and the Queen's speech. The conference season is anticipated by many actors within the political system and attracts a lot of media attention. Despite the high attention given to party conferences in the UK, they do, however, have little democratic power. In the Labour Party of the 1990s and 2000s, most policy decisions were made before the party conference and only need formal approval, and the party leader is not elected by the conferences but by an electoral college (Peele, 2004: 290–293).

In Germany, party conferences are legal requirements. They are by law the ultimate deciding body with authority over leadership and policy and have to be held biannually (Rudzio, 2003:

117–122). However, there is less ritualisation, as conferences of different parties are not held at the same time.

Two further differences in the socio-political context are relevant here: The higher influence of parties on German society and dominance of UK politics by the Prime Minister. Abromeit and Stoiber (2006: 154) call the first difference ‘partyness of society’. They argue that UK parties are less deeply engrained into society than German parties, since local parties are not very powerful, inner party democracy is low, and national politics is dominated by parliamentary parties, as British parties were originally not authentic mass parties. In post-war Germany, however, the partyness of society has been traditionally high: the parties in parliament are proportionally represented in many regulatory bodies such as the ‘Rundfunkräte’, which govern the public broadcasters. All major political parties also have an affiliated foundation of political education, which have a vital role in funding political education and are major funders of postgraduate scholarships. Although they are funded by the government, the political party they are affiliated to influences their political values. Thus, German political parties influence civil society much more directly, which has led historically to a stronger identification of party followers in all parts of society.

The second difference – the increasing dominance of the Prime Minister in the UK – is discussed in political science under the hypothesis of presidentialisation (Poguntke and Webb, 2005). ‘Presidentialisation’ is defined as an increase in power of the head of government. This increase is separated into three parts: the analysis of the executive face of presidentialisation describes the increase of more formal power and power resources for the head of government. The party face grasps the growing autonomy of the leader of a party from his or her party, often via the use of plebiscitary elements that favour party members with fewer argumentative resources, a mechanism we have seen in both Labour and the SPD. And finally, with the electoral face, analyses of presidentialisation evaluate the personalisation of electoral processes, i.e. the growing emphasis on the leader in the campaign and a possibly increasing effect of the leader chosen by the party on the voters’ behaviour.

The process of presidentialisation in Germany and the UK differs. Poguntke (2005) argues that the central principles of party state and chancellor democracy mitigate a tendency towards increasing presidentialisation in the German political system, since the electoral system produces a structural need for coalition governments and the Chancellor therefore depends on their coalition partner.

## Personal pronouns, leadership and groupness

As the decision of the categorisation as exclusive, inclusive or ambiguous ‘we’ heavily depends on the co-text, the analysis of the texts was manual rather than computer-assisted. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the distinction into ‘I’, exclusive ‘we’ and inclusive ‘we’ as well as ambiguous cases was not sufficient, as there were cases where ‘I’ and ‘we’ were used in a different sense. In the speeches, very few examples (only 12 in total) of ‘I’/‘ich’ were found that express an indefinite meaning:

- (1) We would all be able to get the doctor I want at the time I want in the hospital I want. (Blair, 1995a: 103)<sup>2</sup>

In the German speeches, a special reference of ‘we’ appeared that had to be categorised separately: In their speeches in 1998, both Schröder and Lafontaine speak about their relationship, as the press was discussing whether they actually sing from the same hymn sheet. Therefore, they had to point out their strong cooperation, using ‘we’ with the reference ‘Gerhard Schröder and Oskar Lafontaine’, as in example (2):

- (2) Wir sind keine Zwillinge, aber wir sind ein verdammt gutes Team, liebe Genossinnen und Genossen. (Schröder, 1998a: 23)  
*We may not be twins, but we are a damn good team, comrades.*

The distinction into inclusive, exclusive and ambiguous ‘we’ was made according to contextual clues. In example (3), for instance, it is clear from the previous reference that Blair is talking about the party<sup>3</sup>. Hence, the example was categorised as exclusive ‘we’, referring to the speaker and the group he speaks for, but excluding the audience outside the hall:

- (3) We knew we could be better, we the Labour Party. And we are. [...] We have the programme. We have the people to make decent change in our country. Let us call our nation now to its destiny. Let us lead it to our new age of achievement and build for us, for our children, their children, a Britain - a Britain united to win in the 21st century. (Blair, 1996: 87)

A similar method was used for the category ‘inclusive we’: If the context or the anaphoric reference suggested a meaning of ‘Britain’ or ‘the nation’, as in example (4), the use was categorised as inclusive ‘we’:

- (4) Britain won two world wars. We had an Empire and formed a Commonwealth.  
(Blair, 1995b: 97)

Occurrences of ‘we’ were classified as ambiguous, if the context did not allow a disambiguation, because the anaphoric chain of references did not lead to a proper noun and the action could not clearly be interpreted as taken by the ‘party’, the ‘government’ or the ‘nation’, as in example (5):

- (5) All students will repay only as they can afford to. And if we reform, I am going to pledge to you, that by the end of this parliament, we will put resources saved through reform into frontline provision in universities and further education; and the first 165 million pounds is already in next year’s budgets. (Blair, 1997: 70)

A final caveat and restriction must be discussed before I present my results. The question could be asked whether there are preferences of a linguistic or socio-cultural nature for the use of ‘I’/‘Ich’ and ‘we’/‘wir’ in German and English. The problem here is the lack of background data. The contrastive use of first-person pronouns has mainly been investigated in analyses of written academic discourse. As Baumgarten (2008: 414) points out, there “are virtually no analyses of other written genres“, never mind genres of political discourse or spoken genres. Therefore, the quantitative results of this analysis should only be taken for what they are: indications of a strategic use in a particular corpus of political discourse which demonstrates the text-context relation in this type of discourse.

Table 1 represents the results of the analysis of pronominal self-references in the corpus. The results are reported in percent of pronominal self-references.

Speech	Length in words	Pronominal self-references in %	in % of pronominal self-references					
			I = speaker	I = general	Excl. We	Incl. We	Ambiguous We	Other we
<b>Blair 1994</b>	7043	2.95	23.1	2.9	50	13.5	10.6	0
<b>Blair 1995</b>	6915	2.73	37	2.1	30.7	16.4	7.4	6.3
<b>Blair 1995 (SC)</b>	2684	1.97	35.8	0	45.3	5.7	13.2	0
<b>Blair 1996</b>	7219	2.99	51.9	0	28.2	13.4	6.5	0
<b>Blair 1997</b>	5970	3.48	32.2	0	29.8	9.6	27.9	0.5
<b>Lafontaine 1997</b>	7336	3.15	24.2	0	58.4	12.1	2.6	0
<b>Lafontaine 04/98</b>	2163	2.96	28.1	0	59.4	1.6	0	10.9

<b>Lafontaine 10/98</b>	4840	3.22	42.3	0	42.9	1.9	3.8	9.0
<b>Schröder 1997</b>	4722	2.39	31.0	0	42.5	20.4	3.5	2.7
<b>Schröder 04/98</b>	9537	2.75	33.6	0.8	53.1	6.1	3.8	2.7
<b>Schröder 10/98</b>	2252	2.62	32.2	0	20.3	3.4	42.4	1.7
<b>Schröder 2003</b>	7800	4.03	15.9	0	70.4	5.4	5.4	2.9
<b>Schr. 2003 (SC)</b>	5803	4.53	13.7	0	75.3	3.4	6.8	0.8
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>5714</b>	<b>3.06</b>	<b>30.85</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>46.64</b>	<b>8.86</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>2.88</b>

*Table 1: Self-references in party conference speeches*

Three features stand out when we compare the numbers. Firstly, the use of ‘I’ is highest in Blair’s pre-election speech of 1996 and lowest in Schröder’s crisis conference speech of 2003 – a speech that is particularly dominated by the use of exclusive ‘we’. Inclusive ‘we’ is highest in the pre-election speeches, and the ambiguous use of ‘we’ is highest in post-election speeches.

Blair’s 1996 pre-election speech clearly focuses on the construction of his leadership, as it uses ‘I’ in 51.9% of all pronominal self-references. Despite this clear leadership focus, the speech is carefully crafted to also construe the party as principal and hence focus on groupness: Both the opening and closing words of the speech are projected in the party voice using exclusive ‘we’, as the closing passage quoted in example (3) above demonstrates. Within the text, however, ‘I’ is dominant. Furthermore, Blair regularly changes from ‘I’ to exclusive ‘we’, stressing his responsibility for the party’s policies and hence his leadership. A particularly strong example is the central summary of the pledges, a tenfold repetition of the structure ‘I vow that we will ...’:

- (6) I vow that we will have increased the proportion of our national income we spend on education. (Blair, 1996: 86)

This summary of the pledges is presented as a ‘performance contract’. Blair introduces this idea with a story or mini-narrative about a meeting with a successful top-manager who challenged him to use this managerial tool, and how Blair wishes to meet this challenge. This mini-narrative introduces the idea of measurable success into the discourse of New Labour, but is also used to construe Blair’s personal competency and responsibility as a leader: he is depicted as comparable to an industry leader who personally takes responsibility for the success of the party and speaks on its behalf. Embedded in this personal narrative, the structure ‘I vow that we will’ clearly foregrounds Blair as the principal of this contract, rather than the party, indicating the presidentialization of the party face as defined by Poguntke and Web (2005: 8) as one of the faces of presidentialization: “Party faces of presidentialization revolve around the

growing power of leaders vis-a-vis their parties. Essentially, the pertinent question is whether the exercise of power is highly personalized or primarily party-constrained.”

In another passage of the speech, Blair opens a chain of responsibility: He leads the party and the party leads the country:

(7) Today, I offer you, and we offer the country a new vision. If we are to build this new age of achievement, you and I and all of us together must build first the decent society to deliver it (Blair, 1996: 84)

Notable is that even after the connection between ‘I’ (the leader), exclusive ‘we’ (the party), and inclusive ‘we’ (the nation), he does not keep using the inclusive ‘we’ when he urges the nation to build the first decent society, but says ‘you and I and all of us’, foregrounding his role as leader.

Schröder’s pre-election speech at the party conference in April 1998 is not nearly as leader-focused as Blair’s: He only uses ‘I’ in 33.6% of all pronominal self-references. Schröder also opens and closes the speech in the name of the party, but barely uses any personal narratives or foregrounds himself within the party. A foregrounded construction of leadership similar to Blair’s pre-election speech would be considered unsuitable for Schröder as a chancellor candidate. While Blair speaks as undisputed leader, Schröder does so as candidate asking to be elected as chancellor candidate. At the pre-election conference, Blair’s speech focuses on his leadership qualities, while Schröder demonstrates that he can be the party’s voice, the animator for the party as principal. That Schröder campaigns for votes becomes explicit at the end of his speech, when he asks the delegates directly to vote for him as their chancellor candidate.

But the differences in the use of pronominal self-references also have reasons in the differences of the political cultures in general, as these linguistic differences also occur in other genres such as election manifestos (Kranert, 2016). Blair’s foregrounding of his leadership persona is therefore indicative for the process of presidentialization discussed above. In the 1990 and early 2000s, this process is further advanced in Britain than in Germany. In Germany, presidentialization is mitigated by the stronger influence of parties on society (Poguntke, 2005; Abromeit and Stoiber, 2006) as well as the greater complexity of the German political system, which comprises many more veto players such as an influential second parliamentary chamber (Bundesrat) and coalition partners. Furthermore, structural reforms within the Labour party since 1983 made the leader of the Labour party much more autonomous than in the German SPD: They introduced complex policy development procedures that are more under the control



of the leadership and also integrated strong plebiscitary elements in the party democracy that weaken the influence of party activists. Although the German SPD attempted similar reforms to allow plebiscitary elements to strengthen the party leader, they refrained from using them after the popular election of Rudolf Scharping as a party leader did not prove successful (Jun, 2004: 136–149).

The clearly increased use of ambiguous ‘we’ in post-election speeches demonstrates that these speeches are hybrids: Schröder’s speech is dominated by policy and seems a hybrid between a leader’s speeches and a government report, since the speech has the lowest use of exclusive ‘we’ in all the speeches and the highest use of ambiguous and other ‘we’, which mainly refers to the government:

- (8) Liebe Genossinnen und Genossen, wir wollen und wir werden einen neuen Anfang in Deutschland machen: zuerst in Bonn und dann in Berlin. Wir bauen dabei auf die Geschlossenheit und die Disziplin der SPD, wir bauen dabei auf eure Unterstützung heute und morgen. (Schröder, 1998b: 46)
- Dear Comrades. We want to and we will start afresh in Germany: first in Bonn, and then in Berlin. For this, we count on the unanimity and discipline of the party, we bank on your support today and tomorrow.*

While the first ‘wir’ leaves the referent open, the ‘wir’ in ‘Wir bauen dabei auf’ disambiguates it. It does not include the audience, which is referred to as ‘eure’. It can therefore only mean the prospective government, and Schröder asks here for the party’s support of the government. This is a necessary question, as this party conference needs to approve the Coalition-agreement of the SPD and the Green party, drafted by the party leadership. The aim of his speech as prospective Chancellor is to gain support for the government’s programme. But quite often, the ambiguity does not only swing between ‘we’ the government and ‘we’ the party, but also between ‘we’ the government and ‘we’ the nation:

- (9) Wir wollen selbstverständlich auf die Mobilisierung von Energiespartechnologien setzen. Dabei muß aber deutlich werden: Wir steigen ein; wir steigen nicht aus. Wir wollen – es gibt insbesondere in der Bundestagsfraktion der SPD viele Vorarbeiten dazu – die regenerativen Energieträger offensiver nutzen, als das jemals zuvor erwogen worden ist. (Schröder, 1998b: 44)

*Of course we want to focus on using new energy saving technologies. But it must be clear: we are opting into something new, we are not opting out. We – the parliamentary group of the SPD in particular has been involved in many preliminary studies– want to use more renewable energies than ever before contemplated.*

The context does not allow an immediate disambiguation as to who is giving up nuclear power in the first three instances of ‘we’ – is it the party, the government or the country? Only the parenthesis in the third sentence ties the references somewhat to the party and the government. This can be understood as a metonymization strategy described by Chantrill and Mio (1996): As metonymic figures condense related terms operating on the same discursive plane – here party, government and country – metonymization “serves to personalize issues, enhance audience understanding, and resolve ambiguity by collapsing detailed information into a more manageable, albeit simplified form. As an argumentative structure, metonymy may be subtle, but it is a fundamental rhetorical tool with definitional power.” (Chantrill and Mio, 1996: 174) In this case, conflating party, government and country through the use of ambiguous ‘we’ allows the electorate and the party to feel represented by the government. But of course the audience within or close to the SPD, and possibly critical of the Green party – the coalition partner at the time – would have given a different reading: The ambiguous ‘we’ might, in their understanding, have pointed to the SPD, which in this case is construed as different from the Green coalition partner who focused on the catch term ‘Atomausstieg’/‘opting out of nuclear power’. Hence the allusion to ‘opting in’ and ‘opting out’. This is of course a very mitigated criticism and distinction to the coalition partner, whose cooperation the government – and ultimately the chancellor – relies upon. A subtle mitigation strategy such as this would be unnecessary in the speech of an elected Prime Minister of the UK, who has only very rarely had to govern in a coalition since 1945.

While I described Schröder’s post-election speech at the party conference as a hybrid between leader’s speech and government report, Blair’s speech should be understood as a hybrid of a leader’s speech and a presidential inauguration speech where the leader, elected by the people, addresses his people in a sacral tone rather than giving a policy declaration. Using metonymization through the use of ambiguous ‘we’ in a similar way as Schröder, Blair nevertheless foregrounds his role as elected leader of the country:

- (10) (a) On May 1, the people entrusted me with the task of leading their country into a new century. That was your challenge to me. Proudly, humbly, I accepted it. Today, I issue a challenge to you. Help us make Britain that beacon shining throughout the world. Unite behind our mission to modernise our country. There is a place for all the people in New Britain, and there is a role for all the people in its creation. Believe in us as much as we believe in you. Give just as much to our country as we intend to give. Give your all. Make this the giving age. (Applause)
- (b) ‘By the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more together than we can alone.’ On 1st May 1997, it wasn’t just the Tories who were defeated. Cynicism was defeated. Fear of change was defeated. Fear itself was defeated. Did I not say it would be a battle of hope against fear? On 1st May 1997, fear lost. Hope won. The Giving Age began. (Applause)
- (c) Now make the good that is in the heart of each of us, serve the good of all of us. Give to our country the gift of our energy, our ideas, our hopes, our talents. Use them to build a country each of whose people will say that ‘I care about Britain because I know that Britain cares about me.’ Britain, head and heart, can be unbeatable. That is the Britain I offer you. That is the Britain that together can be ours. (Blair, 1997: 73)

The changes of footing are carefully crafted in this finale of the speech: In the first line, Blair presents himself to the party as the elected prime minister in a presidential fashion (‘the people entrusted me with the task of leading their country into a new century’). Here, the general election is construed as a contest of leaders (which it legally is not), parallel to a presidential election, interpreting the victory as a personal victory. Blair also separates the people and the addressee – the party – by using the third person pronoun ‘their country’, instead of using the first person. But already in the second line, Blair switches to ‘you’, when describing the task set as ‘your challenge’. The trouble here is the possible ambiguity of the pronoun ‘you’ and the derived possessive ‘your’, which is so “elastic that it can even embrace the whole of humanity” (Bull and Fetzer, 2006: 5) and can “refer to an unspecific, indeterminate group, such as a political party, to the audience in general, or to some subset of the audience or political party. In that case, *you* expresses generic meaning as it does not refer to an actually specified individual but rather to a prototypical representative, type, or token. (Bull and Fetzer, 2006: 11)

It remains unclear whether this change of footing is a switch from Blair speaking to the party to Blair speaking to the country, and the question of who challenged Blair and who Blair is challenging also remains open. The rest of the text presents us with a constant swing between the narrower and the broader reference of 'us': In 'our mission' it is possibly the party or the government, while 'our country' is certainly inclusive and refers to the nation. In 'believe in us' he must, again, be speaking about the metonymic combination of the party and the government similar to Schröder in his post-election speech.

In the quotation of the revised Clause Four in the party's constitution, the reference to 'we' swings back to an inclusive 'we', leading to the implicature that the actor of the victory omitted in the passive ('was defeated') is the nation. In a further twist, however, Blair manages to introduce himself again as the leader of that battle ('Did I not say').

The last paragraph resembles the Christian dismissal ending a service ('Ite ad Evangelium Domini nuntiandum'), and adds to the sacral tone of the speech that demonstrates the influences of a presidential inauguration speech in the US, a genre that Campbell and Jamieson (2008) describe as epideictic as it "invites the audiences to evaluate the speaker's performance, recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present, employs a noble, dignified literary style, and amplifies or rehearses admitted facts." (Campbell and Jamieson, 2008: 29) The final line of the speech repeats the presidential offer again ('I offer you'), only to then present leader, party and nation as united ('That is the Britain that can together be ours').

In Blair's post-election speech, it is therefore not through the increased use of 'I' alone, but through the repeated play on the ambiguity of the self-reference 'we' and the other-reference 'you' that Blair construes his leadership of the party and the nation. With the quotation of the inauguration speech genre, he underlines his claim to presidential attributes – a claim impossible for a German party leader who was, after all, still a candidate for Chancellor at this point in time, as he could only be elected by parliament after the SPD party conference and after their coalition partner had ratified the coalition agreement. Although it would be unlikely for the party to refuse to ratify the agreement, it was still important to get a high percentage of votes, as these numbers are reported and interpreted by the media.

The party conference speeches of Blair and Schröder that I categorized as crisis conferences - Labour's special conference in 1995 (change of Clause Four) and the special conference of the SPD in 2003 (SPD, Agenda 2010) differ clearly in their use of self-references, but also in their strategies of legitimation. While in Blair's speech, the use of 'I' is above the average for the corpus, Schröder's speech is way below it with 13.7 %. Instead, the speech uses exclusive 'we' in by far the highest proportion in the corpus (75.3 %). As in all his other speeches, Blair

foregrounds his leadership in the speech. Schröder, by contrast, delivers the reasoning about the necessity of an ideological change in the benefit system as the animator, speaking on behalf of the party as principal. Where Blair employs an inspiring rhetoric of renewal rich in metaphors of rebuild and rebirth, Schröder's speech does not use any emotionally strong metaphors, but is dominated by constructions of necessity, comprising exclusive 'we' + must + subjectification verb ('anerkennen'/'*acknowledge*') or event verb:

- (11) Wir müssen den Mut zeigen, anzuerkennen, dass die Zahl der Arbeitslosen nicht nur aus konjunkturellen Gründen auf mehr als 4 Millionen angestiegen ist, sondern dass es dafür auch strukturelle Ursachen gibt. Diese Ursachen müssen wir erkennen und beseitigen. Das ist die Verantwortung, von der ich rede, liebe Freundinnen und Freunde! (Schröder, 2003: 14)

*We must have the courage to recognise that the number of unemployed people has risen to more than 4 Million not only because of the economic situation, but also due to structural causes. We must recognise and eliminate these causes. This is the type of responsibility I am talking about, dear friends.*

The exclusive form of 'we' is here used to foreground the party as a group, as the chain of references leads back to 'Liebe Freundinnen und Freunde'/'Dear friends'. This backgrounds Schröder as the originator of the policies described. In combination with the high obligation modal 'müssen' in 23.6% of the cases, this construes the party as a group that has no alternative but to take a certain position, a strategy that closes down the discourse and allows no alternatives.

The obvious contextual difference explaining these results is a difference in the historical situation: Blair gives his speech after the decision has been reached in a ballot of party members. He uses his speech to re-energise the participants of the party conference and presents himself as inspiring leader. Schröder position is different: He caused a crisis by appearing to make a decision without consulting the party (Klein, 2007) and then aimed to construe this position in his speech as a decision made by the party by keeping the speech firmly in the footing of the party as principal. This is supported by a raised use of the combination 'exclusive we + must + communicate', which constructs the success of the party as a collective responsibility and the unhappiness of the public with the social reforms as a lack of understanding.

## Verb forms, leadership and groupness

Discussing the construction of groupness in Schröder's crisis conference speech from 2003, I have already demonstrated how the construction of footing through pronominal self-reference and the use of verb forms interact: the speech construes necessity of the new party ideology through the combination of exclusive 'we', must and subjectification verbs.

In their analysis of self-references and leadership, Fetzer and Bull (2012) argued that event and subjectification verbs are the prime candidates for doing leadership in speeches. In the analysis of my corpus, I distinguished the use of the verbs combined with the various pronominal self-references. The results in Table 2 only show the use with 'I' and exclusive 'we', where the differences are most prominent.

	in % of all pronoun + verb					
	Blair		Schröder		Lafontaine	
	I	Exclusive 'we'	I	Exclusive 'we'	I	Exclusive 'we'
<b>event verb</b>	2.7	15.7	1.9	25.3	1.1	10.6
<b>subject. Verb</b>	33.2	10.4	44.6	23.7	17.9	17.3
<b>intention verb</b>	15.9	19.2	3.3	10.5	2.8	23.7
<b>comm. verb</b>	26.7	13.6	36.1	11.5	43.5	9.7

Table 2: Verb forms and pronominal self-references

The results show that for all three speakers, the use of 'I' coincided consistently more often with subjectification or communication verbs than with the other verb forms. The party voice construed by an exclusive 'we' on the other hand is mostly commonly combined with event verbs for both Schröder and Blair. Therefore, responsiveness is mostly projected when the speech construes the leader himself as the principal of the speech. Competence, in contrast, is mostly construed as a characteristic of the party, using exclusive 'we'.

Differentiating the results further, we could see the intention verbs combine significantly more often with the party voice in the pre-election speeches (Blair 1996, 39.3%, Schröder 04/1998 26.6%, Lafontaine 04/1998 31.6%), presenting policies as policies of the party. In post-election speeches, however, it is the ambiguous 'we' that is paired more often with event and intention verbs, supporting the notion that these speeches – even in Blair's case, construe the party-government metonymically as competent.

Analysing the results for verb forms combining with 'I' further, 'I + subjectification verb' and 'I + communication' are on average proportionally used most. However, the combination with subjectification verbs is slightly higher than the use with communication verbs, and the use of

event verbs is the lowest. It seems, therefore, that in my corpus the construction of leadership foregrounds personal beliefs. In pre-election speeches, the proportion of intention verbs used with 'I' goes up, being particularly high in Blair's preselection speech through the construction of 'I vow that we will'. This result strengthens yet again the strong influence of presidentialisation in Britain, as the election promises are here linked to the person of the party leader.

## Conclusions

In this article, I demonstrated that a comparative approach to political discourse can reveal specifics of political discourses in two very different polities that might be missed within a non-comparative approach. In a corpus of party conference speeches by German and British party leaders of the Labour Party/SPD, we saw that the use of different pronominal self-references is strategically employed to construe leadership and group identity. The strategic changes between the self-references represent changes of footing of the speech.

The differences in the construction of leadership and groupness in Germany and the UK through pronominal self-references are highly context sensitive. They depend on the party-political context, as well as on the process of presidentialisation. The foregrounding of the leader in Blair's speeches through the use of 'I' as well as through the quotation of the inauguration speech genre in his post-election speech is indicative of the further advanced presidentialisation in Britain, a process that is mitigated by a stronger party influence in Germany. This argument was supported by phenomena in other linguistic domains, such as the quotation of the presidential inauguration speech genre in Blair's speech as well as his prominent use of personal mini-narratives. This systematic insight into political processes revealed by linguistic analysis here also testifies to the merits of an interdisciplinary approach to political discourse: while political science is needed to explain the results of linguistic analysis, the linguistic analysis can also strengthen the argument of the political scientist. The process of presidentialization, originally theorised by political scientists, is also revealed through linguistic analysis. But only through the knowledge of institutional context – here the function and power of party conferences – can this politico-linguistic phenomenon finally be explained.

A further contextual variable became obvious in the analysis, one that both polities have in common: The position of a party conference in the electoral cycle influences the linguistic construction of leadership, as in post-election speeches of both countries, ambiguous forms of

‘we’ are employed to construe what I argued is a metonymic relationship between party, government and country in order to legitimise the political position of the party in government. However, in the linguistic micro-analysis, it became apparent that this ambiguity can also be exploited to position a party covertly against the coalition partner, a strategy that is obviously more relevant for German parties, as they have to deal with coalitions more often.

Finally, in the analysis of the interaction of pronominal self-reference and verb forms posited by Fetzer and Bull (2012), I demonstrated a necessity to distinguish between the footing of the speeches: in this corpus, the verb forms mainly convey the responsiveness of the leader, while competence, using event and intention verbs in combination with the inclusive ‘we’, is mainly ascribed to the party. The comparative approach revealed here that leaders in both polities obviously aim to construe themselves as human beings being responsive to party and nation. Despite the difference in partyness of society, however, both parties are construed as programmatic entities that are competent to govern.

As in this analysis party political ideology was used as a controlled variable – only speeches from Third-Way social democratic parties were analysed – further research is necessary in order to ascertain whether the construction of leadership and group identity through pronominal self-references and verb semantics differs according to party political ideology in different polities. However, I have demonstrated that the mechanisms of constructing leadership and groupness through the use of personal pronouns and verb forms apply to both English and German, which fills a problematic gap in the research on political language in Germany, contributing to the contrastive research on socio-cultural preferences pronoun use in German and English, a field that to date was dominated by research on academic writing.

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<sup>2</sup> All markings by underlining in examples are by the author, highlighting the linguistic clues relevant for the interpretation of the examples.

<sup>3</sup> The anaphoric chain in the example was quite long, hence the omission in the middle of the quotation.