

Resources and Methods for Analysing Political Rhetoric and Framing in Parliamentary Debates

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Recent work in political science has made extensive use of NLP methods to produce evidential support for a variety of analyses, for example, inferring an actor's ideological positions from textual data or identifying the polarisation of the political discourse over the last decades. Most work has employed variations of lexical features extracted from text or has learned latent representations in a mostly unsupervised manner. While such approaches have the potential to enable political analyses at scale, they are often limited by their lack of interpretability. In the talk, I will instead look at semantic and pragmatic representations of political rhetoric and ideological framing and present several case studies that showcase how linguistic annotation and the use of NLP methods can help to investigate different framing strategies in parliamentary debates.

The first part of the talk investigates populist framing strategies, specifically, the use of pronouns to create in- and out-groups and the identification of people-centric messages. The second part of the presentation focusses on framing strategies on the pragmatic level.

Modelling populist rhetoric in text. A rhetoric strategy often used in political debates is *Othering*, a technique that aims at describing a person or minority group as distant and different from what is considered as “the norm”, i.e., the speaker's own in-group. To better understand how political actors use *Othering*, we developed a compositional annotation scheme to capture theclusivity properties of personal pronouns in context, that is their ability to construct and manage in-groups and out-groups (Rehbein and Ruppenhofer, 2022). Our exploratory analysis of pronoun use in the parliamentary setting provides some face validity for our schema, that I will discuss in the talk.

Another prominent feature of populist discourse is the use of people-centric messages, also referred to as *thin* populism (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). To automatically identify *thin* populism in text, we combine insights from political science (Mudde, 2017; Wirth et al., 2019) with quantitative text analysis and NLP methodologies (Klamm et al., 2023). In a first step, we identify the core protagonists of populist rhetoric, i.e., mentions of

The People (such as: Germans, tax payers, Muslims, etc.) and of *The Elite* (e.g., the government, media, politicians, etc.). Aggregating the extracted information, we are able to measure the use of *thin* populism for different parties in parliament and show that our measure correlates with experts' ratings from the Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey 2018 (POPPA) (Meijers and Zaslove, 2021).

Pragmatic framing in political debates. On the pragmatic level, the analysis of speech acts can provide rich information on how political actors frame their messages. Kondratenko et al. (2020) present a linguo-pragmatic taxonomy for speech acts in political discourse. On the highest level, their taxonomy distinguishes cooperation from conflict communication which, on the next level, are further divided into six subclasses. Extending their work, we develop a fine-grained speech act annotation scheme for German parliamentary debates and automatically predict speech acts in a corpus of Bundestag debates, ranging from 2003 to 2023. Our initial analysis confirms our expectations regarding the different rhetorical strategies used by political actors in government and in opposition (Reinig et al., 2024).

Another rhetorical strategy related to epistemological bias (Recasens et al., 2013) is to frame a proposition as a fact or part of the common ground rather than presenting it as personal opinion. Our case study shows how we can identify epistemological bias, based on the identification of events of speech, thought and writing in debates, together with their corresponding roles (e.g., speaker, addressee, message), and combining this information with clustering techniques (Rehbein et al., 2024).

Finally, I will discuss ongoing work on the annotation of moral frames in political communication and highlight the challenges and potentials of this type of analysis.

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