

**PERSONALIZATION IS IN THE DETAILS:
A CASE STUDY OF POLITICAL PERSONALIZATION
IN AMERICAN POLITICS**

LILLA PETRONELLA SZABÓ

Corvinus University of Budapest
lilla.szabo@uni-corvinus.hu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5509-2158>

Abstract

The process of political personalization (namely, politicians taking the center stage rather than political collectives) has been observed from many perspectives by scholars of political communication. A wide range of research measured whether politics was becoming personalized; however, these studies were largely data-driven. In this paper, I argue that in order to gain a fuller understanding of personalized politics, more nuanced analyses need to be conducted, as the detailed interpretation of political communication reveals aspects of political personalization which data-based approaches may overlook. The relevance of qualitative analysis in terms of the personalization of politics is interpreted through the use of first-person singular and plural pronouns in Ronald Reagan's 1984 and Barack Obama's 2008 presidential nomination acceptance speeches. The results show that despite a similar level of personalization in quantitative terms in the two speeches, a closer analysis of the texts reveals differences in terms of the semantic categories represented by first-person pronouns.

Keywords: political personalization, experiential view of deixis, first-person pronouns

1. Introduction

The process of political personalization means that politicians (along with their personal and professional lives) are foregrounded in political communication rather than political collectives (such as parties; Szabó 2022). While in an era when politicians can reach millions of people by setting up a profile on social media platforms it may appear straightforward that individuals are at the center of politics, research indicates different levels of personalization persisting in various countries (Karvonen 2010; Rahat–Kenig 2018), on national versus local levels (McAllister 2015), and depending on whether candidates were mandated by the party or voters (Papp–Zorigt 2016). Since political personalization is a process (cf. Karvonen 2010), several studies took a longitudinal stance. This is evident in the case of Rahat and Kenig's (2018) work, in which indicators such as party-membership density, party-identification, and party continuity were generally declining in the observed 26 democracies (including Austria, Japan, and New Zealand). Karvonen's (2010) results confirm another aspect of personalization: the growth of individual politicians and more precisely, the prime ministers' power in numerous parliamentary democracies. Prime ministers' significance was measured by formal power, funding, and staff, for example. Thus, these pieces of research confirm that personalization has been present in politics.

Data-driven results about personalized political communication are also available from the perspective of politicians' language use. For example, Szabó (2021, 2022) attributed the emerging

occurrence of first-person singular (1PS)¹ pronouns to the increasing level of personalization in American presidential candidates' nomination acceptance speeches between 1960 and 2020 (Szabó 2021) and 1932 and 2020 (Szabó 2022), respectively. First-person singular pronouns can be connected to personalization in the sense that the politician speaks for themselves rather than on behalf of a collective, such as a political party (cf. Van Zoonen–Holtz-Bacha 2000; Liu 2022; Rahat–Kenig 2018; Szabó 2021, 2022). By way of illustration, example (1) from Mitt Romney's 2012 and example (2) from Jimmy Carter's 1976 presidential nomination acceptance speeches demonstrate two contrasting ways of using the 1PS *I*.

- (1) "I grew up in Detroit in love with cars and wanted to be a car guy, like my dad." (Romney 2012)
- (2) "As a governor, I had to deal each day with the complicated and confused and overlapping and wasteful federal government bureaucracy." (Carter 1976)

A study of political personalization based merely on data would reveal that the use of the 1PS *I* in example (1) and example (2) correspond to the personalization of politics. This statement is plausible as long as we accept that political personalization focuses attention on individual politicians and therefore, when using the 1PS *I* in speeches, politicians speak on their own behalf (rather than their parties, for example). However, upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that the two candidates spoke from different perspectives. In example (1), Romney mentioned his childhood ("I grew up in Detroit") taking a more personal stance as compared to example (2) in which Carter detailed his work (i.e., addressed the nation as a professional) in the capacity of Governor of Detroit ("I had to deal each day with the complicated and confused and overlapping and wasteful federal government bureaucracy"). Example (1) and (2) thus reveal that politicians speak from different perspectives in their speeches even when they use the same pronoun (cf. Van Zoonen–Holtz-Bacha 2000).

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate through two case studies discussing Barack Obama's 2008 and Ronald Reagan's 1984 presidential nomination acceptance speeches that a fine-tuned analysis of the semantic categories referred to by first-person pronouns can shed new light on political personalization.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of research on personalized political communication. Section 3 presents the corpus and methodology, while section 4 details the results. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. An overview of political personalization research

Political personalization has been examined on a diverse set of data and with numerous methodological tools. First, Rahat and Kenig (2018) state that political personalization can be studied on three main levels. The level of institutions corresponds to institutional changes which enhance the power of politicians. By way of illustration, the introduction of primary elections contributes to the personalization of politics on the institutional level, as it gives voters the possibility to elect candidates (Rahat–Sheafer 2007). Furthermore, the media can also contribute to political personalization, which is exemplified by the increasing focus on politicians' personal traits and private life. For example, Langer (2007) showed that in *The Times*, British Prime Ministers' visibility (indicated by the number of articles which referred to the PMs) grew from 21 to 74 articles per week between 1945 and 1999. Additionally, Langer (2010) later revealed that following Tony Blair's premiership (and as a result of the so-called "Blair effect"), the subsequent PMs' personal traits were emphasized in British journalism: Gordon Brown was characterized as "dour," while David Cameron was described as a "young family-man."

¹ The abbreviation of the first-person singular (1PS) and the first-person plural (1PP) follows Wales (1996).

Finally, on the behavioral level politicians themselves contribute to the personalization of political communication with their social media presence, for example. Personalization on social media is exemplified in the work undertaken by Metz et al. (2020), who studied German politicians' Facebook activity during the last two weeks of November 2016 (which was not a campaign period, and thus, politicians did not need to actively campaign on social media). The results showed that politicians tend to share professional (e.g., images of the politician at their workplace) and emotional (e.g., posts containing emojis which express feelings) personalized posts in the largest ratio, along with private content (e.g., images showing the politician as a private person) on Facebook.²

The present paper is concerned with the behavioral level and more precisely, with politicians' linguistic behavior (i.e., language use).

2.1. The linguistic research of personalized political communication

The personalization of politics has been approached from many different viewpoints; however, there is still a paucity of research which observes personalization from the perspective of linguistics. Although Rahat and Kenig (2018) and Van Zoonen and Holtz-Bacha (2000) note that language use – and more precisely, the use of the 1PS rather than the 1PP pronouns – may indicate the process of personalization in political communication, they did not investigate pronominal language in detail and their observations do not stem from linguistics.

Liu (2022) undertook to determine the personalization of power (i.e., “the power to decide”, cf. Liu 2022: 1258) *ex ante* with the help of the 1PS *I* and 1PP *we* in the rhetoric of various Mandarin Chinese-speaking politicians in China, Singapore and Taiwan from the 1940s. The research was complemented with a study of speeches from Albania's Enver Hoxha, Ecuador's Rafael Correa, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, and North Korea's Kim Il Sung. The paper argued that as leaders personalize power, they use the 1PS *I* less and the 1PP *we* more. The 1PS *I* is associated with “credit claiming” and “blame avoiding” (Liu 2022: 1259). However, the use of the 1PS assigns moral and personal responsibility to the speaker (Allen 2007; Beard 2000; Mühlhäusler–Harré, 1990; Wilson 1990) and therefore, in the case of unsuccessful measures and negative outcomes, it is the politician who needs to bear the blame if they use the 1PS. The 1PP *we* is associated with situations in which more power is assigned to politicians, as “there are few constraints on their personalization of power” (Liu 2022: 1260).

The study distinguished between two categories of the 1PP *we*. The exclusive “royal” *we* meant that politicians are authorized to speak “for” citizens, while the inclusive *we* signifies group identity and exemplifies when politicians speak “with” citizens. Whereas Liu (2022) does prove that as politicians' personal power increased, the use of 1PP *we* she observed also increased, it must be noted that there are multiple issues with the 1PP categories she proposed. Regarding the royal *we*, Liu (2022: 1263) claims that leaders “[do] not always or strictly” assign a divine right for themselves standing for authority. However, historically the royal *we* served two purposes according to H. Varga (2017). First, monarchs could speak in general terms and say things everyone must accept using the royal *we* and second, monarchs spoke on behalf of their subjects as well. In fact, the latter use overlaps with Liu's (2022) inclusive *we*.³ With regard to the inclusive *we*, it is important to identify which groups the politicians speak “with.” When there are fewer institutional constraints, which marks the personalization of power, one would expect that politicians refer to these

² Apparently, professional personalization is the aspect of political personalization that members of Generation Z find the most appealing. According to Parmelee et al.'s (2022) results, Generation Z respondents favored the “backstage pass aesthetic,” namely, they wanted to gain insight into politicians' work and see what is behind the scenes in politics.

³ Although Liu (2022) spoke about politicians she labelled as “dictators,” it must be added that politicians' use of royal *we* is not always appreciated. One notable example is Margaret Thatcher who said “We are a grandmother” as she announced the birth of her grandchild (Beard 2000: 44). Thatcher was mocked for her statement at the time because it made her sound too self-important (Beard 2000).

institutions less frequently by using pronominal references. Thus, in line with the definition of personalization, they would refer to parties less frequently with 1PP pronouns. However, this contradicts Liu's (2022: 1264) hypothesis which claims that as executive constraints decrease, the frequency of 1PP pronouns increase.

A more detailed account of the uses of the 1PS *I* and 1PP *we* is provided by Szabó (2021, 2022), who also claimed that the study of personal pronouns can be attributed to the personalization of politics. However, Szabó (2021, 2022) observed personal pronouns from the perspective of the "experiential view of deixis" (Marmaridou 2000). The experiential view of deixis means that the linguistic act of pointing is based on the physical act of pointing which is performed by a human being in the presence of another human being (Marmaridou 2000). Accordingly, when a person points to someone or something, their reference point – namely, the deictic center – is themselves. Thus, the 1PS designates the speaker's own perspective and for this reason, it can be considered as an indicator of political personalization (Szabó 2021, 2022).

Upon the act of pointing, we can notice that there are entities which are closer to us and there are entities which are further from us. This observation is also mapped onto the experiential perspective on deixis on the basis of the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema (Marmaridou 2000). The CENTER corresponds to a human's experiential center, while the PERIPHERY refers to the fact that human experience is limited: the further entities are from the experiencer, the closer they are to the periphery of our perception (Johnson 1987). Rees' model (1983, cited by Wilson 1990) shows that the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema can be translated into the use of personal pronouns as well.

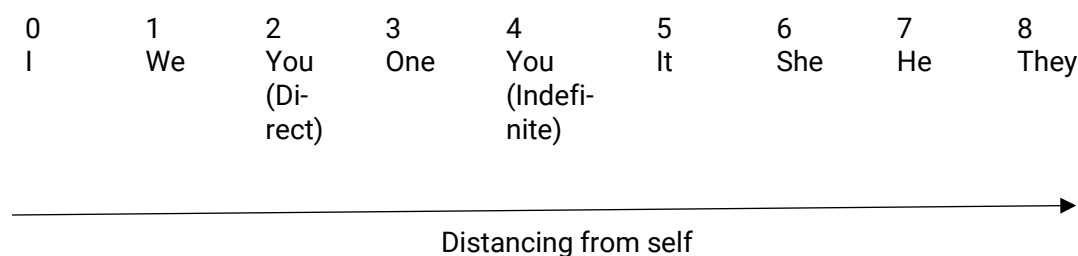


Figure 1. Distancing from the self via personal pronouns as devised by Rees (1983, cited by Maitland–Wilson 1987: 498)

As Rees's model demonstrates, the center is constituted by the 1PS and the third-person plural (3PP) pronoun is the most peripheral one from the speaker's perspective because the speaker is not a member of the group designated by the 3PP.

Based on the experiential view of deixis (Marmaridou 2000) and Rees's model, Szabó (2021, 2022) claimed that the 1PS can be considered as a direct indicator of personalization in American nomination acceptance speeches, as it presents the politician's own perspective. Another personal pronoun she studied was the 1PP *we*. However, as compared to Liu (2022), Szabó (2021, 2022) created rather different categories. Building on the pragmatic differentiation between inclusive (the 1PP includes the speaker, the addressee and third parties) and exclusive (the 1PP includes speaker and third parties) 1PP use (Laczkó–Tátrai 2015; Tátrai 2010, 2011, 2017) as well as on the literature on political communication (Beard, 2000; Fetzer & Bull, 2008; Íñigo-Mora, 2004; Szabó, 2020, 2021; Maitland & Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1990; Zupnik, 1994), Szabó (2021, 2022) set up three major categories of *we*: *we*_{Family}, *we*_{Party}, and *we*_{Nation}. *we*_{Family} included the politician and one or more members of their family. *we*_{Party} referred to a larger group which involved the politician and their party (along with the government, if applicable). Finally, *we*_{Nation} was the most inclusive category on the national level as it included the presidential candidate and American citizens. This categorization can be translated into Rees's model as captured by Figure 2.

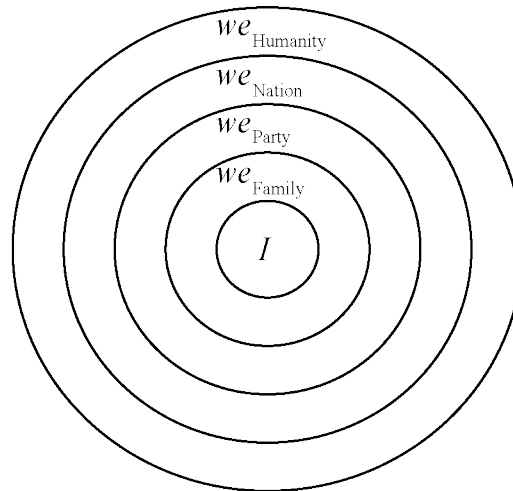


Figure 2. Relative distance of the referents of first-person plural pronouns to the deictic center based on Szabó (2022)

Figure 2 – conforming to Lakoff’s (1987) idea that the CENTER-PERIPHERY image schema can be applied to radial categories – offers a radial representation of Rees’s model. As Figure 2 shows, it is the category of we_{Family} which is closest to the 1PS I , i.e., the deictic center, followed by we_{Party} , and we_{Nation} . It must be added that Figure 2 does not presuppose inclusivity in the sense that it does not claim that a politician’s family members (we_{Family}) automatically belong to their political party (we_{Party}). The positioning of the categories draws on the INTIMACY IS CLOSENESS and the SOCIAL DISTANCE IS SPATIAL DISTANCE (Winter–Matlock 2017) conceptual metaphors, which capture the fact that we tend to be physically closer to those with whom we feel emotionally closer.⁴

In line with Figure 2, Szabó (2021, 2022) stated that the following tendencies correspond to an increase of personalization in political communication. The more frequent occurrence of we_{Family} shows that the politician refers to their private lives in their speeches. The decrease of we_{Party} suggests that the dominance of parties is fading. Finally, the increase of we_{Nation} reveals that presidential candidates aim to address the whole nation, as citizens’ votes may not be strongly determined by party membership anymore.

Whereas the categorization presented in Figure 2 makes it possible to capture a general tendency of personalization, it does not allow for a more detailed analysis of the meaning behind pronominal references. To tackle this issue, two case studies are presented in the following section which show more aspects of the role of pronouns in personalization as compared to Szabó (2021, 2022).

3. Corpus and methodology

3.1. Two presidential nomination acceptance speeches

The texts under scrutiny are American presidential nomination acceptance speeches. The reason why American politics is under investigation is that personalization is believed to have started in

⁴ The experiments carried out by Matthews and Matlock (2011) underpin that people move physically closer to those with whom they feel emotionally closer. Matthews and Matlock (2011) conducted three experiments in which they asked participants to imagine that they were delivering a package to a “friend” or a “stranger” and draw the route of their journey which they made walking through a park, driving a car, and riding a taxi, respectively. Their data showed that participants drew their routes of delivery closer to “friends” in comparison with “strangers,” even when direct interaction with “friends” was made impossible because participants had to imagine that they were driving or sitting in a taxi. Overall, Matthews and Matlock’s (2011) results show that when humans think about intimacy, they immediately access the domain of physical distance.

the USA (Adam–Maier 2010) and personalization itself is ordinary in US politics (Ohr 2015), enhanced by the presidential system. American presidential nomination acceptance speeches are traditionally given by nominees at the Democratic National Convention and the Republican National Convention as part of the campaigns leading up to the selection of Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. Acceptance speeches have a pivotal role in establishing party unity and in the designation of the presidential candidate as the party leader (Trent et al. 2016). For this reason, the presidential nomination acceptance speech can be regarded as a “legitimation ritual” (Ritter 1980: 153). Finally, the acceptance speech is the most important presidential campaign speech (Ritter 1980): it gives candidates the chance to generate a positive response from viewers which can lead to their vote (Trent et al. 2016).

This paper focuses on two addresses: the Democratic Barack Obama’s 2008, and the Republican Ronald Reagan’s 1984 speech, ensuring that both major political parties in the US are represented. Based on Szabó’s (2022) results, it became apparent that personalization in the US was the most dominant since the 1980s. Hence, nomination speeches following the 1980s were taken into consideration. The next criterion was to identify those politicians who gained the most popular vote in the elections. The popular vote – the vote cast by the electorate in the USA – reflects citizens’ sympathy towards the given politician. Based on the *Statista*⁵ database, Barack Obama in 2008 (52.9%) and Ronald Reagan in 1984 (58.8%) were the nominees who could generate the highest ratio of popular votes up until the 2020 elections.

3.2. Analysis

The first step of the analysis was the close reading of Obama’s (2008) and Reagan’s (1984) speeches (Proctor–Su 2011). Subsequently, the subjective (*I* and *we*), objective (*me* and *us*), and genitive cases (the determinative *my* and *our* forms and the independent *mine* and *ours* forms) along with reflexive forms (*myself* and *ourselves*) of the 1PS and 1PP pronouns were extracted with the help of AntConc (Anthony 2020). Finally, the hits returned by the “concordances” function of AntConc (Anthony 2020) were inspected in their immediate context.

The referents of the pronouns were determined based on anaphoric reference (Bazzanella 2002; Jobst 2007, 2010). When there was no anaphoric reference in the sentence, the larger context was observed in which the sentence occurred, and the closest anaphoric reference was identified. When the 1PP reference was compatible with the referent of the closest (non-pronominal) subject, the 1PP was marked as a co-referent. When the 1PP was not compatible with the closest (non-pronominal) subject, I selected the 1PS or 1PP category on the basis of the larger context, “shared knowledge” and “the ongoing interaction” (Bazzanella 2002: 248).

Whereas Szabó (2021, 2022) marked the categories with the actual subjective pronoun they represented (e.g., the 1PP reference to the candidate’s family was indicated as *we_{Family}*), in this paper 1PSX (first-person singular) and 1PPX (first-person plural) are used as the pronominal forms are not treated individually.

Since the aim of the analysis was to provide a more exhaustive account regarding the semantic categories embodied by the pronouns, the pronouns were listed in more detailed groups. In the case of 1PS, it can be determined whether the candidate spoke as a politician or a private person (cf. Holtz-Bacha et al. 2014). Accordingly, when candidates used pronominal constructions related to their political activities, they were considered as 1PS_{Professional} as in example (3).

(3) “As Governor of California, I successfully made such vetos over 900 times.” (Reagan 1984)

⁵ ProCon, & Encyclopædia Britannica, & National Archives and Records Administration, & 270twin.com. (December 16, 2020). Share of electoral college and popular votes from each winning candidate, in all United States presidential elections from 1789 to 2020 [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved 18 December 2021, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1034688/share-electoral-popular-votes-each-president-since-1789/>

However, pronouns in candidates' speeches were categorized as 1PS_{Private} when their utterances were related to their private lives by means of pronouns as shown by example (4).

- (4) "She's [Obama's grandmother] the one who put off buying a new car or a new dress for herself so that I could have a better life." (Obama 2008)

With regard to 1PP pronouns, the categories of 1PP_{Family} and 1PP_{Nation} were retained based on Szabó (2021, 2022). However, in contrast with Szabó (2021, 2022), where references to the Republican/Democratic Party and to the candidate's (future) administration were grouped into the same category (1PP_{Party}), this paper separates references to the Democratic Party and the Republican Party (1PP_{Democrats/Republicans}) and candidates' prospective administration (1PP_{Administration}) for a more detailed image of political references. Furthermore, depending on the observed speech, novel categories were introduced, such as 1PP_{Parties}, referring to both the Democratic Party and Republican Party. By creating groups of pronouns based on the texts themselves, it was possible to put each first-person pronoun into a category.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Barack Obama's 2008 presidential nomination acceptance speech

Barack Obama delivered his acceptance speech entitled "The American promise" at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado. The address marked Obama's first run for presidency which he subsequently won. The speech contained 4652 words altogether. With the help of AntConc (Anthony, 2020), 267 first-person pronouns were identified in the address, 113 (42%) of which were 1PS and 154 (58%) 1PP pronouns.

4.1.1. 1PS pronouns in Obama's 2008 presidential nomination acceptance speech

Obama's speech contained 113 1PS pronouns (81 subjective, 12 objective, and 20 possessive pronouns). In the study, two broader categories were established first, indicating whether the politician spoke from a professional (1PS_{Professional}) or a private (1PS_{Private}) perspective.

Obama spoke in a personal manner in 22% of 1PS references in the sense that the context of his utterances showed him as a private person. He took three main roles in these pronominal references: husband (example 5), father (example 6), and (grand)son (example 7).

- (5) "To the love of my life, our next First Lady, Michelle Obama, and to Sasha and Malia – I love you so much, and I'm so proud of all of you." (Obama 2008)
- (6) "And now is the time to keep the promise of equal pay for an equal day's work, because I want my daughters to have exactly the same opportunities as your sons." (Obama 2008)
- (7) "She [Obama's grandmother] poured everything she had into me." (Obama 2008)

Therefore, private 1PS pronouns directed attention to the nominee's family rather than other personal relationships or interests.

The second group of 1PS pronouns were the ones which portray Obama as a politician and not a private person. 1PS_{Professional} utterances took up the majority, 78% of Obama's first-person pronominal references. Naturally, as a first-time nominee Obama could not refer to any previous achievements as president. Consequently, the pronominal structures of his 2008 DNC speech were future-oriented: in laying out his plans for his prospective administration 30% of subjective 1PS statements contained "I will" or "I'll" in example (8).

- (8) "I will cut taxes – cut taxes – for 95% of all working families." (Obama 2008)

Furthermore, he also talked about his ideas as “my plan” and “my call,” which correspond to the personal role he wished to undertake on the basis of these utterances.

A closer relationship between the candidate and the people was also initiated in the speech by means of directly addressing the audience. In 23% of his 1PS_{Professional} statements, Obama sought to establish a connection with his viewers as in example (9).

(9) “So don’t tell me that Democrats won’t defend this country.” (Obama 2008)

This imitation of an interaction between speaker and audience further reinforces a more familiar and essentially more personal connection.

4.1.2. 1PP pronouns in Obama’s 2008 presidential nomination acceptance speech

Altogether 154 1PP references (72 subjective, 22 objective, 58 genitive, 2 reflexive) were found in Obama’s speech. Three main levels of pronominal reference can be separated: the private level (1PP_{Family}), the group level (1PP_{Parties}, 1PP_{Democrats}, 1PP_{Administration}, 1PP_{Convention}) and the national level (1PP_{Nation}). There was a single reference to the whole of humanity (example 10):

(10) “And for the sake of our economy, our security, and the future of our planet, I will set a clear goal as President: in ten years, we will finally end our dependence on oil from the Middle East.” (Obama 2008)

Additionally, Obama also referred to his work as Senator of Illinois on one occasion (example 11).

(11) “I’ve seen it in Illinois, when we provided health care to more children and moved more families from welfare to work” (Obama 2008)

Due to the lack of tokens, 1PP_{Humanity} and 1PP_{Illinois} are not discussed further.

The first level which was observed in detail was the private one. The private level in the case of Obama’s DNC address included two examples (1% of 1PP references). One of them was in reference to him and his sister (example 12).

(12) “I think about my mom, who raised my sister and me on her own, [...] who once turned to food stamps but was still able to send us to the best schools in the country...” (Obama 2008)

In the other instance, the nominee talked about his wife and himself (example 13).

(13) “Michelle and I are only here tonight because we were given a chance at an education.” (Obama 2008)

The private aspect of personalization was more dominant in 1PS utterances (9% of 1PS pronouns) as compared to 1PP pronouns (0.7% of 1PP pronouns). Moreover, it appears that when using pronominal language related to the private sphere, Obama talked about his family rather than other relations.

19% of 1PP pronouns were categorized as belonging to the group level. The group level in Obama’s DNC address refers to political groups, namely 1PP_{Democrats} (8%), 1PP_{Administration} (5%), 1PP_{Parties} (4%), and 1PP_{Convention} (2%). Firstly, we find two types of party-reference in the address. In the first type, Obama identified with his own political community, the Democratic Party. Party references are illustrated by example (14).

(14) “You see, we Democrats have a very different measure of what constitutes progress in this country.” (Obama 2008)

The DNC speech also highlighted a common “sense” and “purpose” of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party: Obama pointed to times when members of the two leading parties in the USA needed to work conjointly as seen in example (15).

- (15) “Democrats as well as Republicans will need to cast off the worn-out ideas and politics of the past. [...] What has also been lost is our sense of common purpose – our sense of higher purpose. And that’s what we have to restore.” (Obama 2008)

This statement reinforces that party divides belong to the “past” and shared ideas need to be brought forward. Emphasizing the shared objectives is further continued in the address, as seen in example (16).

- (16) “We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country.” (Obama 2008)

Thus, even though the text does bear references to political parties, diminishing the divide between them also appeared.

The speech also exhibits 1PP pronouns designating the prospective Obama administration, namely 1PP_{Administration}. When detailing his future policies, the candidate noted the following in example (17).

- (17) “we will keep our promise to every young American – if you commit to serving your community or your country, we will make sure you can afford a college education.” (Obama, 2008)

Clearly, as a first-time nominee, Obama could not speak about achievements of his administration yet; therefore, future-oriented ideas were described, and promises were made in these utterances.

Each reference which explicitly addressed the audience who were at the convention was marked as 1PP_{Convention}, as in example (18).

- (18) “And we are here because we love this country too much to let the next four years look like the last eight” (Obama 2008).

From the perspective of personalization, it is of interest to compare Obama’s future-oriented “I will,” “I’ll” and “my X” (specifically “my call” and “my plan”) statements relative to all the pronouns in his 2008 speech (n=268). The results show that relative to all pronominal language use, Obama used 1PS statements in 10% of the cases when he referred to his promises and ideas for the future, whereas only 3% of pronominal language pointed to his future administration. The predominance of 1PS regarding prospective measures further points to a person-centered political agenda.

Finally, the national level includes pronouns which refer to the United States of America. The majority of 1PP references in Obama’s speech (80%) pointed to the United States, as in example (19).

- (19) “This country of ours has more wealth than any nation, but that’s not what makes us rich.” (Obama 2008).

From the perspective of political personalization, the fact that the majority of Obama’s 1PP references express a national group identification underpins the idea that it is no longer only the members of the political party who the nominee wishes to address. Rather, by utilizing 1PP_{Nation}, the former president wished to identify with the nation and speak as their voice (since 1PP pronouns assume group identification and the speaker’s role as a spokesperson). Thus, the lower number of party identification as compared to national references further reinforces the pattern of political personalization: namely, it is the nation that is highlighted in convention speeches rather than political parties.

4.2. Ronald Reagan's 1984 presidential nomination acceptance speech

Ronald Reagan ran for his reelection as President of the United States in 1984. He addressed the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas on 23 August 1984, and he was subsequently reelected. His speech contained 5060 words. Using AntConc (Anthony 2020), 237 first-person pronouns were identified in his remarks, 33 (14%) of which was 1PS pronouns and 204 (86%) were 1PP pronouns.

4.2.1. The 1PS pronouns in Reagan's speech

Similarly to Obama's speech, first I discuss 1PS pronouns. Altogether 33 (24 subjective, 5 objective, and 4 genitive) 1PS pronouns were identified which were categorized as 1PS_{Professional} when the President spoke from a professional, and 1PS_{Private} when he addressed viewers from a personal perspective.

Reagan made his remarks from a personal angle in 21% of 1PS pronouns. In his speech, the President talked about his past using 1PS pronouns on the one hand in example (20).

(20) "None of the four wars in my lifetime came about because we were too strong." (Reagan, 1984)

On the other hand, Reagan explicitly noted that he would speak as a private person in the following segment of his speech (example 21).

(21) "Could I share a personal thought with you tonight, because tonight's kind of special to me." (Reagan, 1984)

As opposed to Obama's 1PS_{Private} pronoun use, Reagan did not mention his family but instead restricted his remarks to his own personal experiences.

The 1PS_{Professional} pronouns were used in 79% of 1PS pronominal references in Reagan's address. As the incumbent president at the time, he talked from this perspective in a presidential capacity in example (22).

(22) "Little Leah Kline was asked by her teacher to describe my duties. She said: 'The President goes to meetings.'" (Reagan, 1984)

24% of Reagan's 1PS references discussed what he achieved by the time of the 1984 RNC, (example 23) and 6% of his 1PS pronouns were related to the future (example 24).

(23) "I have addressed parliaments, have spoken to parliaments in Europe and Asia during these last 3 1/2 years..." (Reagan, 1984)

(24) "I will campaign on behalf of the principles of our party which lift America confidently into the future." (Reagan, 1984)

This tendency is in contrast with Obama's use of pronouns who was a first-time nominee at the time of his address. Whereas Obama was more outspoken about his subsequent plans, Reagan did not rely on the 1PS to talk about his intentions for his second term. Naturally, individual differences must be taken into account when contrasting the two candidates. Nevertheless, personal aspects and the political context possibly influenced the distinct tendencies in the two texts.

4.2.2. 1PP pronouns in Reagan's speech

Reagan's 1984 address contained 204 1PP pronouns (100 subjective, 23 objective, 81 genitive) altogether. Three main levels of 1PP references were examined here. The private level (1PP_{Family}), the group level (1PP_{Parties}, 1PP_{Republicans}, 1PP_{Administration}) and the national level (1PP_{Nation}).

Szabó's (2021, 2022) results indicated that in terms of the 1PP subjective pronoun *we*, no reference was made to candidates' families from the start of the observed period, i.e., 1932 to 1984. In the case of Reagan's 1984 remarks (involving all the pronoun usage analyzed in this chapter), merely 1% of pronominal references point to him and his wife (example 25).

(25) "Nancy and I will be forever grateful for the honor you've done us, for the opportunity to serve, and for your friendship and trust." (Reagan, 1984)

However, even in this case, the utterance in which 1PP_{Family} appears is related to presidential duties, namely the way Ronald and Nancy Reagan served their country, rather than their personal life. Thus, as compared to Obama's speech in which he appeared as a husband and (grand)child, Reagan only takes the role of a husband, but a more professional capacity is assumed.

Of all 1PP references in Reagan's speech, 55% designated the group level including 1PP_{Republicans} (34%), 1PP_{Administration} (14%), 1PP_{Convention} (1.5%), and 1PP_{Parties} (0.5%). Reference to the Reagan administration (1PP_{Administration}) is seen in example (26).

(26) "In the first 2 years of our administration, that annual increase fell to 5.3 percent." (Reagan, 1984)

The pronoun use can be attributed to the fact that (as noted above) Reagan ran for his second term as president, thus he had the possibility to highlight the achievements his government made. The ratio of party references (1PP_{Republicans}; 34%) is relatively high compared to party identification in Obama's 2008 speech (10%) which may point to an increase in political personalization (with the proviso that the ratio can also be attributed to individual politicians' willingness to refer to their own parties). Republicans were mentioned in utterances such as in example (27).

(27) "I will campaign on behalf of the principles of our party which lift America confidently into the future." (Reagan, 1984)

Mention needs to be made of two categories which occurred in a relatively low number. Reagan (similarly to Obama) made one reference to the two parties (the Democratic Party and the Republican Party) in example (28).

(28) "The distinction between our two parties and the different philosophy of our political opponents are at the heart of this campaign and America's future." (Reagan, 1984)

Finally, Reagan referred to the RNC (1PP_{Convention}) directly in his speech as showed in example (29).

(29) "And now you really know why we're here tonight." (Reagan, 1984)

In example (29), place (*here*) and time (*tonight*) deictic references reveal that the nominee pointed to the audience who was present at the RNC with the help of person deixis.

The national level (1PP_{Nation}) appeared in 44% of all 1PP references in Reagan's speech. In this instance as well, it needs to be noted that the differences may stem from the nominees' different personas. However, (in light of Obama's remarks) the comparatively low number of 1PP_{Nation} references in Reagan's speech and the relatively high number of party references (1PP_{Republicans}) verify the idea of political personalization being in motion over the years.

Finally, a single reference (0.5% of all 1PP pronouns) was made to the United States of America and the Soviet Union, which still existed at the time of Reagan's speech.

- (30) "For the sake of our children and the safety of this Earth, we ask the Soviets – who have walked out of our negotiations – to join us in reducing and, yes, ridding the Earth of this awful threat." (Reagan, 1984)

As example (30) demonstrates, $1PP_{USA+Soviet\ Union}$ can be detected in Reagan's 1984 speech.

The results of the analysis point to important conclusions regarding the study of personalized political communication. Generally, 1PS pronouns were more dominant in Obama's speech, as they amounted to 42% of all first-person pronoun use. In comparison, only 14% of all pronominal language use was 1PS in the case of Reagan. It cannot be declared that the difference can only be attributed to political personalization. Nevertheless, the results lend support to the hypothesis that personalization – the process of putting the candidates themselves in the center – has expanded over the years. The increasing number of 1PS references correspond to the idea that attention has shifted from political collectives to individual politicians. In terms of 1PS pronouns, the use of $1PS_{Private}$ reflects the trend of political personalization when Obama's speech is compared to Reagan's. Figure 1 displays quantitative data on the use of 1PS pronouns in the politicians' speeches.

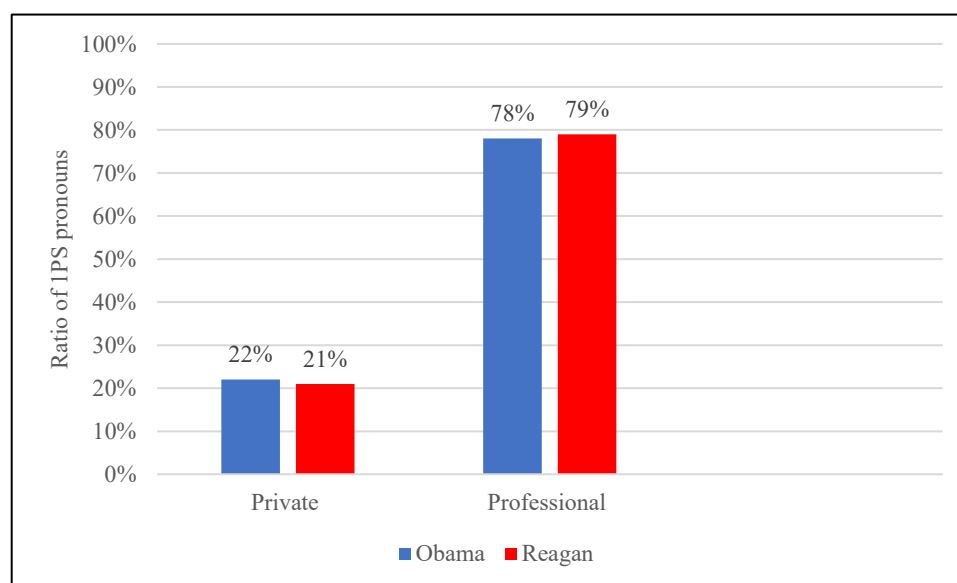


Figure 3. 1PS pronouns in Obama's and Reagan's presidential nomination acceptance speech

As shown by Figure 3, there is no substantial difference with regards to ratio of $1PS_{Private}$ and $1PS_{Professional}$ pronouns in Obama's and Reagan's speeches. However, as the qualitative analysis revealed, President Obama spoke about family issues and history using the 1PS, while President Reagan told stories about himself.

The analysis also included 1PP references in the addresses, the results of which are summarized in Figure 4.

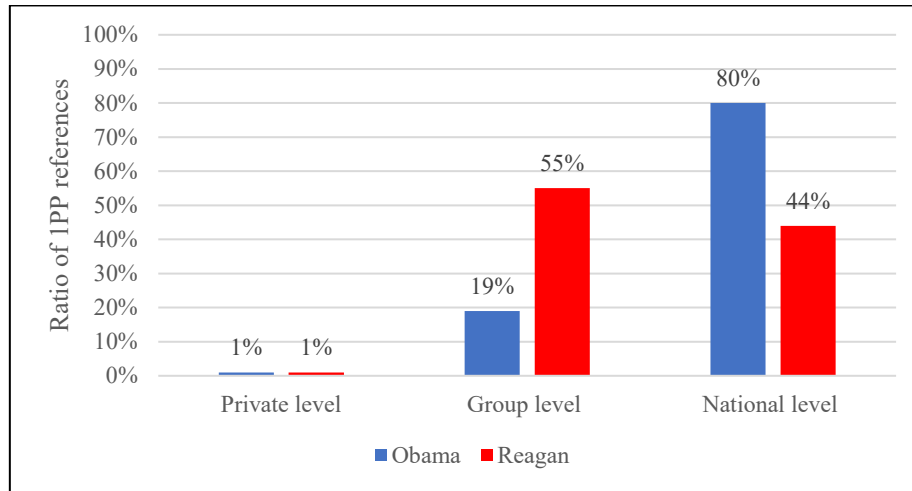


Figure 4. 1PP pronouns in Obama’s and Reagan’s presidential nomination acceptance speech

The private level of 1PP references, namely 1PP_{Family} also point towards a more intimate and personalized way of political communication. Although there is no difference in terms of the percentage of the private level in the two speeches, qualitative analysis highlights a contrast between the two candidates. In this regard, while Obama referred to his family by professing his love, (see example 5), Reagan confined himself to a more professional capacity even when mentioning his wife (see example 25). Party references identified in the corpus also exhibit the tendencies of political personalization. Namely, regarding all first-person references and 1PP pronouns, Reagan referred to his party on more occasions as compared to Obama. This is also in line with political personalization, which comes with a decreasing role of political parties. Naturally, more references to the administration were made by Reagan, who was the incumbent president at the time of his RNC remarks, as compared to Obama, a first-time presidential candidate in 2008. As for the nation (1PP_{Nation}), it was mentioned on more occasions by Obama than Reagan, signaling that the former attempted to address a wider range of voters and not just his own political party, which is further in line with political personalization.

5. Conclusion

The present paper aimed to contribute to research on political personalization from a linguistic perspective. Complementing a data-driven approach to the study of personalization via the use of first-person pronouns (Szabó 2021, 2022), the study offered an in-depth analysis of Obama’s and Reagan’s presidential nomination acceptance speeches.

The results show that qualitative analyses can provide a more complete picture of *how* political personalization happens and account for the subtleties of personalization which are easily overlooked in a data-driven approach. This is supported by the study of private 1PS and 1PP references in Obama’s and Reagan’s speeches: while there is no significant difference in terms of the ratio of references which were categorized as private in the two addresses, variation can still be detected. Whereas Obama used the private sense of 1PS and 1PP to talk about his family, Reagan rather mentioned himself or his wife and himself in a professional capacity.

Although no broad generalizations can be drawn from the comparison of two speeches, the results also confirm that personalization grew as time passed in terms of pronominal language, as Obama’s 2008 address is more “personal” than Reagan’s 1984 speech. However, it must be added that external factors must be weighed in this connection. For example, politicians may simply not be willing to share details of their personal life. Additionally, a politician’s looser relationship with their party may also affect the way they include it in their address.

Overall, the paper confirmed that to understand the personalization of political communication in political speeches better, their in-depth analysis is necessary. In order to reveal the role personal pronouns play in the process, the analysis of multiple speeches from the same politician from different periods, roles, and occasions would provide a clearer picture of the tendency of personalization.

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