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Style and the creation of a political image: Wilders, 'Man of the people'

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Slide 2

Introduction

- Language users almost always have a choice when it comes to describing objects or states of affairs in reality

- The glass is *half full*.
- The glass is *half empty*.

- *Freedom fighters*
- *Rebels*

- The EU is *a bottomless pit*.
- The EU is *one big family*.

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Introduction

- This kind of alternative wording is a matter of *style*

  - "Style is made up of a series of choices among options provided by the language." (Jeffries & McIntyre 2010: 72)

  - "Style is (…) the making of conscious and unconscious choices of certain linguistic forms and structures in preference to others that could have been chosen but were not." (…) (Verdonk 2006: 206)

- Style = when a language user has alternative wordings at his disposal with which to characterize a phenomenon or state of affairs in reality

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Introduction

- Numerous experiments have shown that stylistic variants are not interchangeable semantically: they produce different effects

- E.g. describing a phenomenon from either a positive or a negative perspective affects the image people have of that phenomenon (e.g. Holleman & Pander Maat 2009; Levin, Schneider & Gaeth 1989)

  - a 'pass rate of 75%' vs. a 'fail rate of 25%'

  - '25% fat' vs. '75% lean'

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Introduction

- Research I'm presenting today demonstrates a form of stylistic investigation named 'linguistic stylistics'

- This approach does not involve experiments; rather, it is made plausible, on the basis of linguistic analysis, that stylistic choices create particular effects

- One of my research interests: how do stylistic choices contribute to the creation of a certain political image?

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Aim

- Demonstrate what a linguistic-stylistic approach can yield for studying populism

- Case study: linguistic-stylistic analysis of parliamentary speeches by Geert Wilders (PVV) and Alexander Pechtold (D66) during the 'General Debate' of 2008

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Wilders and Pechtold

- Wilders: a 'textbook example' of populism (Pauwels 2014: 118)

  - Paradox: one of the most experienced members of parliament, but has the image of a political *outsider* who stands up for the will and interests of the common man

- Pechtold: one of Wilders' most prominent and critical opponents in parliament in the last decade

  - Has declared himself openly against populism (cf. Van Leeuwen 2015: 96-99)
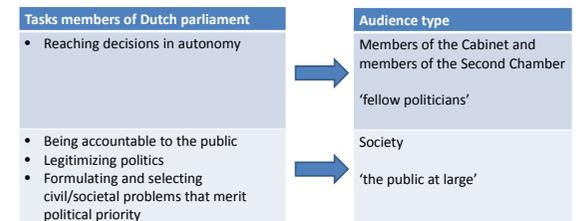
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Structure of my talk

- General Debate 2008: Wilders' and Pechtold's positioning towards 'the audience'

- Stylistic analysis
  - Method
  - Results: zoom in on a series of stylistic features

- Conclusion

Slide 9

Dutch parliamentary debate: complex audience

Dutch political system: governing + representation

Tasks members of Dutch parliament	Audience type
• Reaching decisions in autonomy	Members of the Cabinet and members of the Second Chamber 'fellow politicians'
• Being accountable to the public • Legitimizing politics • Formulating and selecting civil/societal problems that merit political priority	Society 'the public at large'

(Van Haaften 2011, Te Velde 2003)

Slide 1: General Debate 2008

- Media judgments: Wilders and Pechtold gave the impression that they positioned themselves differently towards the two audience types

  1. Wilders kept, more than Pechtold, distance towards his colleagues

     - a.o. 'anti-establishment', 'political outsider' who kept himself emphatically distant from the 'Binnenhof'
     - a.o. 'symbol' of the political establishment, 'political insider'

  2. Wilders positioned himself, more than Pechtold, close to society

     - a.o. 'populist', 'spokesman of the people', speaks 'on behalf of the citizens'
     - a.o. 'anti-populist', 'appearance and usage' pave the way to aloofness – ' maybe he should take a metalworking course first'

- Which stylistic choices in their speeches contribute to these global impressions?

Slide 2: Method

- Searched systematically for relevant stylistic differences between Wilders' and Pechtold's speeches

- Combination of systematic bottom up and top down analysis (cf. Leech & Short 2007)

  - Stage 1 (bottom up)
    - Inventory of stylistic differences between speeches Wilders en Pechtold was made by using a linguistic-stylistic checklist (cf. Verhagen 2001)
    - Result: selection of stylistic features

  - Stage 2 (top down)
    - Can the stylistic features that are used differently by Wilders en Pechtold be linked to the macro-level impressions?
    - Result: final selection of stylistic features

Slide 3: Results (I)

Stylistic features	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
1. Designations for colleagues: neutral or pejorative	Fellow politicians
2. Addressing colleagues in the second or third person	Fellow politicians
3. Absence or presence of references to the electorate	The public at large
4. Sentence structure: presenting voters as subject, complement or adjunct	The public at large
5. Referring to the electorate in combination with a verb of cognition, perception or emotion	The public at large
6. Jargon: with or without explanation	Both types of audience

Slide 4: Results (II)

Stylistic features (continued)	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
7. Concrete or abstract usage a. concrete of abstract words b. presenting individuals as representative of a larger group c. telling details d. quotations e. nominalisations	Both types of audience
8. Presence or absence of narrative passages	Both types of audience
9. Explicating inferences: yes or no	Both types of audience
10. Inclusive/exclusive 'we'	Both types of audience

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Stylistic features	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
1. ...	...
2. ...	...
3. Absence or presence of references to the electorate	The public at large
4. Sentence structure: presenting voters as subject, complement or adjunct	...
5. Referring to the electorate in combination with a verb of cognition, perception or emotion	The public at large
6. Jargon: with or without explanation	The public at large / fellow politicians
7. Concrete or abstract usage a. ... b. ... c. ... d. ... e. ...	The public at large / fellow politicians
8. ...	...
9. Explicating inferences: yes or no	The public at large / fellow politicians
10. Inclusive/exclusive 'we'	The public at large / fellow politicians

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Stylistic features	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
1. ...	...
2. ...	...
3. Absence or presence of references to the electorate	The public at large
4. Sentence structure: presenting voters as subject, complement or adjunct	...
5. Referring to the electorate in combination with a verb of cognition, perception or emotion	The public at large
6. ...	...
7. ... a. ... b. ... c. ... d. ... e. ...	...
8. ...	...
9. ...	...
10. ...	...

Slide 7

Stylistic features	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
1. ...	...
2. ...	...
3. Absence or presence of references to the electorate	The public at large
4. Sentence structure: presenting voters as subject, complement or adjunct	...
5. Referring to the electorate in combination with a verb of cognition, perception or emotion	The public at large
6. Jargon: with or without explanation	The public at large / fellow politicians
7. Concrete or abstract usage a. concrete or abstract words b. presenting individuals as representative of a larger group c. telling details d. quotations e. (...)	The public at large / fellow politicians
8. ...	...
9. Explicating inferences: yes or no	The public at large / fellow politicians
10	

Slide 8: 'The people' in the centre of interest

- Literature on populism: people-centrism seen as a strategy to suggest closeness to the electorate
  (e.g. Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017; Pauwels 2011; Jagers 2006; Canovan 1981)

- Refer frequently to voters

  - 'Political actors (...) frequently use words such as '(the) people', '(the) public', '(the) citizen(s)', '(the) voter(s)', '(the) taxpayer(s)', '(the) resident(s)', '(the) consumer(s)' and '(the) population'. By referring to the people, a political actor claims that he or she cares about the people's concerns, that he or she primarily wants to defend the interests of the people, that he or she is not alienated from the public but knows what the people really want. **The implicit (...) motto is: 'I listen to you because I talk about you.'**

  (Jagers & Walgrave 2007: 323)

Slide 9: References to the electorate

- Thanks to a study by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, we know that an average non-western immigrant family costs €230.000.

- Thanks to a study by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, we know that an average non-western immigrant family costs **the Dutch taxpayer** €230.000. (W08.50)

References to the electorate

- We have more good news. In our Budget, the taxes on petrol and diesel are decreased with 1 billion euros.

- We have more good news, **for automobilists**. In our budget, the taxes on petrol and diesel are decreased with 1 billion euros. (W08.172)

References to the electorate

- Does Wilders refer more often to the electorate than Pechtold?

  You are misleading **people**, prime minister. (P08.92)

  (…) when TomTom had 60 vacancies for engineers, **no Dutchman** put in an application. (P08.126)

  We would have been able to arrange a private room for **all elderly people in nursing homes** (…).(W08.140)

  She got pressure sores sitting in it [i.e. a wheelchair]. (W08.134)

  All of the Netherlands is very welcome to contribute their ideas.

  We could have given **everyone** a sailing boat as a present(…) W08.56

Results

Speaker	Number or references to the electorate (absolute numbers and per 100 words)
Geert Wilders	72 (2,5)
Alexander Pechtold	32 (1,6)

- Significant difference (LL = 4,43; p < 0,05)

- Contributes to the impression that Wilders is more close to 'the people' than Pechtold

- More detailed analysis: the way *in which* Wilders and Pechtold refer to the electorate is relevant as well
  - Syntactic position: as subject, complement or adjunct?
  - Wilders and Pechtold give voters sometimes their own *perspective*

Syntactic position

- 'Sentence' = *predicate* + subject
  - John *is laughing.*

- **Complements**: constituents required by the meaning of the main verb
  - John beat **Mike**[D.OBJ].
  - Mary offered **Jennifer**[D.OBJ] **a photo album**[IND.OBJ].

- **Adjuncts**: constituents *not* evoked by the meaning of the verb
  - John finally beat **Mike during the cycling championship**.
  - Mary offered **Jennifer a photo album for her 50th anniversary**.

Syntactic position & prominence of information

- Cognitive linguists have argued that information can be presented as more or less prominent by putting that information in a certain syntactic position

  - e.g. Van Krieken et al. (2015:222), Cornelis (2003), Langacker (1991), Givon (1984)

- 'Hierarchy': **subject** > **complement** > **adjunct**

Adjunct   Complement   Subject

Syntactic position & prominence of information

- There will be tax reductions **for citizens and companies**.
  - The cabinet will give **citizens and companies** tax reductions.
  - **Citizens and companies** will get tax reductions.

- That is my prospect: a country with equal chances **for each individual**.
  - That is my prospect: a country in which we give **each individual** equal chances.
  - That is my prospect: a country in which **each individual** gets equal chances.

Adjunct   Complement   Subject

Syntactic position & prominence of information

- In 2010 already there will be more money in the wallets of **many people**, as a result of the fact that we will decrease the tariffs in the second tax bracket.

- In 2010 already we will give **many people** more money in their wallets, as a result of the fact that we will decrease the tariffs in the second tax bracket.
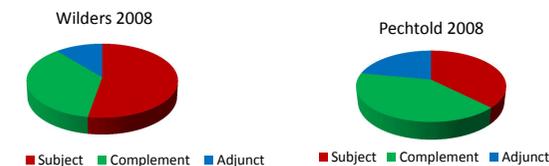
- In 2010 already **many people** will get more money in their pockets, as a result of the fact that we will decrease the tariffs in the second tax bracket.

Quantitative analysis

Syntactic position	Wilders	Pechtold
Subject	38 (52,8%)	12 (37,5%)
Complement	26 (36,1%)	13 (40,6%)
Adjunct	8 (11,1%)	7 (21,9%)

Syntactic distribution

Wilders 2008

Pechtold 2008

■ Subject ■ Complement ■ Adjunct

- In Pechtold's speech, no clear pattern in the distribution of references
  - X2 (2) = 1,938, p > 0.05

- In Wilders' speech, a clear *pattern* in the distribution of references
  - 2008: X^2 (2) = 19,000, p < 0,01
  - Electorate significant more often in subject than in adjunct position (X^2 (1) = 19,565, p < 0,01); number of references in complement position outnumbers the number of references in adjunct position as well ($\chi2$ (1) = 9.529, p < 0.01)

Slide 1: Perspective

Perspective

- Speech & thought representation: frequently studied phenomenon

  (a.o. Dancygier & Sweetser 2012, Fauconnier 1997, Sanders 2009, Sanders & Redeker 1996, Simpson 1993)

- One perspectivising technique: presenting someone as the subject of a 'perspectising verb' (cf. Sanders 2009, 3)
  - Verbs of cognition(*know, hope,* etc.)
  - Verbs of perception (*see, discover*, etc.)
  - Verbs of emotion (*fear, be pleased*, etc.)

Slide 2: Voters + perspectivising verb

Voters + perspectivising verb

- By using this technique, Wilders en Pechold give voters their own perspective

Speaker	Number of references
Geert Wilders	8 (0,8)
Alexander Pechtold	9 (0,5)

- Difference not significant (LL =1,96, p > 0,05)

Slide 3

The differences between what **the Dutch people think** and what the elite thinks, are nowhere more clear than with regard to the mass-immigration. **Almost 60% of the population sees** Islam as the biggest threat to our identity. In addition, **almost *60%* believes** mass immigration is the biggest mistake since World War II. (W08.44-45)

"Greying" is called "silvering" by this cabinet. (…) But **many elderly know** that reality is different. **They know** that "silvering" is incorrect. **They know** that it is about withering, becoming lonely, becoming filthy, dehumiliation. (W08.144-148)

- **They [i.e. the common people] yearn for** the preservation of the Netherlands and their freedom, their security, a reasonable salary and a better future for their children (…). (W08.188)

Standpoints electorate ⇔ standpoints Wilders

Slide 4

Don't you see that **people want** a vision? **They don't want** to hear you say (…). (P08.58-59)

Society is democratized. **People are more critical** towards authorities who have to earn their legitimacy. However, the democracy is not maintained. Democracy is not: you ask, we deliver. This promise of malleability cannot be fulfilled and I don't want to fulfil this. (P08.141-145)

People are cynical about The Hague, not always undeserved. (P08.135)

Standpoints electorate ≠ standpoints Pechtold

Slide 5

Stylistic features	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
1. …	…
2. …	…
3. Absence or presence of references to the electorate	**The public at large**
4. Sentence structure: presenting voters as subject, complement or adjunct	…
5. Referring to the electorate in combination with a verb of cognition, perception or emotion	**The public at large**
6. …	…
7. … a. … b. … c. … d. … e. …	…
8. …	…
9. …	…
10. …	…

Slide 6

Stylistic features	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
1. …	…
2. …	…
3. …	…
4. …	…
5. …	…
6. Jargon: with or without explanation	**The public at large** / fellow politicians
7. Concrete or abstract usage a. concrete or abstract words b. presenting individuals as representative of a larger group c. telling details d. quotations e. (…)	**The public at large** / fellow politicians
8. …	…
9. Explicating inferences: yes or no	**The public at large** / fellow politicians
10. …	…

Slide 7: Use of everyday language

Use of everyday language

- Literature on populism: using everyday language is a way to exhibit closeness to the electorate (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave 2007, Canovan 1981)

- Theoretical underpinning for this idea: Communication Accommodation Theory
  - More/less accommodation of your language = a way to exhibit more/less closeness to the interlocutor (cf. Giles 2008; Giles, Coupland & Coupland 1991)

Slide 8: Convergence / divergence

Convergence / divergence

- Context of (Dutch) parliament: accommodation of speech = complex

- Two audience types who speak (to some extent) a different register

- Language of 'The Hague'
  - Facilitates closeness to fellow politicians
  - Distances from the public at large

- Everyday language
  - Facilitates closeness to society

Slide 9: Convergence / divergence

Convergence / divergence

- Expectations, based on the media judgements:

  - Wilders uses the register of 'The Hague' less than Pechtold
  - Wilders uses more 'everyday language' than Pechtold

- Testing these hypotheses is not easy

- Stylistic differences between Wilders and Pechtold that influence the *accessibility / comprehensibility* of their speeches are relevant:

  - A politician who accommodates his language to his colleagues, will formulate his standpoints in a way that is relatively inaccessible for outsiders
  - A politician who is speaking in everyday language, will formulate his standpoints in a very accessible/comprehensible way

Comprehensible language

- Jargon: with or without explanation

- Concrete / abstract usage
  - A. concrete / abstract nouns
  - B. presenting individuals as representative of a larger group
  - C. telling details
  - D. quotations

- Explicating inferences: yes or no

Jargon

- Technical and specialist terminology that enables fast and univocal communication among professionals but is hard to understand for outsiders (Burger & De Jong 2009, 21)

- Difficult to quantify

- Qualitative analysis:
  - Both Wilders and Pechtold make use of jargon
  - Wilders clarifies jargon; Pechtold doesn't

Jargon

We have two other plans to slightly soften the economic crisis. First: we want to take **a measure that will make the housing market slowly start again, a measure that makes that bying a house will become cheaper**. We do this **by cutting the property transfer tax in half**. (…)

We would like to introduce in the Netherlands an organization like **Animal Cops**. **This is a kind of animal police, (…).**

These are all developments that are not recognized by **the CPB-model**.

You are enthusiastic about the Randstad in 2040 and even more for **getting bogged down with Veerman in the 22nd century**.

Concrete / abstract usage

A. Concrete / abstract nouns
B. Presenting individuals as representative of a larger group
C. Telling details
D. Quotations

Concrete / abstract usage

A. Concrete / abstract nouns

- Referring to sensory perceptions or not (cf. Douma 1994)
- Abstract nouns hamper understanding of a text (e.g. Kraf & Pander Maat 2009)

Speaker	General debate 2008
Geert Wilders	208 (7,15)
Alexander Pechtold	270 (13,50)

- Significant difference (LL = 47,97; p < 0,0001).

Concrete / abstract usage

B. Presenting individuals as representative of a larger group
C. Telling details
D. Quotations

Show, don't tell

- (…) Don't say that something is the case, but show it. Don't tell us that the ringmaster 'has a scruffy appearance', but [C] show us his yellow teeth and the strings of hair on the greasy collar of his discoloured shirt. Don't tell us only that the problems of asylum seekers are 'serious'. (…) [B] Introduce to us one refugee, [C] describe his appearance, [D] let him narrate about his family at home, about his expectations and his fearful dreams.

(Burger & De Jong 2009, 44)

Presenting individuals as representative for a larger group

But, madam speaker, who is paying the bill, who is paying this 100 billion? It will be the people who built the Netherlands, it will be the people who work hard, the people who properly put something aside, who pay their taxes decently, the common Dutchman who doesn't get it for free: **Henk and Ingrid** are paying for **Mohammed en Fatima**! (W08.61-62)

People are cynical about The Hague, not always undeserved. (P08.135)

Policy creates **winners and losers**, **insiders and outsiders**. (P08.79)

Speaker	General Debate 2008
Geert Wilders	8
Alexander Pechtold	0

The 88-year old **Mrs. Willemse** has been sitting in a dilapidated wheelchair for four years, the weels tilted, a ramshackle frame and a wooden plate as backrest. She got pressure sores sitting in it. **Mr. Steller**, very advanced in years, has been waiting for more than two years for the care he needs. And due to haste, **Mrs. Emons** died not in her bed but in the cold storage of the morgue of the nursing home. (W08.132-136)

Telling details

The **88-year old Mrs. Willemse** has been sitting in a **dilapidated** wheelchair **for four years**, the weels **tilted**, a **ramshackle** frame and a **wooden** plate as backrest. She got pressure sores sitting in it. **Mr. Steller**, **very advanced in years**, has been waiting for more than **two years** for the care he needs. And **due to haste**, Mrs. Emons died not in her bed but **in the cold storage** of the morgue of the nursing home. (W08.132-136)

Telling details

Last Thursday, a bus driver **from Gouda** emailed me: "Mr. Wilders, Moroccans terrorize us. Yesterday, **in his first run**, a colleague was robbed **by a Moroccan with a knife put on his throat** while his Moroccan friends were sitting outside **in a car** waiting. They left **cheerfully**, (…)." (…) (W08.91-93)

Telling details

The real concerns of people can be found in their **daily** reality of promotion, dismissal, removal, illness, misfortune and debt repayment, in the **by rules embittered** joy that nurses and teachers have **in their work** and the sometimes **frustrated** search by parents for (…) affordable child care. (P08.138)

Quotations

"Mr. Wilders, Moroccans terrorize us. Yesterday, in his first run, a colleague was robbed by a Moroccan with a knife put on his throat while his Moroccan friends were sitting outside in a car waiting. They left cheerfully, (…)." (…) (W08.91-93)

Recently, a Moroccan told a journalist of Elsevier: "Within ten year we are the boss here, and then we immediately throw that fucking awful Queen of yours out."

Quotations

- Speaker does not tell (in his own words) what someone said, but he *shows* it

Speaker	Number of quotes in General Debate 2008
Geert Wilders	6 (0,2)
Alexander Pechtold	2 (0,1)

  – No significant difference (LL = 0,87; p > 0,05)

Speaker	Number of words in quotations
Geert Wilders	97 (3,3)
Alexander Pechtold	9 (0,5)

  – Significant difference (LL = 56,07; p < 0,0001)

Explicating inferences: yes or no

Why are all these weak-kneeded administrators looking away? Why do they let the Dutch down ? **That is what they do after all. They are letting the Dutch down !** (W08.99-102)

Thanks to a study by the CPB from a few years ago, we know that an average non-western immigrant family costs Dutch taxpayers 230,000 euros. That is more than one hundred billion euros in total. That is how much we lost to the multicultural project: 100 billion. Just think of what we could have done with that money. **We would have been able to arrange a private room for all the elderly in nursing homes many years ago, each with a private nurse. We would have, so to speak, been able to stop working from our fiftieth birthday. (…)** (W08.50-56)

Explicating inferences: yes or no

The key question is whether the Netherlands will dare to reform. Do we reach for the chances of globalization and technological progress? Do we make sure that we will be able to cope with the dangers? Do we want to adjust our social system to the rise in the ageing of the population, or will the burden be borne by future generations? Do we invest substantially in education, knowledge and innovation, or do we drop (…) on the European list? Do we exploit a proportion of the growth to make the economy carbon-neutral, or do we stick to the old solutions? Will it be nature or stone? Do we have the cheeck to modernize our energy supply or will we remain dependent on the Middle East and Russia? (P08.63-70)

Stylistic features table

Stylistic features	Pertinent to attitude to which type of audience?
1. …	…
2. …	…
3. …	**…**
4. …	…
5. …	**…**
6. Jargon: with or without explanation	**The public at large** / fellow politicians
7. Concrete or abstract usage a. concrete or abstract words b. presenting individuals as representative of a larger group c. telling details d. quotations e. (…)	**The public at large** / fellow politicians
8. …	…
9. Explicating inferences: yes or no	**The public at large** / fellow politicians
10. …	…

Conclusion (I)

- Many stylistic features in the speeches by Wilders and Pechtold contribute to the intersubjective impression that Wilders and Pechtold positioned themselves differently towards the public at large

- Due to systematic stylistic choices, Wilders, more than Pechtold,
  – Puts voters in the centre of interest
  – Formulates in a very comprehensible/accessible way

- Complete stylistic analysis is more complex (cf. Van Leeuwen (2015))

- Effects are the result of the joint use of many stylistic devices, and the *interplay* between these devices
  – **People are cynical** about The Hague, not always undeserved. **We** sometimes ask for it: hysteria about spending power, McCarthy-like debates about the eighties and a witch hunt in relation to development organisations (P08.135-136)

Combination of stylistic means

(…) Let **us** call it what it is, it was your one and only election pledge. Half measures are also mentioned in your agreement, or rather the law governing dismissal that was dictated to you. (…) This is not the conclusion of **the Bakker-commission**, is it? In the light of the numbers it is completely irrelevant, (…) since this affects less than 3% of all employees with a income of more than € 5000. That compensation wasn't **our** primary focus, was it? **Our** ambition was to get more people to work, isn't it? (P08.94-101)

Conclusion (II)

- Political-scientific literature:
  - Putting 'the people' in the centre of interest and use of accessible, everyday language are frequently mentioned as strategies used by populists to create the image of being close to society
  - How such strategies are shaped linguistically is barely discussed (cf. Stanyer et al. 2017; Stockemer & Barisione 2016; Reisigl 2008)

- Strategies are the result of many (systematic) stylistic choices and the combination of such choices

- A linguistic-stylistic approach enables the analyst to identify these stylistic choices systematically
  - Enables to pinpoint how concrete, (systematic) linguistic choices contribute to the realization of certain strategies that contribute to the creation of a political image (e.g. the image of being a 'populist')

- Last fifteen years increase of political-scientific literature in which systematic textual analysis is used to measure populism empirically (e.g. Pauwels 2014; Jagers & Walgrave 2007),

- From a linguistic-stylistic perspective, measures used could be more fine-grained (cf. Van Leeuwen, submitted)

- Linguistic-stylistic approach can offer concrete tools for such a more fine-grained analysis