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Leadership and agency in Ukraine-related discourse: Focus on press conferences and Twitter

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study into discursive leadership and agency construction in Ukraine-related political discourse, as exemplified by press conferences and Twitter. The material used in the analysis includes transcripts of press conferences and Twitter posts by three European politicians, i.e. Mateusz Morawiecki, Boris Johnson and Olaf Scholz, from the period between February and June 2022. The study investigates how the speakers construct leadership and agency in two different communicative settings and whether any differences can be noted between their respective styles. Drawing on Systemic Functional Grammar, the analysis examines different process and reference types, and illustrates their role in the projection of leadership and agency, as well as accounts for the impact of the communicative setting on linguistic choices. The study reveals that material processes are the most visible in both situational contexts, which indicates that the politicians emphasize the actions taken in response to the crisis. Regarding the types of reference (i.e. first-person singular and first-person plural), the analysis shows that first-person plural forms linked to international collectivity are the most salient in both settings. The findings suggest that underscoring responsiveness, competence and international cooperation are the dominant strategies of establishing discursive leadership and agency in crisis circumstances.

Key words

discursive leadership, agency, Systemic Functional Grammar, press conference, Twitter, Ukraine

1. Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine launched by Russia in February 2022 was a watershed moment in the history of Europe and the whole world. It destabilized the economic and geopolitical situation, and brought a sense of insecurity, fear and uncertainty about the future. This triggered the need for urgent collective actions and initiatives aiming to restore peace and provide assistance to Ukraine, and the implementation of precautions and policies addressing the crisis. The war motivated many European and global politicians to take action, express their stance on the war, seek alliances and to show themselves as active and competent leaders, both on a national and global scale. During the first months of the war officials from different countries showed strong determination to put an end to the invasion, be it by diplomatic steps or by economic sanctions imposed on Russia, and to seek urgent solutions to occurring problems and challenges.

In the current study, we focus on press conferences and Twitter¹ posts by three European leaders who represent countries with different geopolitical positions, and who were actively involved in the decision-making process shaping Europe's response to the war, i.e. Mateusz Morawiecki, the then prime minister of Poland, Boris Johnson, the then prime minister of the United Kingdom, and Olaf Scholz,

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¹ On 23 July 2023, Twitter was officially renamed to X. However, since the material examined in the study was collected prior to the change, we use the old name of the platform, rather than the new one.

the chancellor of Germany. Following the view that “politics must be conceived and studied as a discursive phenomenon” (Pelinka, 2007, p.129), where language is a strategic resource serving to exert influence (Hudson, 1978), we analysed the statements and posts by the three politicians to reveal how each of them discursively constructed his position as a political leader. Based on previous research concerning discursive leadership and agency (Fetzer and Bull, 2012; Hafner and Sun, 2021; Jaworska, 2021), our study sought answers to the following questions:

- 1) How is agency and leadership discursively constructed by the three speakers in two different communicative settings, i.e. in press conferences and on Twitter?
- 2) What differences, if any, can be noted between the speakers’ discursive construction of leadership and agency?

We hope to fill a niche in political discourse research and to enrich existing scholarship comparing leadership strategies used by politicians who represent different languages and countries in the context of war. To date, not much attention has been devoted to the differences in the construction of leadership and agency across various communicative settings.

In the ensuing sections of the paper, an overview of previous studies concerning leadership and agency is provided, the materials and methods are presented, the main findings are discussed, and conclusions are offered.

2. Leadership

The concept of leadership has been investigated from multiple perspectives. The two prevalent views describe it as either a stable construct or a dynamic one, i.e. as a trait or a process. The former approach, dominant in sociological and psychological research, defines leadership as a capacity or ability and “emphasises leaders’ attributes such as personality, motives, values and skills” (Yukl, 2006, p.13; see also Abercrombie et al., 1988; Bogdanor (ed.), 1993), and highlights individual capabilities, especially on the cognitive level, predisposing a person to becoming a leader (Fairhurst, 2007). The latter, by contrast, views leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2010, p.3). This approach underlines the interactive nature of leadership, seeing it as a dynamic concept that is enacted through communication (Fairhurst, 2007).

The dynamic view, which has recently gained more proponents (see e.g. Schnurr, 2008; Fetzer and Bull, 2012; Hafner and Sun, 2021), is the basis for the definition of leadership developed within linguistic research, i.e. the concept of discursive leadership that looks at how leadership is performed in interaction. According to Schnurr et al. (2015, p.190), discursive leadership “explores the specific processes through which leadership is communicated and accomplished in and through discourse”. Leadership is here seen as a discursive and situated activity in the sense that an effective leader chooses linguistic devices suited to the context and aims, thus persuading the audience to adhere to the proposed measures (Jaworska, 2021).

Investigating leadership in the Western sociopolitical context, Fetzer and Bull (2012) argue that successful leadership involves a combination of competence and responsiveness, i.e. a political leader needs to show him-/herself as both competent and responsive. The two features are discursively constructed by the choice of specific lexical items, such as e.g. self-reference, with event and intention verbs signalling competence, and communication and subjectification verbs expressing responsiveness. Naturally, expressing competence and responsiveness gains particular significance for a leader in times of crisis and uncertainty. A leader is then expected to make and communicate responsive decisions, present his/her goals, as well as establish trust and seek cooperation from the public (see e.g. Charteris-Black, 2007; Fetzer and Bull, 2012; Hafner and Sun, 2021; Jaworska, 2021).

A number of recent studies have investigated discursive strategies which served the expression of leadership during the pandemic crisis. For instance, analysing the speeches delivered by Angela Merkel, Jaworska (2021) has shown how the then chancellor of Germany changed her communicative style to suit the time of the pandemic. The discursive change involved a more frequent use of first-person plural pronouns, lexical items signalling urgency, as well as causal relations. These discursive strategies allowed the politician to highlight her connection with the people, to establish unity and solidarity, and in this way emphasized the interpersonal dimension of the communication. Hafner and Sun (2021), in turn, have studied Covid-related press conferences by Jacinda Ardern, the then prime minister of New

Zealand. Using frame analysis, positioning theory and rhetorical analysis, the scholars have shown that Ardern and her government used such discursive actions as e.g. explaining practical issues, coaching, showing empathy and advocating a specific course of action. The study has revealed that Ardern positioned herself as a task-oriented authoritative politician, a caring leader and a coach, whereas the government was in her speeches positioned as protectors and New Zealanders as a team and community. In the press briefings, the crisis was framed as a collective fight, emphasizing the need for cooperation, solidarity and adherence to the rules set by the government.

As indicated above, earlier research has shown that in a crisis situation, a politician's agency, his/her responsiveness expressed in decision-making, acting, communicating with the public and expressing solidarity are constitutive components of leadership.

3. Discursive construction of agency

Similarly to the notion of leadership, agency has been defined differently across disciplines. Two commonly discussed approaches originate from sociological and linguistic studies. In the former, agency has been conceptualized, for instance, as “the ability of an individual to exert change” (Reid, 2022, p.238) or as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p.112). In linguistic research, agency, also termed agentivity or animacy, has been discussed with respect to the roles and functions of arguments within a proposition. Within the framework of case grammar, as noted by Cruse (1973), agentivity can be defined in linguistic terms “which relate the feature to the meaning of the surface lexical item *do*” (1973, p.11), as in Gruber's (1967, p.943) definition which describes agentive verbs as “substitutable in all circumstances by the phrase *do something*”, or in referential terms as “the case of the typically animate perceived instigator of the action identified by the verb” (Fillmore, 1968, p.24).

The lack of correspondence between sociological and linguistic agency has been pointed out in many studies (van Leeuwen, 1996; Ahearn, 2001; Duranti, 2004; Reid, 2022). One of the reasons for the incongruity, as van Leeuwen (1996, p.32) observes, is the fact that “sociological agency is not always realised by linguistic agency, by the grammatical role of ‘Agent’; it can also be realised in many other ways”. Integrating the sociological and linguistic perspectives on agency, Duranti (2004, p.453) defines it as “the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behavior, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities’ (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of evaluation (e.g. in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome)”, with the properties being interconnected and not mutually exclusive. Two dimensions of agency are outlined, i.e. performance (enactment of agency) and encoding (depiction of human action through linguistic means). The approach underlines the centrality of agency in language, its universal nature (with forms of agency encoding found across languages) and its “inevitability”, as it is claimed to be “either the goal or the result of a person's being-in-the-world” (Duranti, 2004, p.468).

As far as political communication is concerned, the construction of agency has been investigated using different approaches, such as the theory of semantic roles, social actor theory, or the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Research has revealed how constructing agency by means of specific social actor representation strategies, participant categorization, pronominal choices (e.g. *we* vs *they*) and nominalization enables politicians to express ideology, legitimize actions and build solidarity with their followers. For instance, it has been shown that naming, especially pronominal choices, used to categorize participants and establish in-groups and out-groups, or creating the *us* vs *them* dichotomy, is a frequent strategy in political discourse, allowing speakers to legitimize actions (van Dijk, 1993, 1998; Halmari, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2007; Oddo, 2011).

Many studies on the discursive representation of agency in political communication have employed the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (e.g. Ghachem, 2015; Almaghlouth, 2022), where agency has been described as “the representation of participation in processes” (Thompson, 2004, p.138). Chilton (2004), for instance, examines a speech by Enoch Powell, a British conservative politician, in terms of argument roles and relations and shows how predication and pronominal choices give rise to presuppositions and thus shape anti-immigration rhetoric. In another study, Ghachem (2015) has demonstrated how David Cameron constructs collective agency to express ideology and persuade the audience by a specific choice of pronominal references (*us* vs *them*), transitivity patterns and nominalization. Almaghlouth (2022), in turn, has revealed how pronominal choices and process types contribute to the construction of human and non-human agency in G20 leaders' declarations.

The above examples indicated that SFL allows researchers to uncover how agency is expressed, concealed or manipulated. As Machin and Mayr (2012, p.111) observe, “transitivity patterns, especially in the manipulation of agency at the grammatical level, can be significant in terms of language and power”, which is particularly relevant in the context of political communication.

3. Leadership and agency and in Ukraine-related political discourse

3.1 Materials and methods

The material used in the analysis involves two datasets: political press conferences and Twitter posts. Political press conferences represent an institutionalized form of public communication, organized to announce policies and decisions or to manage crisis events. They are considered as media genres, serving to mediatize public political events (Bhatia, 2006). As Fetzer (2011) notes, such mediatized statements, in which politicians are the primary agents controlling the discourse, may be used as tools of constructing and expressing leadership. By making careful discursive choices, politicians are able to show themselves as leaders and persuade the audience to accept their viewpoints (Fetzer, 2011). This function of press conferences is reflected in the discourse of the statements, which is typically characterized by the presence of markers of stance, subjectivity and ideological positioning (Ekström and Eriksson, 2018).

The second communicative setting selected for the analysis, Twitter, is an online microblogging platform used in political communication as a channel of self-promotion and a tool for the management of political news (Adi et al., 2014). It has likewise become a tool of political-agenda setting, as well as a means of gauging public opinion and disseminating information and opinions. The platform offers politicians access to a broad and diversified audience as well as an opportunity for a personalized dialogic interaction with their followers (Jensen, 2017; Bhatia and Ross, 2019). In the context of the war in Ukraine, Twitter has come to be the major channel through which politicians communicate their war-related views.

The two settings are characterized by different situational parameters. Press conferences, though often mediatized by means of mass communication, are typically based on spoken, face-to-face communication between the politician and a specific co-present audience. Such was also the case with the conferences that were delivered during official visits or in connection with organizational summits (e.g. NATO, G7, EU summits). Twitter, on the other hand, is a “multiparty, temporally fluid and highly intertextual” medium (Zappavigna, 2012, p.195) characterized by a “collapsed context” (boyd, 2008; Scott, 2022) as the tweets are available to a wide and largely undefined audience. In contrast to press conferences, tweets exemplify asynchronous written communication, with an optional use of other modes of expression, such as image or video. Moreover, the messages are influenced by the architecture of the medium, as the length of a tweet should not exceed 250 characters. The two contexts were put together in order to verify to what extent the situational parameters determine the linguistic choices which affect the construction of leadership and agency.

The analysis is based on transcripts of all the press conferences which Boris Johnson, the then prime minister of the United Kingdom, Mateusz Morawiecki, the then prime minister of Poland and Olaf Scholz, the chancellor of Germany, organized between 24 February (onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine) and 30 June 2022 (NATO summit). As for Twitter, the dataset involves Ukraine-related tweets posted in the same timespan on the profiles of the three politicians: @MMorawiecki, @BorisJohnson and @Bundeskanzler.² The tweets were collected manually, i.e. they were copied from respective leaders’ accounts and saved as text files. Only the tweets with an explicit reference to the war in Ukraine were included in the study.

Detailed information on the two datasets can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.³

² We decided against using tweets from the @OlafScholz profile for two reasons: the statement that the profile is managed by Olaf Scholz’s team and the fact that the majority of the tweets comprise messages forwarded from the @Bundeskanzler page.

³ A detailed list of all the press conferences is provided in the References.

Table 1. Press conferences included in the study

Press conferences	UK	Poland	Germany
Politician	PM Boris Johnson (BJ)	PM Mateusz Morawiecki (MM)	Chancellor Olaf Scholz (OS)
No. of conferences	5	12	12
No. of words	4,686	7,827	8,390

Table 2. Twitter posts included in the study

Twitter posts	UK	Poland	Germany
Politician	PM Boris Johnson (BJ)	PM Mateusz Morawiecki (MM)	Chancellor Olaf Scholz (OS)
No. of tweets	137	50	88
No. of words	5,506	1,661	3,555

The analysis of leadership and agency draws on the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Systemic Functional Grammar helps to examine ways in which speakers make certain linguistic choices to reflect their internal and external experiences and ideologies (Halliday, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). According to Halliday (1994, p.106), language is a system of meaning-making, which “enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them”. In SFG, “the clause plays a central role, because it embodies a general principle for modeling experience – namely, the principle that reality is made up of processes” (Halliday, 1994, p.106).

The transitivity system, lying at the core of SFG, has three major components contributing meaning to the clause, i.e. process types, participant roles and circumstantial elements. Process types and participants directly involved in them are central to the experiential structure of the clause. Six process types are distinguished, i.e. material (doing, acting, making things happen), verbal (saying, meaning), mental (sensing, reflecting on experience), relational (identifying, having an attribute, classifying), behavioural (acting out processes of consciousness or physiological states) and existential (being, existing) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

Using the above framework, we examined the data for the occurrence of processes in which the leaders were assigned agency, i.e. in which they were allocated the role of agents or doers, either as individuals or members of a specific collectivity. The material was examined for the presence of patterns of self-reference, given that it is “a necessary condition for doing leadership” (Fetzer, 2012, p.132). Since in political communication self-reference may be realized by means of not only first-person singular forms but also first-person plural forms, both categories were annotated.⁴ The important meaning potential of the latter form in political communication has been underscored in many studies, which stressed its relevance to identity construction, the role it may play in uniting or polarizing the audience, as well as its wide range of reference (Fetzer, 2012; Jaworska and Sogomanian, 2019; Jaworska, 2021). As Jaworska (2021, p.6) underlines, the “flexibility of ‘we’ makes it a convenient tool to involve, address and mobilise larger or smaller audiences”. What is particularly significant in the context of the present study is that *we* allows speakers to index “a social group on whose behalf they are speaking, thereby expressing solidarity as well as group identity, while at the same time laying claim to leadership” (Fetzer, 2012, p.132).

Since “doing leadership is intrinsically connected with the predication to which the self-reference is anchored” (Fetzer, 2012, p.132), in each case of self-reference the accompanying verb phrase was

⁴ Since Polish is a pro-drop language, the analysis of the first-person perspective involved both verb forms and pronouns, where used.

annotated and classified according to the SFG framework, i.e. as an instance of a material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural or existential process.

Both datasets were first examined by each of the authors individually and then compared and discussed before the final annotation was produced. The results were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively to demonstrate how the processes contribute to the construction of leadership and agency and to explain the differences between the leaders' styles and the two communicative settings.

3.2 Results

The reading of the data has yielded the following types of agents:

- Individual (PER) – representing the leader as an individual actor, expressed by first-person singular pronouns and first-person verb forms, e.g.:
 - 1) *Today I am announcing a further £175m of UK aid.* [PC_BJ_2]
 - 2) *Heute habe ich mit @EmmanuelMacron und und Chin. Staatspräsident Xi zur #Ukraine gesprochen* [T_OS]
 ‘Today I have talked to @EmmanuelMacron and and Chin. President Xi about #Ukraine’
- Collective – national (WE1) – representing the leader as a member of a national community expressed by first-person plural pronouns or first-person verb forms. For instance:
 - 3) *We are committed to helping Ukraine and protecting our NATO friends & allies – exactly why we’ve doubled numbers of British troops in Estonia in recent weeks.* [T_BJ]
 - 4) *Für Deutschland heißt das, das wir unseren Beitrag zu Land, zur See und in der Luft weiter ausbauen werden.* [PC_OS_11]
 ‘For Germany it means that we will increase our contribution to land, to marine and air forces.’
- Collective – international (WE2) – representing the leader as a member of an international community or organization (i.e. *we* – NATO, the G7, the EU, *we* – Western civilization, *we* – the citizens of the free world, *we* – opponents to Russia), expressed by first-person plural pronouns and first-person verb forms. For example:
 - 5) *After 127 days of war we in NATO are now more resolved than ever that Europe’s boundaries cannot be changed by force* [PC_BJ_5]
 - 6) *Staramy się jako zachód robić to co do nas należy, stąd pakiet sankcji.* [PC_MM_3]
 ‘We as the west try to do what is our duty, hence the package of sanctions.’

As far as the clauses are concerned, the analysis has revealed the presence of four types of processes, i.e. verbal, material, mental and relational. Behavioural and existential processes were not attested. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the occurrence of each of the processes in the two datasets.

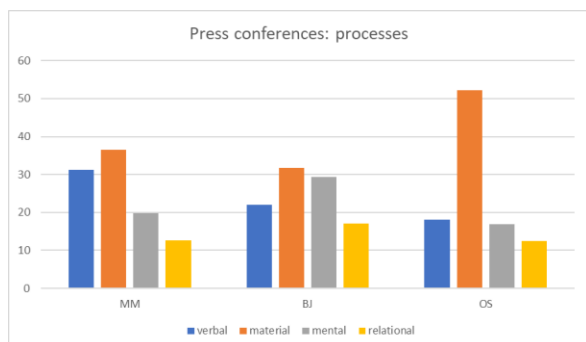


Figure 1. Process types in press conferences

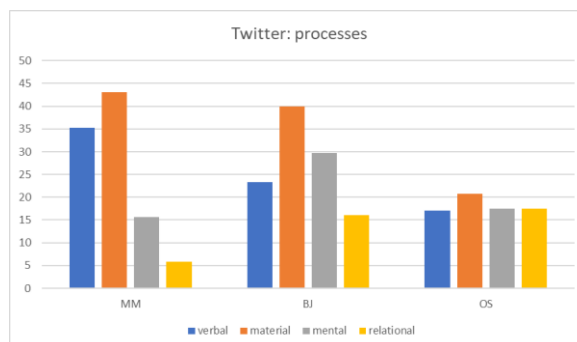


Figure 2. Process types on Twitter

In the press conferences, material processes were the most frequent and amounted to 36.5% (MM), 31.7% (BJ) and 52.1% (OS), respectively. As regards other types, in Morawiecki's conferences, verbal processes were the second most frequent category (31.1%), followed by mental and relational processes (19.7% and 12.5%, respectively). In Johnson's discourse, by contrast, mental processes were the second most common category (29.2%), with a lower occurrence of verbal and relational clauses (21.9% and 17%). Finally, in Scholz's case, verbal processes were the second most frequent type (18.1%), with a slightly lower occurrence of mental processes (16.8%) and the lowest frequency of relational ones (12.4%).

As for the Twitter data, analogically to the press conferences, material processes proved to be the most frequent in the tweets of all the three politicians and accounted for 43.1% of the processes in Morawiecki's posts, 39.8% in the case of Johnson's messages and 20.7% of the processes in Scholz's tweets. More visible differences were identified in relation to the other processes. In Morawiecki's tweets, verbal clauses were the second most frequent category (35.2%), followed by mental processes (15.6%), with a rather infrequent occurrence of relational ones (5.8%). In Johnson's posts, mental processes occurred relatively frequently (29.7%), as did verbal ones (23.3%), while the share of relational processes was the lowest (16%). As for Scholz's tweets, a similar distribution of the remaining three processes was identified, with the same ratio of mental and relational processes (17.4%) and only a slightly lower occurrence of verbal processes (17%).

It thus transpired that material processes were the most frequent ones both in the tweets and in the press conferences. Their ratio over the other types, however, appears to be slightly higher on Twitter than in the press conferences.

A more detailed description of the quantitative findings pertaining to each of the process types and reference forms used in the two settings is provided below.

3.2.1 Material processes

Material processes entail verbs indicating actions, such as e.g. *visit, work, build, introduce, help, provide, win, send*. In the data analysed, the politicians were represented as engaged in activities aiming to counteract the crisis and support Ukraine. For instance:

- 7) *We are providing further military aid, including protected mobility vehicles.* [T_BJ]
- 8) *Wir werden auch weiterhin humanitäre Unterstützung geben.* [PC_OS_9]
'We will also still give humanitarian support.'

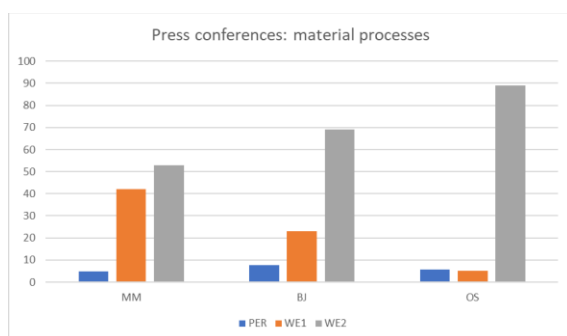


Figure 3. Material processes in press conferences

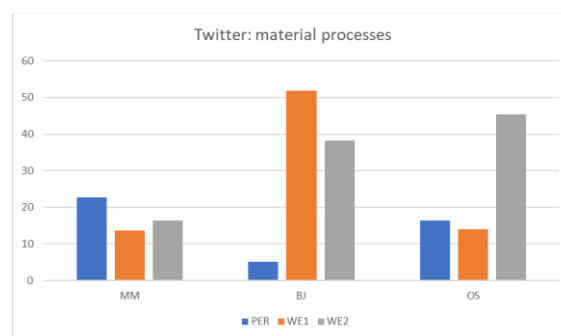


Figure 4. Material processes on Twitter

As the results indicate, in the press conferences, in Morawiecki's case, the WE2 perspective turned out to be the most frequent (52.9%), followed by a rather high occurrence of the WE1 forms (42.1%) and a visibly low frequency of the personal perspective (4.9%). In Johnson's conferences, analogically, it was the WE2 reference that proved the most common (69.2%). Less frequent were the WE1 forms (23%) and the first-person singular perspective (7.6%). As for Scholz, the WE2 reference too was clearly the most dominant one (89%), with only several instances of both the WE1 and personal forms (5.1% and 5.8%, respectively).

A different occurrence of the reference types can be seen on Twitter. In Morawiecki's posts, a relatively similar distribution was observed, with the personal perspective being slightly more frequent (22.7%) than the WE1 (13.6%) and WE2 (16.3%) forms. In Johnson's case, the WE1 forms were clearly

the most salient (51.9%), whereas the WE2 forms were less common (38.1%) and the personal perspective was the least preferred choice (5.1%). In the German chancellor's tweets, similarly, it was the WE2 perspective that was the most common (45.4%), followed by a comparable distribution of the personal (16.3%) and WE1 (13.9%) forms.

It can thus be observed that in the press conference setting, the WE2 perspective proved to be the most common choice. As for Twitter, unlike the press conferences, the first-person singular reference was favoured over the WE2 forms. The speakers differed in their preferences regarding the use of the WE1 forms: Boris Johnson and Olaf Scholz used them on Twitter more frequently than did Mateusz Morawiecki, who, in turn, opted for this perspective in the press conferences.

3.2.2 Verbal processes

Verbal processes include verbs of speaking: *speak, discuss, call for, or praise and congratulate*, by means of which the politicians represented verbal actions during talks or debates at organizational summits or international visits. For example:

- 9) *Z @OlafScholz rozmawiałem o pilnym dostarczeniu broni i o zależności od gazu i ropy.* [T_MM]
 'With @OlafScholz I talked about the urgent provision of weaponry and dependence on gas and oil.'
- 10) *Hier haben wir auch noch einmal grundsätzlicher diskutiert, was dieser Angriff, der am 24. Februar begonnen hat, eigentlich bedeutet.* [PC_OS_9]
 'We have here once again more profoundly discussed what this invasion, which started on 24th February, actually means.'

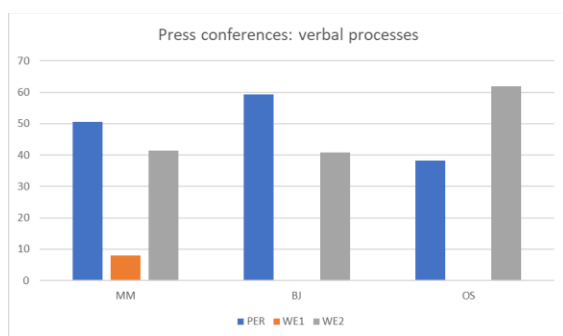


Figure 5. Verbal processes in press conferences

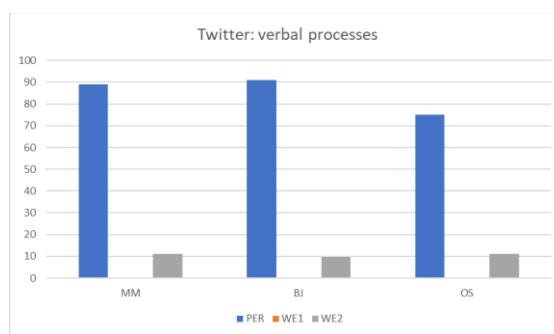


Figure 6. Verbal processes on Twitter

In the press conferences, Morawiecki tended to rely on the first-person singular reference (50.5%), as well as the WE2 perspective (41.3%) and single instances of the WE1 forms noted, too (8%). In Johnson's conferences, only two perspectives were observed, i.e. personal and WE2, with the former being more frequent than the latter (59.2% and 40.74%, respectively). The two types of reference were also found in Scholz's conferences: the WE2 form proved more visible (61.8%) than did the first-person singular form (38.1%).

In the Twitter data, the personal perspective clearly came to the fore in all the tweets: MM: 88.8%, BJ: 91.1%, OS: 75%. Instances of the first-person plural WE2 reference were found only occasionally (MM: 11.1%, BJ: 9.7% and OS: 11%).

What the foregoing analysis clearly indicates is the high visibility of the personal perspective in both datasets. The most noteworthy differences between the two settings include the high frequency of the WE2 forms in the press conferences, rather than on Twitter, and Mateusz Morawiecki's preference for the WE1 perspective in the conferences, which was not observed in the case of the other speakers.

3.2.3 Mental processes

Mental process clauses entail verbs such as: e.g. *marvel, tolerate, believe, think, see, know, remember*, through which the politicians expressed their feelings, as well as beliefs and knowledge about the circumstances of the war. Illustrative examples are provided below.

- 11) *I think he is mobilising the world against the horror of what is happening.* [PC_BJ_1]
 12) *Wiemy, jaki los dla ukraińskich dzieci zgotowali Rosjanie.* [T_MM]
 ‘We know what fate the Russians have sealed for Ukrainian children.’

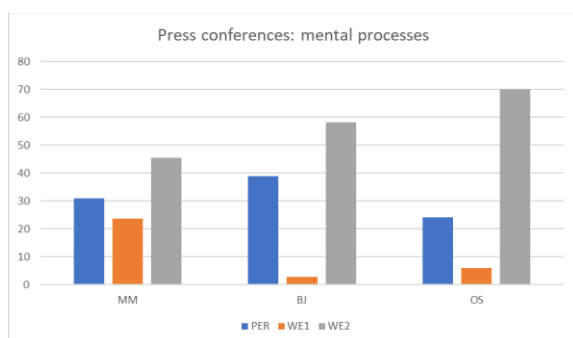


Figure 7. Mental processes in press conferences

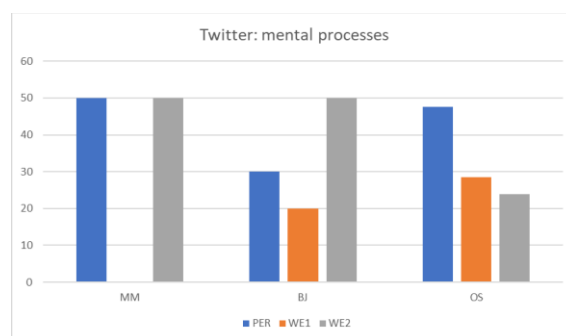


Figure 8. Mental processes on Twitter

As to the type of reference, in Morawiecki’s case, the WE2 forms were the most common (45.4%), the personal perspective was less frequent (30.9%) and the WE1 references were the least visible (23.6%). In Johnson’s conferences, the WE2 and personal forms were similarly favoured and their frequency stood at, respectively, 58.3% and 38.8%. The WE1 perspective, with only one attestation, was marginal (2.7%). In Scholz’s conferences, in quite the same way, the WE2 perspective clearly stood out (70%), while the first-person singular was far less common (24%) and the WE1 forms occurred only three times (6%).

On Twitter, in Morawiecki’s posts, an equal share of the personal and WE2 perspectives was identified (each having four occurrences). In Johnson’s tweets, by contrast, three types of reference were found: the WE2 perspective emerged as the most frequent (50%), the personal perspective turned out to be less common (30%) and the WE1 forms were the least preferred choice (20%). In Scholz’s posts, the personal perspective proved to be the most salient (47.6%), whereas the WE1 and WE2 forms were less frequent (28.5% and 23.8%, respectively).

As the analysis reveals, the WE2 forms were favoured in the press conferences, while the first-person singular reference was more visible on Twitter. It was also noted that both Johnson and Scholz chose to rely on the WE1 perspective on Twitter, while Morawiecki did not. Instead, the Polish prime minister tended to use this form more often in the press conferences, unlike the other speakers.

3.2.4 Relational processes

Relational processes include such verb clauses as: *be united, be grateful, be determined, stand with*, by means of which the speakers disclosed different attributes. For example:

- 13) *We are clear in our mission – Putin must fail.* [T_BJ]
 14) *Wszyscy jesteście nie tylko cały czas zjednoczeni, ale jesteście bardzo zdeterminowani, żeby doprowadzić tę wojnę do końca.* [PC_MM_8]
 ‘We are all not only united all the time, but we are also very much determined to bring this war to an end.’

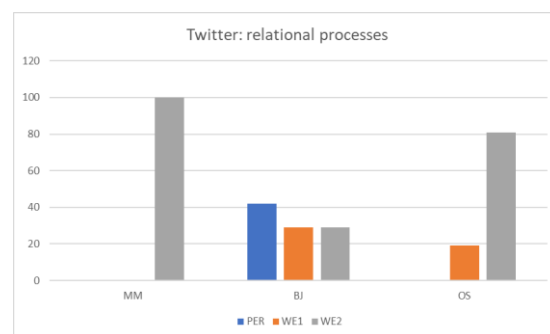
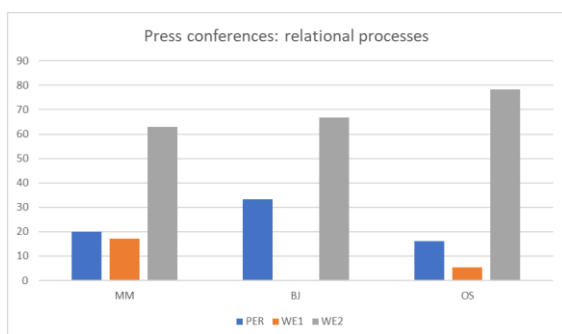


Figure 9. Relational processes in press conferences Figure 10. Relational processes on Twitter

As the data bear out, in Morawiecki’s case, the WE2 perspective turned out to be the most salient (62.8%), while the other two forms were less common (personal perspective – 20%, WE1 references – 17.1%). By analogy, the WE2 forms stood out in Johnson’s conferences (66.6%) as well, and the personal perspective was less frequently observed (33.3%). The WE1 forms were not attested at all. In Scholz’s material, on the other hand, three types of reference were identified, the WE2 perspective accounted for 78.3% of the cases, the first-person singular was represented by 16.2% and the WE1 forms were sporadic (5.4%).

On Twitter, in Morawiecki’s posts, only the WE2 forms were found and the number of relational clauses was indeed very low. A greater diversification of perspectives can in turn be seen in Johnson’s tweets, in which the personal forms were the most common (41.9%) and the remaining two types were represented by 29% each. In Scholz’s tweets, by contrast, only the WE2 and WE1 forms were identified: the former were visibly preferred (80.9%) over the latter (19%).

The comparison of the two datasets shows that in the conferences, the WE2 forms were clearly more common and that in this context the speakers also favoured the first-person singular reference. As to the other perspectives, the politicians differed in where they adopted the WE1 forms: Johnson and Scholz tended to use it on Twitter, whereas Morawiecki relied on this reference more often in the press conferences.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis has shown how three political leaders from different linguistic backgrounds construct leadership and agency in two different communicative settings: in face-to-face press conferences and in asynchronous Twitter posts, both of which focused on the war in Ukraine.

Four types of processes were identified in the two datasets, i.e. material, verbal, mental and relational ones. In both settings and in the case of all the political actors, material processes were the most visible, which indicates that the politicians focused on highlighting the actions they had taken. This included not only meetings and official visits, but, more importantly, the introduction of sanctions as well as the provision of military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The high frequency of references to such actions in the tweets and conferences clearly contributes to their self-representation as strong agents, since, as Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 111) observe, “the levels of an actor’s agency are directly correlated to material process types”. A high occurrence of verbal processes was also observed, by means of which the politicians signalled their engagement in diplomatic actions following the outbreak of the war. In fact, frequent references to material and verbal actions are not surprising as they are central to the construction of agency and leadership in political communication. As previous research has demonstrated, stating what actions the politician has undertaken is a legitimizing tool (Schnurr et al., 2015), as well as a powerful persuasive strategy which implicates competence and responsiveness (Fetzer and Bull, 2012), and thus helps speakers to establish their identities as leaders. Though somewhat lower, the occurrence of mental processes in both settings is also worth noting. It was through these acts that the politicians shared their knowledge of the situation as well as their predictions about the possible consequences of the war, or expressed emotional reactions concerning the circumstances. The markers convey responsiveness and competence, allowing the politicians to position themselves as knowledgeable, attentive and empathetic leaders (cf. van Leeuwen, 2002; Chilton, 2004; Reyes, 2011; Marín Arrese, 2009, 2011; Charteris-Black, 2014; Schnurr et al., 2015). Finally, the lowest frequency

was stated for relational processes, which were also characterized by a low degree of diversity, with clauses such as *be united*; *einig sein*; *być zjednoczonym* used recurrently in both datasets. Though relatively infrequent, the expression of unity may be considered as a means of showing responsiveness, building trust and promoting solidarity, all of which contributes to the construal of leadership.

The two situational settings differed in terms of the preferred process types. The most significant difference was observed in the ratio of material and verbal processes which proved to be higher on Twitter than in the press conferences, a tendency particularly salient in the case of Morawiecki and Johnson. This trend indicates, rather predictably, that Twitter was used primarily as a medium for updates on daily activities or tasks accomplished by these politicians.

The study has also provided insight into various types of reference used by the speakers, i.e. personal and collective, both national and international. The analysis has demonstrated how the politicians construct their identity as leaders on multiple levels: as individual politicians, representatives of a nation or of an international collectivity. The use of the first-person singular reference clearly represents a leadership-oriented strategy, as it allows the politicians to emphasize individual agency, highlight their personal authority and role in the decision-making process, while lending the statements a personal tone. The analysis has also confirmed the central function of the first-person plural reference and its role in political communication in establishing a connection with different groups, as well as the width of its referential domain. By employing the WE1 perspective, the speakers identify themselves as government leaders, as well as members of a national community, thereby promoting their government and country in the context of global affairs. With the WE2 form, in turn, the politicians positioned themselves as members of an international alliance, having a military, organizational or civilizational character. Emphasizing collectivity on this level was particularly prominent, which is reflected in the high occurrence of the WE2 references in both datasets. This finding suggests that stressing the transnational and organizational cooperation and the commonality of goals is a major strategy of enacting leadership in times of a global crisis.

Differences have been identified in the occurrence of each reference type in the two datasets, thus revealing how the situational parameters influence the speakers' pronominal or verb-form choices. In general, the first-person singular was more frequent on Twitter than in the press conferences, a trend to be noticed especially in the expression of material, verbal and mental processes. It is in this communicative context that the preference for individualization was the strongest. This may be associated with Twitter's established use in political communication as a channel for self-promotion and for personal updates. The WE1 perspective, likewise, was more prominent on Twitter than in the press conferences, which pertains in particular to Boris Johnson's and Olaf Scholz's tweets. The two leaders used the profiles to present their governments' strategies in response to the war and communicate the decisions taken on a national level. This tendency may be explained by the uses and affordances of Twitter, which, as shown in previous studies, serves as a channel for not only political leaders' personal updates, but also official party communications (Golbeck et al., 2010). The last of the examined perspectives, i.e. WE2, turned out to be more visible in the press conferences, which may also reflect the influence of the situational context on the speakers' linguistic choices. In most of the cases, the conferences were delivered as part of the politicians' participation in summits of such organizations as the EU, NATO or the G7, following discussions in which joint strategies to counteract the crisis and to support Ukraine were devised. In this communicative situation, the three politicians chose to express their collective (i.e. international) identity, where they positioned themselves as representatives of a European or global alliance. In broad terms, a greater diversification of perspectives on Twitter as well as more visible differences between the politicians' choices noted in the same setting may be attributed to the influence of the collapsed context and the multiparty and fluid nature of this medium.

The study has also brought to light the differences between the politicians as regards the frequency of the respective processes and the perspectives taken. In Mateusz Morawiecki's data, verbal processes turned out to be slightly more frequent in the tweets and in the press conferences than in the case of the other two speakers. The results indicate that Morawiecki focused on outlining individual and collective verbal actions during debates and on emphasizing his engagement in the widespread diplomatic initiatives undertaken by the Polish government during the initial stages of the war. When it comes to the types of reference, the Polish prime minister's use of the WE1 forms in the press conferences is worthy of note, as their occurrence in this setting stands out and distinguishes him from both Boris Johnson and Olaf Scholz. Through the use of this perspective, Morawiecki underlines

the significance of Poland in a European or global arena, but also highlights his government's strategies and promotes all initiatives and actions taken by his cabinet. The higher frequency of this form in the press conferences may result from the situational parameters, as many of the conferences were held in front of a Polish audience or were broadcast by the mainstream media in Poland. The use of the "national" perspective in such a case may thus be a means of seeking voters' support and a way of validating the government's policies. In the case of Olaf Scholz, a considerably high occurrence of material processes in the press conferences is noticeable. This politician in particular focused on highlighting joint endeavours, what had already been achieved by the international community or what measures still need to be implemented to counteract the crisis. Moreover, as for the types of reference, a predominant occurrence of the WE2 reference, both on Twitter and in the press conferences, can be seen. It thus appears that Scholz chose more often to position himself as a member of an international community and underline the collective actions and his cooperation with global partners.

The present study adds to the research on political communication, offering a contrastive perspective and showing how political leaders from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds make choices to construe their status of powerful political representatives. Nevertheless, several limitations of the study need to be mentioned. The analysis was narrowed down to the use of the first-person singular and plural pronouns and verb forms in agent function, so other grammatical subjects and semantic agents were not considered (e.g. proper names). The study also focused on active-voice clauses and did not account for other structures which might also be employed to (de)construct agency. For this reason, the findings may not be generalizable, although they do show clear trends in the two contexts analysed.

To conclude, the study has confirmed that in times of national and worldwide crisis successful leadership is mainly associated with showing one's responsiveness and competence by making decisions, taking actions and building alliances. Material, verbal, mental and relational process clauses comprise discursive devices by means of which those activities are communicated and thus leadership and agency is enacted and accomplished. Through their discursive choices, politicians foreground their active – individual or collective – role in the management of the crisis, as well as establish themselves as influential political representatives involved in the affairs on a national and international level.

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Primary sources

Twitter profiles:

Boris Johnson
@BorisJohnson

Mateusz Morawiecki
@MateuszMorawiecki

Olaf Scholz
@Bundeskanzler

Press conferences:

Boris Johnson

- BJ_1 = Press conference with Mateusz Morawiecki, 1 March 2022, Warsaw
- BJ_2 = Press conference with Mark Rutte and Justin Trudeau, 7 March 2022, London
- BJ_3 = Press conference at the NATO summit in Brussels, 24 March 2022, Brussels
- BJ_4 = Press conference with Olaf Scholz, 8 April 2022, London
- BJ_5 = Press conference remarks at the NATO Summit, 30 June 2022, Madrid

Mateusz Morawiecki

- MM_1 = Press conference after the EU summit in Brussels, 25 February 2022, Warsaw
- MM_2 = Press conference before meeting with O. Scholz, 26 February 2022, Berlin
- MM_3 = Press conference with Boris Johnson, 01 March 2022, Warsaw
- MM_4 = Press conference with Mark Rutte, 21 March 2022, Warsaw
- MM_5 = Press conference before the EU summit, 24 March 2022, Brussels
- MM_6 = Press conference after the EU summit, 25 March 2022, Warsaw
- MM_7 = Press conference after meeting with Olaf Scholz, 26 April 2022, Berlin
- MM_8 = Press conference before the EU summit, 30 May 2022, Brussels
- MM_9 = Press conference before the EU summit, 23 June 2022, Brussels
- MM_10 = Press conference after the 1st day of the EU summit, 23 June 2022, Brussels
- MM_11 = Press conference before the 2nd day of the EU summit, 24 June 2022, Brussels
- MM_12 = Press conference after the EU summit, 24 June 2022, Warsaw

Olaf Scholz

- OS_1 = Press conference, 24 February 2022, Berlin
- OS_2 = Press conference with Justin Trudeau, 9 March 2022, Berlin
- OS_3 = Press conference after the NATO, G7, EU summit, 24 March 2022, Brussels
- OS_4 = Press conference after the EU summit, 25 March 2022, Berlin
- OS_5 = Press conference after the EU summit, 30 May 2022, Berlin
- OS_6 = Press conference during the EU summit, 23 June 2022, Brussels
- OS_7 = Press conference during the EU summit, 24 June 2022, Brussels
- OS_8 = Press conference after the EU summit, 24 June 2022, Brussels
- OS_9 = Press conference at the G7 summit, 27 June 2022, Elmau

OS_10 = Press conference after the G7 summit, 28 June 2022, Elmau

OS_11 = Press conference before the NATO summit, 29 June 2022, Madrid

OS_12 = Press conference after the NATO summit, 30 June 2022, Madrid