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**The Notion of "Fashion and
Language use in Politics"**

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Summary

This paper is a presentation of research on the '*Lebenswelt*' of politicians and in particular the fashion and language they make use of in order to convey a certain message. Definitions of these concepts have been given, along with examples that demonstrate the importance of the mentioned aspects in politics.

The topics presented in this paper have first been defined and subsequently elaborated on, specifically with regards to the use of fashion and language in politics. The authors have drawn upon their personal experiences as well as on articles by researchers such as Bernd Müller-Jacquier, and on research done on the internet, for example. Photographs have been inserted to illustrate certain examples, especially concerning the use of various fashion features.

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1. Introduction

"Wie de vorm beheerst, is de inhoud meester"

-Frits Bolkestein

In the words of Frits Bolkestein: "whoever masters the form, masters the contents". As a politician he knows what he speaks about when saying this. He may be referring to language use in particular, however, it also applies to many other areas of a politician's life. This paper presents a study of the '*Lebenswelt*' or 'life world' of politicians as a social actor. The *Lebenswelt* of politicians is made up out of many different aspects, however, for the purpose of this paper, the focus has been trained on two areas in particular, namely fashion and language use. These two aspects have always played a role of significance, yet, in the last couple of decades the influence of the media has increased the importance of both the fashion and language use of politicians to the greater public. It could be said that both fashion (image) and language have become the most important tools for politicians to achieve positive results in the elections, for example. All this has led to the birth of a new discipline called Presidential Communication, a variant of the political communication, which studies behaviours and manners of politicians. Since not only the message is important, but also the way in which it is conveyed, as well as the information sent by the politician himself, this new discipline also examines the attitudes of politicians in public events, as well as the physical appearance and image. Important authors agree that Presidential Communication has to be based on the good way of using words, but also on the idea that words should be accompanied by an adequate and pertinent political image.

In this paper, first, the *Lebenswelt* of politicians is described, subsequently, definitions are given of both language and fashion use in politics. Following chapters take a closer look at how both these factors play a role of influence in the functioning of these social actors. Finally, the intercultural aspect of both fashion and language use is explored.

2. Structure, composition of the life world of "Fashion and Language use in Politics"

Lebenswelt, also called life world, is the common social reality as described by Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckman. It is composed of a number of entities, such as agents, objects or artefacts, routine activities, territories and places, moments and periods, and languages. When speaking about agents in the context of this paper, the main entities referred to are political parties, state and other national institutions, such as the parliament for example, the media, and those that vote for the politicians. Among the functions of these politicians are the attraction of voters, representation of the people that have voted for them, and the country when abroad. Also, every politician stands for a party or a specific message that they represent. Some of the objects and artefacts used by the social actors, the politicians in this case, are clothing, the language they use, colour specific to their party or the message they convey, and party symbols. These all serve to generate recognition with their agents. According to Roland Barthes as paraphrased by Jorge Núñez Barnés in his essay *La Imagen Presidencial: Fuente de Comunicación*, the image establishes a personal union between the politicians and the voters. The routine activities that can be mentioned in this regard are public debates, for instance, and campaigns, visits throughout the country, addresses in the media and so on. Each of these serve as a medium through which the politicians can meet with above mentioned agents and present their ideas and visions. When speaking of territories, one could think of the country in which a political party is active. However, more specifically, parliament, public media talk shows, the street, institutions and party headquarters are all examples of places of significance to the social actor. National history, party tradition and political tradition in general are examples of moments and periods that influence the life world of the social actors. In daily life these may be found in election days, for instance, terrorist attacks, and national holidays commemorating important events in the history of a nation. Language is one of the principal tools used by the social actor to convey who they are and what they stand for. In this paper particular attention will be given to the way language, is used for these purposes.

2.1 Definition of Language Use

Language use is a broad term used to describe the use of a language by a particular individual or group. The Collins Concise Dictionary gives a number of examples of the use of language: "1 a system for the expression of thoughts, feelings, etc., by the use of the spoken sounds or conventional symbols. [...] 3 the language of a particular nation or people. [...] 5 the specialized vocabulary used by a particular verbal group [...] 6 a particular manner or style of verbal expression". As these descriptions indicate, language is not a static notion, it

is rather a fluid concept which can be used in a variety of ways. It is the way in which a language is used that determines the meaning of the words that are employed to this purpose. De Saussure in this way distinguishes between the '*signifié*' and the '*signifiant*', which in combination with each other form the '*signe*'. The '*signifié*' is the concept to which one refers by making use of the '*signifiant*' which is the verbal realisation of the intended concept or idea. Two important factors concerning language use in the context of this paper, namely lexicon and register, will be explored further in a later chapter.

2.2 Definition of Fashion Use

The Collins Concise Dictionary describes fashion as follows: "...style in clothes, behaviour, etc.". Fashion, as used in this paper, is aptly portrayed by Robert Woods as cited by Jorge Santiago Barnés. He says the following; "la imagen personal de un individuo, además de estar muy por encima de lo que marca la moda (...), es un fenómeno de alcance mundial, que emite un juicio valorativo, sobre lo mucho o poco interesante, que puede llegar a ser una persona'. (*the personal image of an individual goes beyond fashion (...) it is a world-wide phenomenon which judges about how interesting or non-interesting a person can be*)

2.3 Description of the Social Actor

Taken from Peter Stockinger's internet course, the definition of

"a social actor is any (human, animal, "artificial", ...) *agent* such as a group of persons, an individual, an organized group (a company, a union, a party, ...), who: Possess a common cognitive reference frame (composed, among others, by a common tradition, common knowledge and values)"

He goes on to say that this requires "the possession or acquisition of a specific competence for understanding, accepting and dealing with this common cognitive reference frame." For the purpose of this paper the social actors are politicians who act both as an organized group, and as individuals. Their common cognitive reference frame are their various political party traditions, placed within the political tradition of their country, along with language use and fashion, for instance. As for the specific competence required for understanding, as mentioned by Stockinger, it is not very clear what that would be in this particular context. Politicians enter into politics from many different backgrounds, at many different points in their lives, even though very general tendencies may be discovered when looking at this closely.

3. The culture particular to "Language use in Politics"

The value of a politician not only depends on the preparation, effort and success along his political career, but also on the prestige and social acceptance that his image provokes among the voters. The power of his messages, the influence of his thoughts and the persuasion of his words will be directly related to the language style he will adopt during his campaign as well as to the facade he will decide to assume as a character who has to be accepted and valued by the public. According to Vroom and Redeker (2006) ideological differences can be expressed both through the means of words and the style of speech. These two language features refer directly to categories as the ones defined by Bernd Müller-Jacquier in his paper "Linguistic Awareness of Cultures" (2000), in which he describes lexicon and social meaning, and register. "From a cognitive-psychological point of view, 'social meaning' and 'lexicon' are taken to indicate that co-participants use words to express social representation and to evoke these in others" (14). He explains register by saying that

"register' denotes 'functional varieties' of 'speech' (Scherfer, 1977), i.e. alternative formulations that interactors use dependent on: the situation (from very ritualised to informal), the status of the person being addressed, the age of those present, their rank, their gender and finally the level of speech (formal-informal) chosen by the core participants" (22).

In an essay from 1998, Frits Bolkestein gives an example of how different words and phrases are used by various political parties to denote the same essence coloured by their political views. What is called 'solidarity' by the socialist party, is termed 'social justice' by the liberals, and 'a sense of community' by the Christian Democrats. Style is mainly used by politicians and their parties to mark a certain position, and to distinguish between themselves and another politician or party. Vroom and Redeker mention perspectivising, negative definitions, oppositions, sarcasm, irony and rhetorical questions as some of the ways in which this can be done. According to Eulalio Ferrer (1994:9), as mentioned by Jorge Santiago, politicians need to take special care about the words they use if, by means of words, they want to convince, persuade, seduce and fascinate citizens. Depending on the situation and the target audience they are addressing, politicians typically vary their lexicon. This refers both to the words they use, but also to the number and type of style figures employed. When aiming to come across more sophisticated they may use different word endings, for example, as stated by Luis Núñez Ladevéze in his paper *Lenguaje del Político, Lenguaje del Informador*. Words like '*posicionamiento*' or '*sobredimensionamiento*' can be easily found in political discourse, whereas the more commonly used form or meaning of these words are '*posición*' and '*exageración*'. Sayings and proverbs are features that are also frequently used by those that want to come across more distinguished. These features are an indication of a more formal

register. All these characteristics make up the political jargon, also called '*binnenhofbargoens*' by Bolkestein, when referring to the language used by Dutch politicians.

A diglossic scheme can be distinguished when looking at the way politicians speak in parliament in contrast with the way they adapt their register to the situation when communicating with the general public in the street, for instance. In a multilingual country such as Spain, regional politicians in bilingual communities where there are two official languages, such as in the Basque Country and Galicia, may choose to adopt a regional language, depending on the party they belong to. In this way their language choice is a reflection of their ideological sentiments. National politicians are also known to speak a few words or phrases in a regional language when visiting a certain region. This is a way to signal good will and to generate favour from the community. In contrast, unofficial minority languages are seldom used in this way. This could be explained by the fact that in most countries these languages are spoken by immigrants, who are expected to adapt to their host country, and learn the languages that are spoken there. The way languages are used within a country are often also influenced by the history and political climate of a country. During Franco's regime it was unthinkable that politicians in Spain would use another language than Spanish, whereas everyone is now free to speak the language of their region, for example, even in official capacities.

The relationship between the written and oral language of politicians could be said to be quite close, as there generally is not a great difference between the one and the other. Depending on the situation, the topic and the audience, a certain register will be used. This register will be the same, both when spoken, as well as when written. There may be a difference, however, between free spoken discourse, and a prepared speech. In these instances, the speech writer may have used more static language than that which is used in more spontaneous, spoken language. This is something that is subsequently reflected when the speech is given. In some languages, linguistic forms may be applied to written texts to signal the skill in writing, which is not used in speech, as it is a feature only applicable in writing. Examples can be found both in the Italian language and in French, where the use of the '*passé simple*' is restricted to well written texts.

4. The culture particular to "Fashion use in Politics"

Fashion, just as language, are features through which politicians can express their personality and identity, as well as their ideology. The time that politicians were all male and wore suits in a uniform style has long since passed. With an increasing number of women in politics, and the important medium of television, it has become much more important what politicians wear. Not only does clothing contribute to the creation and maintenance of their image, it also conveys a certain message in itself. Roger Ailies (1988; 45) as cited by Jorge Santiago says that "image has to become a bombing of symbols and signs which can send signals through the eyes, facial expression (...)". Everything someone makes, wears and is, will be judged. To get it just right, a growing number of politicians have been known to employ the services of image advisors and stylists. These people are experts in the world of persuasion, fascination and suggestion. They are able to convince and lead people to vote for a certain politician according to the way this politician is introduced to the public, the way in which he presents his suggestions and through the appropriate or inappropriate personal appearance. They study, analyse and look into all the personal and intimate features that politicians have and transmit in order to provide him with the necessary charisma he needs to move and stimulate people with the presentation of his ideas. These experts are able to create a convincing image through methods of social incitation and to produce real leaders thanks to special tools in the so-called political marketing. Experts analyse the body-language (non-verbal communication) of politicians because they can help in the description of his personality and character. His gestures can define certain attitudes towards the other, whereas his physical appearance can also provide information about his behaviour and acts in other situations in life.

When speaking of fashion, an easy analogy is found when looking at the register in language use. As is the case when using a certain register, fashion can indicate or show a certain perception of the formality of a situation, the status of the people involved, as well as the age, rank and gender. The means by which these factors can be implied, are, for example, found in the use, or non-use, of specific clothing items. Colours can also carry great significance as well as the choice of particular designers for special occasions. Examples are plentiful. One need only to look back to a speech given by the late Prince Claus of the Netherlands, who in 1998, while speaking at a formal occasion, protested against the 'snake around the neck' and demonstratively took off his tie. He was only trying to make a point at that time, however, what he started was a movement in the perception of what was admissible in men's formal wear. Before this event it was unthinkable that a well dressed man would wear his suit without a tie. Now, many have adopted the new, tie-less style. Among them are a good number of politicians, who now have as a habit to leave the tie at home,

even at formal occasions. Some have even been criticised for arriving without a tie to the funeral of Prince Claus, even though it may have been a gesture of support and appreciation of the late Prince. In contrast, the late Pim Fortuyn who came onto the scene a couple of years after Prince Claus' speech, wore what was to become his signature ties. These big ties were soon imitated by those who supported him and his ideologies, and started off a trend in the opposite direction. Pictures of Prince Claus taking off his tie, Jan Marijnissen, who does not wear ties to work anymore and Pim Fortuyn are shown below.



In Spain, it is very unusual to find people in parliament without a tie, whereas it is not as uncommon to see a politician wearing an orange blouse, which, in turn, would be almost unthinkable in the Netherlands. On informal occasions, on the other hand, it has become common practice for politicians to wear leather jackets, a practice that was first introduced by the second president after the dictatorship. Members of all parties in Spain wear them especially during their political campaigns in order to signal their closeness to the general public. Pictures demonstrating this are to be found below.



The leather coats have not yet made their appearance in Dutch political life, however, during campaign season the politicians will often wear wind breakers in their party colours and with their party slogans and logos printed on them. This is not so much meant to signal their close relationship with the greater public, but to enforce the recognition of the party, as well as through the use of posters, for example. The pictures below show Wouter Bos of the Partij van de Arbeid (Labour Party) wearing his red wind breaker, and a politician of the CDA, the Christen Democratisch Appèl (Christian

Democrats) standing next to the Prime Minister, wearing a green wind breaker with an orange scarf. Both of these clothing items represent the party colours and bear the logo of the party.



In some cases, not only party colours are expressed through the clothing of politicians, but symbols are worn as a dress, for instance, as was the case when Esperanza Aguirre, the president of the Madrid region wore a design by Spanish artist Agatha Ruiz de la Prada. The skirt of the dress represented the flag of the region of Madrid as is shown in the pictures below.



When it comes to fashion, the choice of certain designers can also be seen as a statement in itself. One Minister has made a point of wearing clothes from different Spanish designers on each formal occasion. In order to be 'fair' she changes designer by alphabet, moving through the letters as the occasions come up. One of the designs is shown below.



In rare cases a politician's choice of clothing sparks a growth in a certain industry, as was the case in Bolivia. Present President Evo Morales has become famous, not only for his political views, but also for the striped sweaters he wears. Wearing the striped sweaters even to official meetings with Presidents of other nation-states, it had caused a rage in his own country, where the demand for similar sweaters has risen dramatically. The pictures below show Morales' signature sweater.



5. The multi-/intercultural dimension in the "Fashion and Language use in Politics"

The preferred sweaters of President Evo Morales not only make a statement within his country, his unconventional dress for formal meetings may not be seen so much as an intercultural dimension, but more as a personal characteristic of this particular states man. More intercultural then is the traditional head-dress of late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and of course of the Pope. A photograph of these two men together is shown below.



Less visible, but not less relevant is the way politicians use language in intercultural contexts. An amusing anecdote can be taken from Spain where the former President Jose Maria Aznar was reported to speak with a fake American, or rather Texan, accent in Spanish, when visiting President Bush. Where this influences his mastery of his own language, Dutch politicians, for example, find that they have a problem interacting in English, as they lack the necessary language competence to apply the appropriate register when communicating in an intercultural context. An additional problem the politicians may encounter when expressing themselves towards another audience than they are used to at home is the differing style in communication. When the Dutch speak in the way they do in the Netherlands, without mentioning additional authorities in the field they are addressing, they do not come across very credible or intellectually competent when interacting with the French. As described in *Sixty Million Frenchmen can't be wrong, Why we love France, but not the French*, by Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow, the French, as a general rule, make use of many references to authorities when they speak. The use of these authorities expresses great knowledge of the field, as well as lending credibility to that which they are saying.

6. Conclusion

As stated above, both the use of fashion and language of politicians has gained great importance over the years, especially with the increasing influence of the media. The register used to convey a certain image, be it through the lexical features of their speech, or the fashion items they wear, all contribute to the message that is being sent. As Alex Grijelmo (200;11), quoted by Jorge Santiago, says: 'nothing will be able to measure the power that a word hides. We can measure its letters, its size on a paper, the phonemes articulated in a syllable, its rhyming, maybe even its age; however, the real space of words ...is developed in more spiritual, ethereal and frivolous places of the human beings.' In the same way, the specific items of clothing of a politician do not necessarily bear significance in itself; it is the combination of colours, the situation in which they are worn and the greater context, for example, that create a certain impression. This, along with the language use and other symbols contribute to the image of the politicians and the message they want to convey.

In a world where politician's work field increasingly spreads across the borders of their home countries, the registers with regard to fashion and language use need to be adapted to specific intercultural situations. The presentation of their message in a globalized context may present challenges, especially when communicating in a lingua franca. Further research on the adaptation of these messages could provide interesting insights in this regard.

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