

## *Handsome Is As Handsome Speaks*

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### **Abstract**

The presented work is a multi-year project of defining essential lingual characteristics for building up a Gestalt of a positive political figure. The paper presents research into psychological and linguistic correlations between the social image of a political leader and his/her speech. Our goal is to shed light upon the interdependence of the person's oratory organization and his/her self-presentation in the eyes of the audience. We believe any human image to be created by a complex integrity of various external and internal factors, such as one's appearance, clothes and mimics as well as the way one placates one's inner ego, or social "I" in the process of communication with the audience.

Our argument is that the positive image of a political leader is a creative product which is determined not only by a sum total of his/her personal qualities, but is mostly generated from the listeners' identification of the speaker with an ideal positive image scenario stored in the listeners' mentality. Hence, this work highlights different conceptions of what being positive signifies for the majority of people and how it affects their taking in and evaluating political leaders in terms of good and bad moral values. The close study of fifty five original political speeches of American presidents dating back from the post-war period to nowadays resulted in singling out the main necessary verbal components of a political leader's positive image which enable him/her to make a desired impact on the audience.

Keywords: Gestalt, political leader, oratory organisation, positive, impact.

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## **Introduction**

This work is based on the analysis of verbal characteristics of the original political speeches of the American presidents (John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama (5 speeches; 1,000 speech samples). It should be noted here that this paper namely looks at syntactic peculiarities of oratories and presents a survey of quite powerful lingual instruments of political image-making. Having been unfairly neglected for a long time, syntax of the language presents a variety of means of making a psychological impact on human minds.

Syntactic structures as the most abstract linguistic code reflect human deep cognitive processes no worse than words or vocabulary, disclosing the speaker's intellectual and psychological potential, and, thus, link the way one thinks and the way one speaks. Individual syntactic speech features are not eye-, or ear-catching, but "work on a deeper level" of one's perception and taking a personality as a whole. This brings syntax closer to reflecting the speaker's inner "I", no matter whether it is real or imposed. In our paper, we have tried to highlight psychological and linguistic correlations between a political leader's public image and his verbal self-presentation.

## **Gestalt theory application today**

Our way of investigation grounds on understanding any linguistic phenomenon as a focused multidimensional formation reflected in its Gestalt properties and qualities and still unequal to their sum total. Today appliance of the Gestalt theory as a part and parcel of the cognitive approach becomes still more popular in different fields of knowledge, like social psychology, individual psychology, Gestalt consulting, management, etc. It's being developed by such outstanding researchers as D. Häffler (1998), F. Perls & P. Goodman (2001), A. Ramat (2002), Irvin and Meriam Polster (2004), G. Skitters (2007). The Gestalt researcher S.V. Chesnokov declares that our mind operates exclusively through Gestalts. In the book *Phenomenology of Dialogues in Gestalt-theory, Mathematics and Logic* (2009), he states that his forty years of studies dedicated to applying mathematical methods of analysis to linguistics prove that all the phenomena of consciousness can be explained only by means of Gestalts, their inter-connection, and changes in their figures.

## **Gestalt theory: ABCs**

There's no absolute linguistic equivalent to the German word '*Gestalt*' in English. It can approximately be rendered as '*tangible figure or image*'; to be more precise, it is a specific organization of parts building up an organic entity. In other words, a Gestalt is a mental model specifically organized by putting its parts together. These parts make up an organic wholeness bigger than their sum. Historically, the cognitive theory of Gestalts dates to Germany, 1912, where the well-known psychologist Max Wertheimer (1880-1943), grounding upon the philosophic ideas of Christian von Ehrenfels, arrived at the following conclusion. Any world vision – regardless of its simplicity or complication – can be contrasted with a multi-dimensional wholeness built up in human mind. He termed such integral phantom image of the world fragment as "*its Gestalt*".

Into linguistic studies, the notion of Gestalt was introduced by George Lakoff in his work *Linguistic Gestalts* (1981), where he claimed that all our thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and the processes of cognition are organised by means of the same structures which are called Gestalts. The scholar believed them to be integral and available for analysis. In our research papers, we try to develop the ideas as to there existing possibilities to employ Gestalt approach in linguistic practice.

The formed Gestalts always represent entities, while each of those in its turn is a part of wholeness, characterised by its limitation (contour) and dissection. Psychology views wholeness, subjectness, permanence and structureness as basic features of human perception. On the level of mentality, formation of a concrete notion presupposes creating a certain image or figure against other objects.

### **Gestalt theory in our paper**

As essence is manifested in phenomena, a complete Gestalt of the object is conceived by means of studying its projections. The more projections undergo analysis, the more exact and vivid the general image of the construct is. In the process of Gestalt analysis, the '*areal*' of the object under study is also taken into consideration. We term '*areal*' as a hypothetic or textual field where one can see the results of Gestalt object projecting which in our case is a public oratory.

A Gestalt building process is a dynamic operation, consisting in studying the essential characteristics of an object in question consecutively, and foregrounding the so-called '*significance*', or '*pregnancy*' of the Gestalt. The latter is traditionally understood as a hierarchical distribution of the dominating property in the Gestalt-figure, defining the Gestalt-centre of the object. (E.g. the centre of a person's Gestalt is his face, where the interlocutor usually focuses his attention). The vector shifting of the Gestalt centre testifies to the fundamental changes in its figure.

We argue that studying the Gestalt projections of an object – abstract or concrete – makes it possible to get a multidimensional focused Gestalt of the given formation. The Gestalt construct in human mind is the very model, possessing and objectivising the properties of the original. Hence, our method of investigation suggests first of all singling out appropriate Gestalt projections in the USA presidents' oratory.

### **Political actor's public image**

We believe any human social "*I*" to be created by a complex integrity of various external and internal factors, such as one's appearance, clothes, mimics, and peculiarities of one's speech. More than that, people take pains to create this or that image in the eyes of the audience.

Darren G. Lilleker in his book *Key concepts in political communication* (2006), defines political image as a special impression, a construct existing in people's minds which is based upon their ability to decode other people's verbal or non-verbal behaviour. The key-role in this process belongs to the so-called professional marketing. A political public image is a multi-dimensional creation reflected in different verbal and non-verbal spheres of the political actor's activity. Thus, turning to Gestalt analysis here we consider quite motivated.

Creating a public image is always grounded upon moral, ethical or aesthetic concepts rooted or existing in the national mentality in the way of certain symbols, or basing upon well-known precedent phenomena or myths. We want to be taken in positively, we want to be liked by others, and it is a sort of biological law, something close to Darwin's survival law. (No woman will come to the first date looking like a scarecrow, smoking like a chimney, and pissed as a newt if her boyfriend is a neat-looking cigarette fighter and teetotaller. The problem of being liked is even more vital for political actors. Being liked here means being voted for.)

### **Political myths as platform for the political image**

As Ruth Wodak points it, the main condition of a political myth is its being accepted and supported by society, while the myth itself constructs "a second semiotic 'reality' which mystifies contradictions, ideologies, and so forth" (*The discourse of politics in action: politics as usual*, 2009). Political myths function as cognitive maps structuring and classifying information in people's minds, or as a special "collective memory" of a nation (after D. Bell, 2003).

The President has always occupied a leading position in the life of the country and played a central role on the international political stage. His political image is a result of joined work of image-makers, psychologists, sociologists, speech-writers etc. The head of the state is supposed to inspire confidence and respect with his electorate, which is impossible without people's taking him in as a positive personality. Susanne Tietze & Laurie Cohen rightfully claim treat leadership "not as an individual activity but as a social or collective phenomenon" and conclude that a political image is a specific idea rooted in the human mind about an ideal performer of a certain social role (*Understanding organisations through language*, 2003).

As our focus is placed upon the generalised verbal Gestalt of the American president's speech, we have turned to the most popular and significant symbol of the USA, i.e. the "western". Grounding upon the data received by Fred Emery and David Martin, who studied psychological effects of western films (those in the genre of western), we have made an assumption that **presidents as leading personalities of American society will use "western" stereotypes for awakening subconscious trust on the part of their nation.** It's rather meaningful that the famous JFK, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, one of the most popular presidents with his nation, declared it in the open that the main positive character of "westerns" manifests standards of national mentality. A positive cowboy (*A Mr Good Guy*) symbolises the best features of Americans and is a regular character on the magazine covers, billboards, in films and adverts.

### **American presidents' oratory: Gestalt analysis**

In the process of work, we have tried to compare the syntactic Gestalt of the average positive cowboy character (the speech samples were taken from virtual literary dialogues of "westerns" amounting to 1,000 speech samples altogether) to that of American presidents. For the background of our analysis we have also used the average data analysis of the syntactic organisation of the publicistic text and the author's monologue published by I. Morozova in her monographic research, 2010.

The speech Gestalts in the groups contrasted were studied within the following projections of vision:

- 1) sentence surface structure;
- 2) communicative goal;
- 3) speech strategies;
- 4) pragmatic orientation of the utterance.

The comparative analysis permitted distinguishing a number of similarities and differences existing in the speech patterns employed by the American presidents, in the average publicistic text representation, the author's monologue, and the good cowboy's speech party.

The above mentioned projection types represented in *Figures 1, 2, 3* are built up in accordance with the principles of 'Ehrenfels circles' reflecting the corresponding use frequency areal of the linguistic phenomenon analysed.

The sums total of all speech constructions under study within the groups considered are delineated in the paper as circles, where three oriented lines running from their centres are conditionally understood as corresponding to the hypothetical maximum use frequency of the speech pattern and taken as 100% each. The average use frequency of the corresponding linguistic phenomenon in the western heroes' speech parties, American presidents' oratories, publicistic text, and author's narrative in modern English novel are identified by dot-marks on each of the given oriented lines. By joining the dots one gets a Gestalt-figure of the communicant's speech features in the concrete projection of vision.

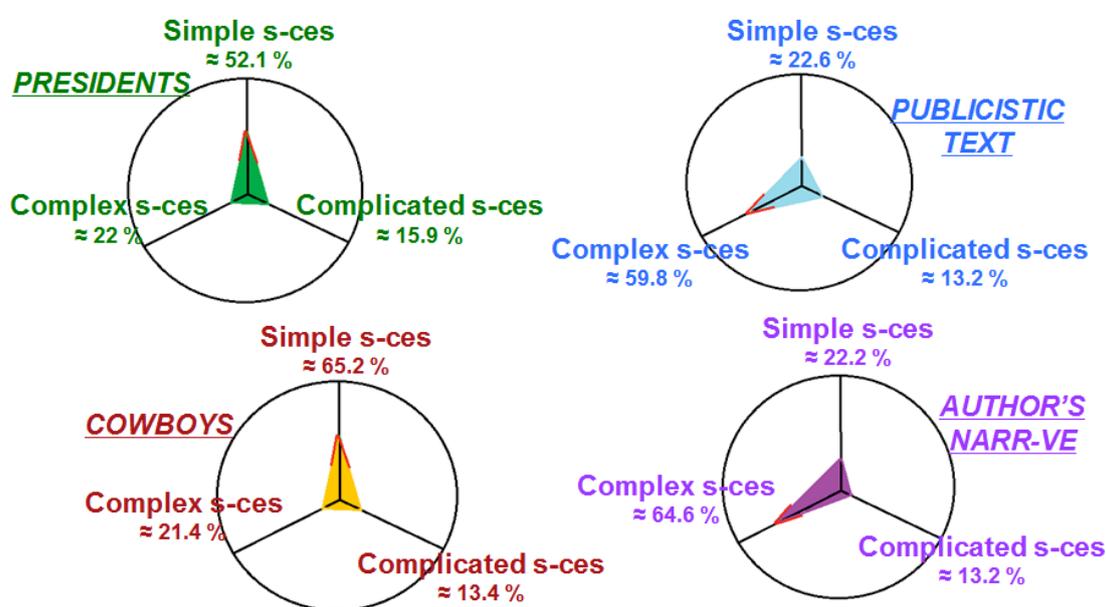


Figure 1. Sentence structure Gestalt projections analysis, where:  
s-ces – sentences;  
NARR-VE – narrative.

**Structurally**, simple sentences make up approximately 22.6% in the publicistic text, 22.2% in the author's narrative, while the presidents' speeches manifest their use in 52.1%, and the good cowboy's speech party boasts 66.2% of simple sentences (see Fig. 1).

## EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE FIGURE 1

### I. Presidents' oratory:

1. *The world is very different now. This much we pledge – and more (J. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, 20 Jan 1961).*

Both sentences here comprise one predication nexus each and, thus, represent simple sentences.

2. *Now, as we stabilized the financial system, we also took steps to get our economy growing again, save as many jobs as possible, and help Americans who'd become unemployed. (B. Obama's State of the Union Address, 25 January 2012).*

A number of subject-predicate groups account for treating this remark as a complex sentence.

3. *Middle-class and low-income Americans are hurting, with incomes declining; job losses, poverty and inequality rising; mortgage foreclosures and credit card debt increasing; health care coverage disappearing; and a big spike in the cost of food, utilities, and gasoline. (B. Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, August 27, 2008).*

The quoted remark is complicated due to the chain of homogeneous members of various morphological character: attributes: 'middle-class' and 'low-income' (to the subject 'Americans'); 'food, utilities, and gasoline' (to the adverbial modifier 'a spike'); and adverbial modifiers mostly expressed by nominative absolute constructions with the participle: 'incomes declining; job losses, poverty and inequality rising; mortgage foreclosures and credit card debt increasing; health care coverage disappearing; and a spike'.

It was noted that in their speeches American presidents widely use chains of simple sentences which give a marching rhythm to their oratories and make them sound more action-packed and energetic.

### II. Cowboys' speech

1. *"Mebbe you put me in prison to get Charlene." – "On my word, Eli, it wasn't that!" (Haning:48)*

The first sentence in the dialogical unity is a simple sentence with one subject and one predicate group.

2. *"Caroline is right, she tripped and I caught her" (Lewis).*

The sentence is compound due to three subject-predicate nexi.

3. *"This mount's seen dust, and dirt, and rock of all the tracks hundred miles around from here. He'll find the way." (Davis:34).*

The underlined sentence is furnished with a chain of homogeneous objects, which complicates its structure.

As seen from above, the surface-structure projections of the speech patterns analysed demonstrate a striking similarity between the syntactic organisation of the western heroes' speech parties and American presidents' oratories.

Figure 2 looks at the preferences in the **communicative sentence types** in speech of the virtual and actual communicants and shows that those differ quantitatively only in their use of imperatives, which rank second after declaratives in the presidents' speech and in the speech parties of good cowboys (25.5% and 23.4%, respectively). It's noteworthy that both in the author's narrative and publicistic texts their share is no more than 15.2%.

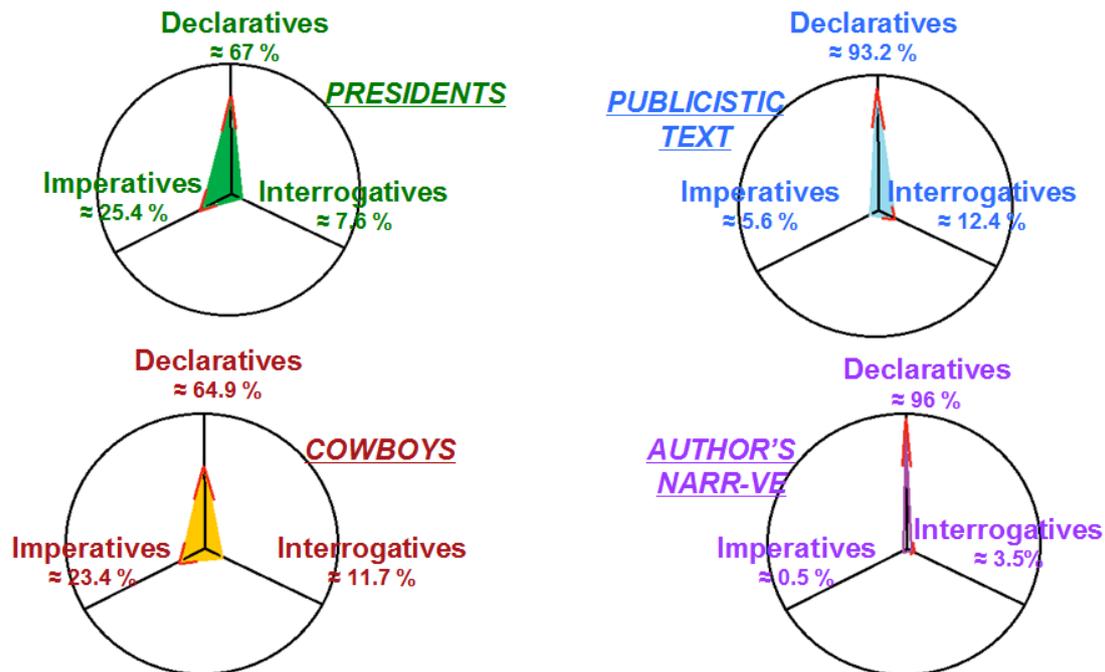


Figure 2. Communicative sentence type Gestalt projections analysis, where: NARR-VE – narrative.

## EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE FIGURE 2

### I. Presidents' oratory:

1. *It's tempting to look back on these moments and assume that our progress was inevitable – that America was always destined to succeed. (B. Obama's State of the Union Address, 25 January 2012).*

The sentence is information-giving, declarative.

2. *Look at the example the Republicans have set: American workers have given us consistently rising productivity. (B. Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, August 27, 2008).*

Bill Clinton urges his audience to contemplate the Republican way of ruling the country, hence, using an imperative.

3. *Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort? (J. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, 20 Jan 1961).*

Both these remarks are rhetorical questions, interrogative sentences.

## II. Cowboys' speech

1. "About time some of my friends were showing up," Dick remarked jovially (Payne:55).

The declarative sentence here shows the good cowboy's pondering on his buddies lagging behind.

2. "Tell him I'll be at the Headquarters bright and early!" (Griffin:126)

As most of the commands, the sentence is imperative.

3. "Who done this?" asked Rio Jim, and still the shiver of cold metal rang in his voice. (Thomps:119)

The cowboy makes use of a special question.

Here one can also note similar features between the good cowboys' speech and the American presidents' political oratories.

A concept of the positive in the western can be described as a concept of a real man, which in the Wild West meant to be honest, patriotic, to be a leader, a hero, for whom it was possible to kill, but never to betray.

Already at the present stage of analysis we can draw a conclusion that the concept of "honesty" (which is a part of the concept of the positive) is expressed on the level of syntax as clearly built-up sentences, grammatically structured, simple, non-elliptical and affirmative. This conclusion agrees with the psychological theory of "message matrix" suggested by David Lewis, where surface simplicity grants better understanding the message (1996). We can make further conclusions that syntactic transparency of the utterance makes it mentally sound more *honest* and, hence, more positive, creating the image of 'good' about the character.

Presidents' speeches, as well as those of "good cowboys", are characterised by the **strategies** of "domination" and "co-operation" as seen from *Figure 3*. Here they make up 59.3% and 31.3%, while the same strategies are employed in communication by good cowboys in 61.2% and 28.5%, correspondingly.

C.f. 1. I've proposed a fee on the biggest banks. I urge the Senate to do the same, and I know they will. They will. People are out of work. They're hurting. They need our help. And I want a jobs bill on my desk without delay (B. Obama's State of the Union Address, 27 January 2010).

2. I promise to come. And we'll do it. You stay and just see. (Tuttle:87)

The underlined remarks are performatives from the president's oratory and the author's protagonist in a western novel.

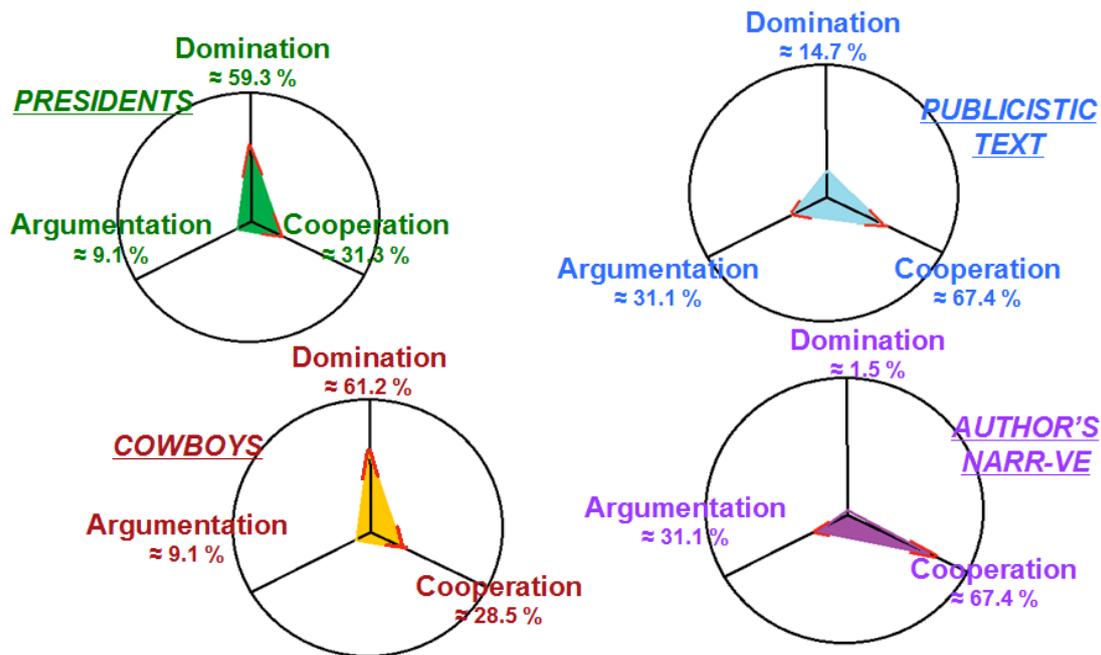


Figure 3. Speech strategy Gestalt projections analysis, where: NARR-VE – narrative.

## EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE FIGURE 3

### I. Presidents' oratory:

1. *But the devastation remains. One in 10 Americans still cannot find work. Many businesses have shuttered. Home values have declined. Small towns and rural communities have been hit especially hard* (B. Obama's State of the Union Address, 27 Jan 2010).

In his speech, B. Obama uses a chain of simple sentences for additional stressing the main idea of his speech, thus, turning to the domineering communicative strategy.

2. *But I'll do my best. That makes two of us. Our nation is in trouble on two fronts* (B. Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, August 27, 2008).

B. Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, on August 27, 2008, is an example of employing the communicative strategy of cooperation. The president is eager to collaborate with his nation.

3. *We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.* (J. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, 20 Jan 1961).

The famous JFK uses the strategy of argumentation while explaining his policy to his people. His arguments are built up by affirmatives.

### II. Cowboys' speech

1. *"You want them, Mr Jordan? Be right pleased to go get them for you."  
"No, let it go. I'll see them in the morning. Good night."* (Hogan: 70)

The author's protagonist employs the strategy of domination, thus, showing himself not only as a communicative leader, but also as a master of the situation.

2. "I will. And..." her breath caught, "if you hear anything... anything, let me know, Dick."

"Of course... Don't fret, Lynn." (Payne:32).

The strategy of cooperation helps Dick preserve good terms with the girl and calms her a little bit in the difficult position they are both facing.

3. "I don't advise you to do it. It will give you nothing. I reckon, be wiser stay where we are" (Haning:99).

The strategy of argumentation shows the interlocutor who has the upper hand in the situation.

From the point of view of **pragmatic orientation of utterances** (see Figure 4) in their speech acts, both types of the communicants under consideration demonstrate a steady tendency to affirmatives and performatives, coloured positively. Their shares in the speech parties are 43.2% and 38.3% – in presidents' speeches, and 44.4% and 38.3% – in cowboys' dialogues.

C.f. 1. Now, I know Wall Street isn't keen on this idea... Now, the House has passed a jobs bill that includes some of these steps. As the first order of business this year (B. Obama's State of the Union Address, 27 January 2010).

2. I can read your mind. I can trail you anywhere (Tuttle:71).

3. Your folks will all be back in their homes by night (Haning:102).

Even a superfluous comparison demonstrates an evident similarity in the communicative behaviour of the speakers analysed.

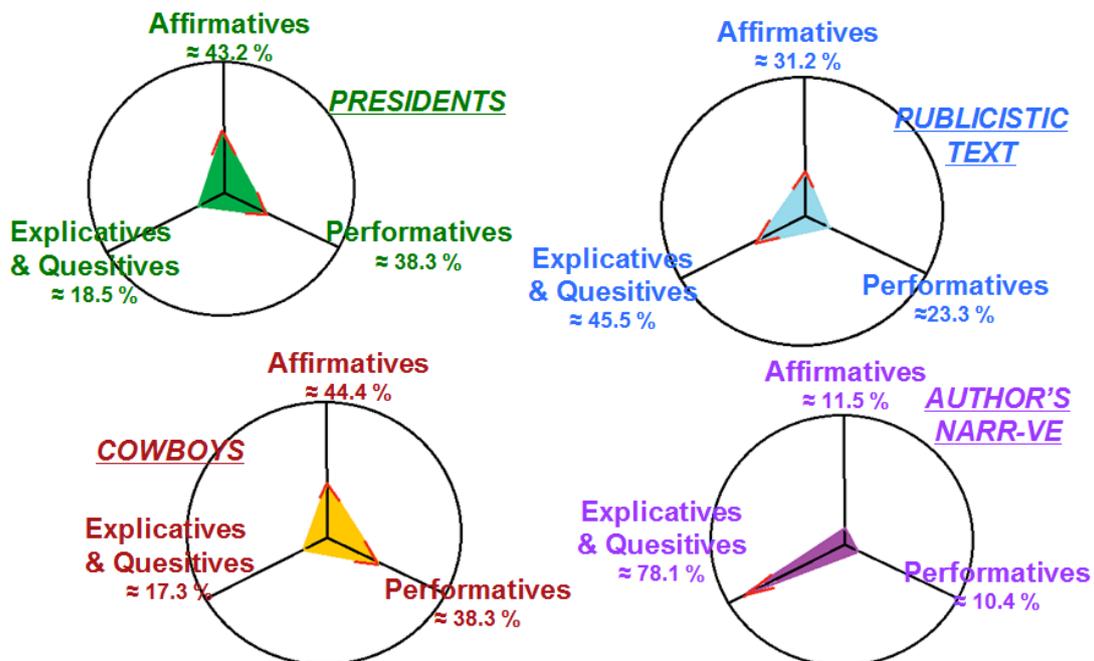


Figure 4. Pragmatic Gestalt projections analysis, where: NARR-VE – narrative.

## EXAMPLES TO ILLUSTRATE FIGURE 4

### I. Presidents' oratory:

1. *Clearly, the job of the next president is to rebuild the American dream and restore America's standing in the world (B. Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, August 27, 2008).*

In his speech, Bill Clinton is talking about the President's responsibilities quite confidently stating his point of view by means of an affirmative.

2. *Our Constitution declares that from time to time, the President shall give to Congress information about the state of our union (B. Obama's State of the Union Address, 27 January 2010).*

The explicative employed by B. Obama aims to interpret the Constitution to Americans.

3. *To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge – to convert our good words into good deeds – in a new alliance for progress – to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. (J. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, 20 Jan 1961).*

J. Kennedy makes use of the performative promising the sister republics south of the border his support.

### II. Cowboys' speech

1. *Once I promised to stop you and plumb dead. And I will (Thomps:95).*

The good cowboy firmly stands his ground and employs an affirmative to prove it.

2. *He met her gaze, not nearly as certain as he pretended. "You do have a motive. Who wants half a ranch? And your horse looks like it's been ridden hard recently." (Rigsbee)*

The given excerpt of the cowboy's speech contains two explicatives and the quesitive "Who wants half a ranch?"

3. *I wait here. Not a sound! (Bochmann:79)*

The author's protagonist employs the given above performative to show his readiness to perform an action.

As shown above, the projection of pragmatic speech orientation of good cowboys and American presidents manifest common features in the aspect of communicative strategies as well.

The Gestalt figures of the American President's speech organization made for the four projections considered are marked by an evident shift in their centres and mirroring the character parties of "good cowboys"

## Conclusion

Today, our investigation results in the following finding. Presidents of the country as national leaders and icons to follow try to create such public images that would coincide with the national understanding of the ideal and, thus, meet demands and hopes of their people to see a living national symbol. Alongside with postulating his good faith, family feeling, and education, a leader's speech should inspire confidence which is impossible without winning the audience over with the evident coinciding pregnancies in their Gestalts. The obtained data demonstrate similarity in the syntactic Gestalts of speech of the real American presidents and virtual positive cowboy characters. They both prefer simple, predication-structured positive statements of the affirmative or performative type. *Handsome is not only as handsome does. Handsome is as handsome speaks.* We can also assume that psychologically the concept of positiveness is associated with the so-called '*primary, or basic knowledge*' (after Slama-Cazacu, 2000), i.e. information coded in simple sentences. Correspondingly, the concept of inner positiveness is reflected on the level of speech in the surface simplicity of the utterance.

Doing their best to create an appealing political image for presidents, their speech-writers consciously or sub-consciously imitate **speech models of national symbols**, this way trying to win over the inner trust with the electorate, who take the President's personality as a living substitute for a legendary hero. We believe syntactic means to have wonderful perspectives in speech making. Aptly employed, they will work with the audience's mentality better than, say, one's style of clothes, age, sex, or appearance. Syntax is power.

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