

# LANGUAGE, POLITICS, AND IDENTITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION OF MODERN POLITICAL DISCOURSE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The present article discusses an interdisciplinary approach to the study of political discourse using the example of linguistic and political science studies into the manifestation of national identity in the speeches of German politicians. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that it is the first to consider the use of an interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of professional discourse by specialists from different scientific fields. The purpose of the work is to show how an interdisciplinary approach is implemented in the study of political discourse by linguists and political scientists. Both studies were carried out using the empirical material of 60 texts of public speeches by leading German politicians (Heiko Maas, Sigmar Gabriel, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Angela Merkel, Olaf Scholz, and Ursula von der Leyen) at international and national events such as the Munich Security Conference, the UN General Assembly, and in government statements. Both studies used general scientific methods (description, analysis, continuous sampling method), as well as quantitative content analysis (political scientists) and statistical methods of the chi-squared test and Cramér's V (linguists). The use of these methods led both research groups to approximately the same conclusions: German politicians tend to avoid emphasizing ethnic identity in their speeches on the international agenda, which is reflected in their language choices. The analysis by linguists of culture-bound elements with the help of the chi-squared test showed that the elements of non-German realities predominate in the speeches. The content analysis carried out by political scientists revealed that leading German politicians tend not to demonstrate their national identity, giving priority to positioning Germany as a member of the EU and NATO.

**Keywords:** interdisciplinarity, national identity, professional discourse, political discourse, culture-bound elements, Germany.

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Linguistic science has long since moved away from the ideas of structuralism, where language is studied in and of itself, and turned towards the ideas of anthropocentrism, which aims to study not only the specifics of language, but also to understand both the speaker and the world around them. Here, research often requires an interdisciplinary approach – specifically recourse to the theoretical foundations and methods of other sciences. One example of this is discourse studies, whose practitioners refer to extralinguistic information about time and place, the topics of communication, the people taking part in such communication, their communicative strategies, and so on. When studying political discourse, linguists and political scientists alike frequently turn to mathematical and statistical methods, which significantly expands the tools at their disposal.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how experts in various scientific fields can implement an interdisciplinary approach in the study of political discourse. An analysis of the meaning of the term “interdisciplinarity” reveals its content and provides grounds for a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon of identity. The relevance of this article is that it is the first to examine the use of an interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of political discourse by linguists and political scientists. No papers have been published on this topic thus far. A review of the scientific literature leads us to the conclusion that researchers focus exclusively on the linguo-pragmatic and stylistic means used by politicians to actualize their national identity (Kudryavcev 2010; Slyusarev 2012; Kaufova I.B., Kaufova L.A. 2018; Hermann 2021).

### **Materials and methods**

The materials used for the analysis presented in this paper are the public speeches of leading German politicians at both the international and national levels – the Munich Security Conference and the UN General Assembly in the former case and government addresses in the latter. Most of the government addresses also dealt primarily with the international agenda. A total of 60 speeches were analysed amounting to some 30.3 author's sheets (around 240,000 words). These included addresses by Heiko Maas, Sigmar Gabriel, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Angela Merkel, Olaf Scholz, and Ursula von der Leyen that were examined. We chose a timeframe of 2014–2022, as it was during this period that the general rhetoric of the German leadership shifted in response to foreign policy factors. The study was carried out by a research team made up of political scientists and linguists.

The choice of texts is explained by several reasons. First, the speeches selected had, for the most part, not been subjected to linguistic analysis previously. Second, international political events serve as a kind of platform for politicians to broadcast the national identity of the citizens of the country they represent.

The research methods used were of a general scientific nature (description, analysis, continuous sampling), in addition to more specific approaches: the political scientists on the team used quantitative content analysis, and the linguists used statistical methods (the chi-squared test and Cramér's V) and discourse analysis to verify the results.

## Research results

### The meaning of the word *interdisciplinarity*

In recent times, researchers have started to abandon the rigid institutionalization of individual sciences, blurring the boundaries between disciplines and the subject of their research.

Most research papers these days declare that the work was carried out at the intersection of various scientific disciplines. But this naturally leads to the question: What do the authors mean by this? Despite the supposed transparency of the term *interdisciplinarity*, its content turns out to be more complex than it might seem at first glance, since the dictionary does not provide an adequate definition of the concept, and glossaries of linguistic terms are equally unhelpful in this regard. It is here that we should turn the “science of all sciences” – that is, to philosophy.

The term *interdisciplinarity* is relatively new in the field of philosophy as well. It does not appear in classical philosophical dictionaries. The only work that offers a definition is *The Projective Philosophical Dictionary*, which was published relatively recently and includes various new terms and concepts<sup>2</sup>. Epistemology, as a branch of philosophy, distinguishes between *interdisciplinarity* and *interdisciplinary interaction*. The former is understood globally and describes the integrative nature of the modern stage of scientific knowledge (Lysak 2016). The latter is interpreted more substantively. The American researchers Heidi Jacobs and James Borland see interdisciplinary interaction as a type of knowledge that uses the methodology and terminology of more than one scientific discipline (Jacobs, Borland 1986). A. S. Ujbo defines interdisciplinary interaction as the successful synthesis of the scientific achievements of various disciplines in large projects and research activities (Ujbo 1990). E. M. Mirsky understands interdisciplinary interaction either as “the relationship between systems of disciplinary knowledge in the process of the integration and differentiation of sciences” or as “collective forms of work of scientists in different fields of knowledge in the study of the same object” (cit. ex.: (Kasavin 2010: 7)).

In general, interdisciplinary research is recognized as a method of organizing research or scientific activity whereby the efforts of various disciplines are directed at studying the same object. However, this approach is not limited to the joint study of a

<sup>2</sup> Artem'eva T. V., Smirnov I. P., Tropp E. A., Tul'chinskij G. L., Epshtejn M. N. 2002. *Proektivnyj filosofskij slovar'* [The Projective Philosophical Dictionary]. Saint Petersburg. (In Russian)

given problem. The French scientist Jean Piaget distinguished three forms of interaction between disciplines: *multidisciplinarity* (where one discipline is complimented by another); *interdisciplinarity* (the interaction of disciplines); and *transdisciplinarity* (the construction of integral structures) (Piaget 1972). The Russian researcher L. P. Repina proposes a similar typology for historical research that distinguishes between *multidisciplinary*, *interdisciplinary*, and *transdisciplinary* studies depending on the degree of integration (Repina 2011). In the first case, the participants work independently of one another and rely on their own disciplinary base to solve a common problem. In the second case, a mixed team is formed, but the researchers stick to their own scientific disciplines. And in the third case, team members combine concepts from individual disciplines to solve a common problem. Yet another vision of the interdisciplinary approach has been proposed that distinguishes between the degree of integration (*disciplinarity – interdisciplinarity – polydisciplinarity – synthesis*), in which synthesis is recognized as the highest form of scientific knowledge<sup>3</sup>.

An interdisciplinary approach to the study of various objects is generally recognized today as the most promising, since it allows us to consider the object in all its diversity, and employing the methodologies of different, and sometimes unrelated, disciplines gives us more accurate results. Of course, this approach can be applied in various scientific fields, including linguistics.

Linguistics, according to E. S. Kubryakova, is characterized by the following features: expansionism, anthropocentrism, functionalism, and explanatoriness (Kubryakova 2004). While all of this can be considered a sign of an interdisciplinary approach, we believe that it is most clearly reflected in the first two features – expansionism and anthropocentrism. Expansionism *a priori* presupposes going beyond the boundaries of a single discipline and requires the use of methods and data from various disciplines to study the same object. Anthropocentrism also takes philological research into the external environment, that is, into the space surrounding the individual, when the attention of researchers is focused on the role of the human factor in language, and when the task of understanding how and why a person uses language in his or her society becomes important. This view is shared by many researchers today (Kostomarov 2014; Ashurova 2021; Hamdamova 2021). We should also note that linguistics makes the distinction between internal interdisciplinarity (interaction of levels and aspects of language in the process of its functioning) and external interdisciplinarity (the study of a specific object using the methods of various disciplines). The object of such external interdisciplinary research may be discourse in general, and professional discourse in particular. In this paper, we look at how German national identity is reflected in the German language.

<sup>3</sup> Rumyanceva M. F. 2007. Celostnost' sovremennogo gumanitarnogo znaniya: neobhodimost' i vozmozhnost' [Integrity of modern humanitarian knowledge: Necessity and possibility]. *Edinstvo gumanitarnogo znaniya: novyj sintez: Materialy XIX mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii [Unity of humanitarian knowledge: A new synthesis. Proceedings of the 19th international scientific conference]*. Moscow, January 25–27, 2007. P. 41–49. (In Russian)

## Nationality as an object of interdisciplinary research

The phenomenon of identity has been studied by experts in various disciplines of the natural and social sciences, as well as the humanities. A distinction is generally made between biological, ethnic, and ideological identity. Ideological identity, in turn, can be subdivided into sociological and political, and it is at the intersection of ideological and ethnic identity that sociocultural identity arises<sup>4</sup> (Kaufova I.B., Kaufova L.A. 2018). As we can see, *identity* is a complex concept that is characterized by its multidimensionality and multi-vector nature. This is why an interdisciplinary approach appears to be the best for this study.

National identity is typically the object of research in political science (Safran 2011; Orlov 2012; Gaskarth, Oppermann 2021). A great deal of attention has been paid to this in recent times. The reason for this is that, in the era of globalization, the aspirations of national communities are multi-vectored – striving towards integration and unification while at the same time seeking political autonomy and independence (Hauer-Tyukarkina 2013). This is of particular importance in Germany, for historical reasons (the experience of National Socialism, the division of the country into two states, the process of integration into the European Union, the transatlantic partnership, strong nationalistic ideas in Bavaria, etc.).

Despite the various interpretations of the term *identity* in political science research, the fact that its representation occurs with the help of linguistic means is, however, indisputable. Therefore, the material for political scientific analysis is the text, or, in the broader sense, discourse. Linguistics also use this material for their research. What is more, many researchers see the phenomenon of identity as a largely linguistic issue (Coulmas 1985; Thim-Mabrey 2003; Bschleipfer 2010; Lappo 2014). This is why we believe it may be interesting to examine this phenomenon from the perspective of two scientific disciplines – political science and linguistics. A mixed research group was created for this purpose to focus on analysing the texts of speeches of high-ranking German politicians in order to identify the relationship between the demonstration of national identity and the use of specific lexical units. In the context of this study, we consider culturally marked vocabulary to be one of the main means of representing identity in political discourse, relying on the opinion of recognized authorities. For example, Teun A. Van Dijk believes that “discourse reflects mentality and *culture*, both national, universal, and individual, private” (van Dijk 1998: 47). Meanwhile, Jürgen Habermas sees discourse as type of speech communication conditioned by the critical

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<sup>4</sup> Shiryayev N. S. 2017. *Kommunikativnye strategii reprezentatsii nacional'noj identichnosti v politicheskom mediadiskurse (na materiale anglijskogo i francuzskogo yazykov)* [Communicative strategies of representation of national identity in political media discourse (based on English and French)]. Doctoral thesis. Saratov. (In Russian)

examination of the *values* and norms of social life (Habermas 1989). In our research, we proceed from the fact that ethnic identity is most clearly demonstrated in units of speech that contain elements of national culture in their meaning.

### **Analysis of the reflection of national identity through the prism of political science and linguistics: Results**

The working hypothesis put forward by the research team was that the use of units that denote the realities of national – or, in our case, political – culture can be considered a sign of demonstrating one's ethnic identity. The more often a speaker uses culturally marked vocabulary, the more clearly they position themselves as a national-level politician.

The political scientists in the research team conducted a quantitative content analysis of the selected texts to determine the frequency of use of words and concepts in the speeches of top German officials that can be understood as characterizing their national identity: Germany (Deutschland, Deutsche, deutsch), the EU (Europa, europäisch, Europäer, Europäerin, EU, Europäische Union), and NATO (NATO, Nordatlantik, Atlantik, transatlantisch). The researchers came to the conclusion that German government and political figures refuse to demonstrate their national identity in their public speeches. This may be explained by the following reasons: rapid globalization; commitment to transatlantic and European partnership; and the prioritization of pan-European values above national values.

The linguists took this analysis as a basis and expanded the corpus of linguistic material. We used previous research (Chigasheva et al. 2021) to help us classify the layer of culturally marked vocabulary according to the onomastic principle. Ten classes were identified based on the selected lexical units. The distribution results are presented in Table 1.

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**Table 1. Classes of Culturally Marked Vocabulary**

| <b>class</b> | <b>description</b>   | <b>examples</b>  |
|--------------|--|--|
| anthroponyms | personal names   | Frank-Walter Steinmeier, François Hollande, Cem Özdemir  |
| toponyms     | names of geographical features   | Deutschland, Russland, Mittelmeer, Asien, Brüssel  |
| politonyms   | names of professional and public associations specific to the sphere of activity and system of public administration | Bundestag, EU-Kommission, die Europäische Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion, Östliche Partnerschaft |
| ergonyms     | names of professional business associations, organizations, companies, etc.  | Euro-Zone, IWF, Deutsche Bahn AG, der Europäische Fonds für Strategische Investitionen           |
| officionyms  | job titles in politics and public administration   | Präsident, Justizminister, Generalsekretär, Bundesaußenminister                                  |

| class                | description   | examples   |
|----------------------|---|--|
| ethnonyms            | names of nationalities                                  | die Deutschen, Europäer, Kurden, Pole  |
| ethnonym adj. + noun | names of objects indicating ethnic/national affiliation | die europäischen Staaten, deutsch- russische Regierungskonsultationen, die britische Regierung |
| documentonyms        | names of laws, international treaties, agreements, etc. | die Römischen Verträge, Freihandelsabkommen, der Vertrag von Lissabon                          |
| gemeronyms           | names of media outlets                                  | Charlie Hebdo  |
| geortonyms           | names of important historical events and holidays       | der Fall der Berliner Mauer, der Zweite Weltkrieg, die Flüchtlingskrise                        |

A total of 2258 lexical units in 9178 word usages were identified. Each class that was identified was divided into two categories: 1) units denoting phenomena and elements of life specific to Germany; and 2) units denoting phenomena and realities of European and international politics. For each category, we calculated the number of units and the number of times they were used, including in absolute values, as well as in percentages, depending on the how “well” they performed. The results are presented in tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2. Number of Lexical Units in Absolute Values and as a Percentages**

| Government statements |                         | Munich Security Conference |                         | UN General Assembly |                          |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| National level        |                         | International level        |                         | International level |                          |
| German names          | Non-German names        | German names               | Non-German names        | German names        | Non-German names         |
| 267                   | 1181                    | 84                         | 587                     | 9                   | 130                      |
| 18%                   | 82%                     | 12.5%                      | 87.5%                   | 6%                  | 94%                      |
|                       | 4 times more frequently |                            | 7 times more frequently |                     | 14 times more frequently |

The results of this analysis clearly show that German politicians referred to non-German names far more frequently in their speeches.

**Table 3. Number of Word Usages in Absolute Values and as a Percentages  
[+399 exc. Tables 2 and 3).**

| Government statements |                         | Munich Security Conference |                         | UN General Assembly |                          |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| National level        |                         | International level        |                         | International level |                          |
| German names          | Non-German names        | German names               | Non-German names        | German names        | Non-German names         |
| 267                   | 1181                    | 84                         | 587                     | 9                   | 130                      |
| 18%                   | 82%                     | 12.5%                      | 87.5%                   | 6%                  | 94%                      |
|                       | 4 times more frequently |                            | 7 times more frequently |                     | 14 times more frequently |



Most of the cases of word usage that were identified occurred in speeches at the national level (government statements), with speeches at the UN General Assembly containing the lowest number of such cases. Non-German names constitute the absolute majority of word usage cases. On the whole, the results obtained confirmed the previous conclusion – that German politicians appeal to non-German names far more frequently than they do to German names, preferring not to focus on designations that are specific to national culture, regardless of the level of the event.

The chi-squared test (medstatistic.ru) was employed by the linguists to identify the presence or absence of a significant connection between the use of a given name and its origin (whether it is a unit of national culture or another culture). Without going into detail about the chi-squared methodology, we can note that the results obtained showed a statistically significant connection between lexical units and their origin in all the texts we selected, regardless of the level of the event (national or international). To clarify the strength of this relationship, we used Cramér's  $V$ , the maximum value of which is 1. Our calculations showed a weak relationship in two cases: 0.196 for government statements, and 0.184 for the Munich Security Conference. As for the texts of the speeches at the UN General Assembly, the strength of the relationship was found to be moderate (0.342).

The statistical methods used generally confirmed the conclusion of the political scientists (that high-ranking German politicians refused to demonstrate their national identity). The statistical relationship was found to be insignificant. Perhaps a larger corpus could help clarify these results.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we examined two studies – one in the field of linguistics and one in the field of political science – that pursued the common goal of identifying the extent to which leading German politicians convey national identity in their speeches at national (government addresses) and international (the Munich Security Conference and the UN General Assembly) events. Statistical methods played a central role in both cases, leading both research groups to approximately the same conclusions: that German politicians do not play up ethnic identity in their speeches devoted to the international agenda, which is reflected in the linguistic choices they make. The analysis of culturally marked vocabulary performed by the linguists using the chi-squared method showed that the speeches were dominated by the names of non-German elements. The content analysis conducted by the political scientists revealed that leading politicians tend to not demonstrate their national identity, preferring instead to position their country as part of the European Union and NATO.



The proposed interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of linguistic material in combination with methods borrowed from various disciplines seems promising. For instance, identifying separate blocks of national (German) and European elements will allow us to identify the presence or absence of a relationship between their use and the demonstration of national or European identity in the speech of political and government figures in Germany. A comparative analysis of the speeches of politicians from the ruling and opposition parties, as well as politicians at the national and regional level – most notably Bavaria, where nationalistic ideas and means of manifesting them are quite strong – may be a relevant and novel area of study. A similar analysis could be carried out using materials in other languages,

The scientific (political scientific and linguistic) analysis of textual material of a single type leads us to the general conclusion that German society is currently suffering from an identity crisis. Its close connection with European and Western identity is eroding German national identity, pushing national values and interests into the background, and, ultimately, ushering in the loss of subjectivity of Germany as an independent player on the international stage. Looking at the material we have analysed from different methodological positions will provide a better understanding of the speakers' intentions, the decisions taken by the country's leadership, and, potentially, to predict new periods of stabilization and escalation of the sociopolitical situation in the country or region in the future.

Returning to the philosophical origins of the term *interdisciplinarity*, we have grounds to claim that, based on our analysis, interdisciplinarity should be understood as the true synthesis of the scientific achievements of various disciplines within the framework of a single scientific project, or as a type of knowledge that includes the methodology of more than one scientific discipline (political science, linguistics, sociology). In terms of the form of interaction, the present study can be considered interdisciplinary, since it was conducted by a mixed team whose members relied on data from their own disciplinary base.

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### **Conflict of interests.**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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