



Functional theory of political discourse. Televised debates during the parliamentary campaign in 2007 in Poland



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ABSTRACT: The aim of the paper is to implement a new and so far unfamiliar theoretical perspective into Polish communication science. Although the functional theory of political discourse discussed here originated on the ground of American empiricism, it aspires to be perceived as an international theory which may be successfully applied in analyses of political messages in various countries. Thus, the authors of presented paper aim not only at transporting onto Polish humanities premises and theoretical presumptions but also at verifying their adequacy in Polish political stage based on comparative analysis obtained from research performed by American and Israel scholars.

KEYWORDS: political discourse, political messages, political campaigns, Polish leaders debates, comparative analysis



INTRODUCTION

The paper aims to implement a new and so far unfamiliar theoretical perspective into Polish communication science, which is not only able to make certain anticipations but also, above all, provides a research tool enabling their verification. Although the functional theory of political discourse¹ discussed here originated on the ground of American empiricism, it aspires to be perceived as an international theory which may be successfully applied in analyses of political messages in various countries.² Its authors argue that differences observed both in cultural or political and media systems fail to make its main presumptions inadequate, what ena-

¹ The functional theory of political discourse was introduced by a professor of communication at the University of Missouri, William L. Benoit.

² That refers obviously only to democratic countries.





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bles them to make a hypothesis that: *Political discourse standardization goes beyond borders*. The functional theory introduces, therefore, a certain *novum* into communication sciences, assuming that similarities on the international scale may be sought not only at the level of methods and modes of election campaigns but also at the level of message content constructed by political actors. Thus, authors of presented paper aim not only at transporting onto Polish humanities premises and theoretical presumptions but also at verifying their adequacy in Polish political stage based on comparative analysis obtained from research performed by American and Israel scholars (Benoit, Sheaffer, 2006). The weakness of the analysis results from lack of access to the same operationalizations the American and Israeli researchers applied. Thus, we applied our own research method based on presumed premises and procedures. The statement “many similarities, few differences” expressed on the basis of comparative analysis of American and Israeli data we decided to modify into “many similarities, considerable differences” between the U.S., Israel and Poland. Concluding, despite considerable differences demonstrated by comparative analysis we may notice numerous similarities and principles in leaders’ discourse in all studied countries. Therefore, despite considerable differences we tend to confirm the opinion that the discourse standardization goes beyond the borders. We would like to present the results compared with American and Israeli data.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THEORETICAL PREMISES

Political discourse in the functional theory

The functional theory of political discourse, as its name indicates, is applied in analyzing political campaign messages. That statement requires, however, to be more specific due to its ambiguity. The political discourse is since understood as a set of public statements referring to a specific subject area which in that case is policy. Thus, it may be interpreted extensively as a set of messages containing political issues coming both from ruling elites, opposition representatives, activists of social organizations, citizens or at least mass media. However, the functional theory views the political discourse in a more narrow perspective as a set of announcements coming exclusively from rival politicians only during a limited timespan which is an election campaign. To avoid the notion of ambiguity the reader is offered a distinction of two categories to operate on. The first one is a category of the *political discourse* while the latter represents a *political campaign discourse* (see Table 1). For that purpose we recall a concept introduced by Harold D. Lasswell providing five categories he distinguished with a time criterion of formulating statement (Laswell, 1948).

The functional theory of political discourse is thus applied in analyzing messages belonging to the political campaign discourse field, where the message send-



ers are exclusively rival political actors. The reason for focusing on that area seems to be obvious and refers to a manipulative or even functional character of the discourse which aims at obtaining electoral support resulting in post appointing and a real political power.

Table 1. Political discourse versus political campaign discourse

Distinguishing criteria	Political discourse	Political campaign discourse
Sender	ruling elites, opposition parties, social organizations, church organizations, citizens, mass media	rival political actors: incumbents and challengers
Message	informative and agitational	agitational
Channel	direct and indirect	mostly indirect
Receiver	politicians, citizens, mass media	voters
Effect	change or maintenance of current political course	obtainment or loss of electoral support
Time perspective	broad	limited to election campaign

Source: authors.

Theoretical perspective

The functional theory of political discourse has been constructed on the basis of six predictions (Benoit, 2007, pp. 32–61):

A1: Voting is a comparative act.

A2: Candidates must distinguish themselves from opponents.

A3: Political campaign messages allow candidates to distinguish themselves.

A4: Candidates establish preferability through acclaiming, attacking, and defending.

A5: Campaign discourse occurs on two topics: policy and character.

A6: A candidate must win a majority (or a plurality) of the votes cast in an election.

The theoretical presumptions, on the one hand, characterize range standards for rival political actors (A1, A6), while on the other, they illustrate operation chains taken up during election campaigns (A2, A3, A4, A5). First statement argues that *voting is a comparative act* (A1) which means that a voter casts for a preferable candidate – in his opinion better than his opponents. To win, a candidate does not need to *persuade all the voters to prefer him but recognition of voting majority is sufficient* (A6). If a voter casts on the basis of comparison it seems obvious that *rival candidates must distinguish themselves* (A2). *That may be achieved with the use of political messages expressed in the framework of the political campaign dis-*



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course (A3). The distinction may be made on the basis of *two criteria oscillating within the political discourse* (A5). The first is *the character* of a candidate and the second *the policy* he pursues. The functional theory reduces a notion of character to the characteristics of the candidates and divides them into three subforms: personal qualities (e.g. intelligence, sincerity, credibility), leadership ability (achieved during fulfilling the public functions, i.e. negotiation and goal achieving skills), values/ideals (principles determining one's behavior, i.e. patriotism, fairness, dignity). The policy is yet defined within authority categories including referred problems and may be similarly divided into three subforms. The first are accomplishments that are the past deeds of the candidate taken up while fulfilling certain functions. The next category are *future plans* containing specific solutions to intractable issues. The latter are *general objectives* – usually of indisputable character and reduced to declarations of improvement of the current situation but failing to explain how those may be achieved. It is worth emphasizing that the candidates characteristics are not distinct today. When aim at winning a public opinion they put their manifesto within a mainstream reflecting their opinions on certain issues. There exists also a common agreement on leadership expected qualities. After making a decision on traits in order to distinguish himself from the opponents, the candidate needs to transmit the information to the voters. In that matter he cannot rely only on the media and thus expresses his own messages which are then sent to the public opinion with the use of media. It is an obvious fact that the candidates attempt to present themselves in the best light possible and discredit their political opponents at the same time. The messages they express are of functional nature (A4) what basically means to achieve main objective that is to create their advantage over the other competition participants. That may be achieved using the messages containing *acclaims*, *attacks* and *defences* expressed in two possible topics: policy and character. Within the confines of the functional theory *acclaims* are defined as positive statements on candidate virtues and accomplishments, possible benefits of his election and intended post, etc. In a word, the acclaims refer mostly to the qualities preferable by the voters. On the contrary, attacks focus on the negative traits of the opponents and stresses those which may discourage voters. *Defence* is considered as a response to the attack and is limited to negation or refutation of attack from opponents.

On the basis of those presumptions, the functional theory formulates six hypotheses determining empirical research:

H1. Acclaims will be the most frequent function and defences the least common function

The premise derives from a cost-benefit view resulting from specific types of expressions articulated by political actors and distinguished as regards a functional criterion. Acclaims demonstrating positive traits of the candidate are the only of solely positive effects. Attacks, despite their effectiveness, may result in a boomer-



ang effect owing to the fact that most voters dislike mudslinging and dirty policy. An efficient attack must be veracious and thus its application is considerably limited. Defence has since most side-effects. First, it requires not only attack identification but its resource as well. Second, a defending candidate is perceived as more reactive than one who initiates a political game on the election market. Third, defensive statements remind voters of a candidate potential weakness.

H2. Policy will be more common than character

The hypothesis formulated on the basis of analysis of opinion poll results indicates that policy-referred issues influence the public opinion more than contenders' personal qualities.

H3. The incumbent party candidate will acclaim more, and attack less, than the challenger

The hypothesis is based on an assumption of differences in a discourse between incumbents (having specific political past including positive and negative accomplishments resulting from their public function) and challengers who aspire for an office for the first time. The former, owing to the fact of having responsibility for post functioning, will emphasize positive aspects of the functioning (they acclaim their own actions and character). The latter will attack even slightest deficiency or unrealistic promises more frequently (they attack opponents' actions and character). Limited possibilities of attacks from the incumbents results from lack of activities within the political area demonstrated by the challengers.

H4. The incumbent party candidate will use past deeds more for acclaims, and less for attacks, than the challenger

The presumption derives directly from the previous hypothesis and represents its detailed version with regard to the policy division into three subforms as discussed above. In a word, incumbents' past deeds are used rather for acclaims while challengers use them for attacks. Incumbents have a record in the office sought (challengers may have records in other offices). The incumbents' record is a source for acclaims by the incumbent and for attacks by challengers.

H5. General goals will be used more frequently to acclaim than to attack
and

H6. Ideals will be used more frequently to acclaim than to attack

These hypotheses are constructed on the basis of two subcategories previously distinguished within the policy and character. It is beyond doubt that it is easier to pray general goals, e.g. of more jobs or greater citizen security, than to attack them. Similarly, it is easier to praise values/ideals, e.g. equality and justice, than to question them.



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Apart from research hypothesis, the functional theory poses two research questions:

Q1. What are the proportions of the three forms of policy?

Refers to quantity relations between the subcategories within policy area, i.e. past deeds, future plans and general goals. These proportions characterize the political discourse considerably and thus define its focus on past or future, specific solutions or blur visions of the current situation improvement.

Q2. What are the proportions of the three forms of character?

Similarly, the subcategories of character may be analyzed. The discourse tends to focus on personal qualities, leadership skills or values/ideals and thus determines a campaign nature.

PRACTICAL METHOD APPLICATION

Research in the U.S. and Israel

Body of evidence. The functional theory has been applied in analyzing various messages allocated within political campaign discourse. It has been used so far to test television and radio campaign spots, political debates, leaders' speeches, television talk-shows participated by various politicians.³ Owing to the fact that the theory derives from the American background, most of the empirical research was carried out in the U.S. The research in other countries has failed to be taken up or has just been initiated (Israel). Although the functional theory may be applied to most of messages expressed by rival candidates, the research has focused on political debates between candidates for state leaders (presidents, prime ministers, chancellors).⁴ W.L. Benoit argues that several questions support analysis of such a message type. First, political debates are optimal way to reach many voters as proved by television rating polls. Second, the debates are longer than campaign spots providing an extended opportunity to learn about candidates. Third, they enable voters to compare candidates as they discuss the same topics. Fourth, contrary to political campaign spots, they are not completely controlled by politicians who may encounter unanticipated questions or unexpected criticism from an opponent. Fifth, the direct confrontation provides candidates an opportunity to correct misstatements. Altogether, these factors mean that leaders' political debates are clearly worry of empirical research.

Research method. Similar research procedures and operationalization were employed in the study both in the U.S. and Israel to achieve comparable measures on

³ American research supervised by W.L. Benoit.

⁴ American research supervised by W.L. Benoit included all president debates (debate in 1960 and from 1976 to 2004). Israeli research was supervised by T. Sheaffer at Hebrew University in Jerusalem on the basis of analyzed five Israeli Prime Minister debates (1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 1999).



the international level of research.⁵ In both countries, local intercoders were employed to refute accusation on ignorance of local realities or policy nuances. The investigation was performed on several levels. First, each debate was grouped on the basis of distinguished themes, where the latter was understood as a single assertion on a subject. Due to thematic categorization, assertions length might vary, e.g. when a single or several sentences working together were considered one theme. Subsequently, distinguished themes were categorized by discourse function. Three categories discussed above were employed, which include acclaims, attacks and defenses. Then particular questions referring to certain topic were identified as policy or character category. Next, the forms of policy or character were recorded within particular subforms. The hypotheses defined above were verified on the basis of applied code key.

Research results. This part of the paper demonstrates only results of comparative studies by American and Israeli scholars while detailed data containing author's investigation to obtain a comparative analysis are to be presented in the following section. The study revealed mostly similarities and slight dissimilarities between the U.S. and Israel. In both countries, the most common were acclaims ahead of attack and less frequent defenses. Inconsiderable differences were noted merely in their frequency (H1 verified positively). Policy was addressed more frequently than character in both countries (H2 verified positively). Both in the U.S. and Israel incumbent candidates acclaimed more, attacked less and defended more often than challengers (H3 verified positively). Again, in the context of past deeds, incumbents acclaimed more, attacked less by contrast than challengers (H4 verified positively). General goals were used both in the U.S. and Israel by rival leaders to acclaim (H5 verified positively). The sixth hypothesis presuming the use of values/ideals for acclaims could not be confirmed due to the fact that Israeli leaders used them sporadically (only two instances of ideals), which made statistics analysis impossible. Trying to answer the research questions, it was noted that past deeds were discussed in both countries while in Israel future plans were a significant aspect as well (Q1). The investigation revealed a difference: in Israel values/ideals were recalled extremely seldom while leadership skills were apparently of more significance (Q2). According to researchers' opinion, the results support the hypothesis on discourse standardization beyond borders.

THEORY VERIFICATION ON POLISH POLITICAL STAGE

Sample of text. Leaders debates during the parliamentary campaign in 2007 were the sample for the study.⁶ Weakness of the study results, on the one hand, from only

⁵ Those are: training of research teams, unified code categories, one common code book.

⁶ Three debated were investigated: Kaczyński – Kwaśniewski (1.10.2007), Kaczyński – Tusk (12.10.2007), Kwaśniewski – Tusk (15.10.2007).



single campaign providing the body of evidence, and, on the other, the analysis of the campaign discourse limited to three leaders. The latter resulted from breaking regulations on equal media access during the campaign and thus effected in participation in political debates only representatives of the most powerful parties. Problem we met during the research referred to an ambiguous categorization of Polish political leaders into incumbents and challengers. If it was possible in case of Kaczyński (incumbent) or Tusk (challenger), a dilemma arose in case of Kwaśniewski. The latter was since only a label of a political formation and had had former presidential experience. Finally he has been defined as a challenger what might have influenced obtained results. Due to that fact, the results are presented taking that issue into consideration.

Research method. The weakness of the analysis results from lack of access to the same operationalizations the American and Israeli researchers applied. Thus, we applied our own research method based on presumed premises and procedures. The number of intercoders was a weak point of the study: American and Israeli investigations involved huge research teams while ours comprised only of the authors. To avoid subjective opinions, the data were coded separately and then the results were compared and verified. If discrepancies occurred, a common version was formulated. Content analysis based on a categorization code comprised of 26 questions was employed as a research method. First, each debate was unitized into sequences distinguished on a sender criterion (Kaczyński, Kwaśniewski, Tusk) and assertion themes. Thereby the method of message thematizing previously employed by Americans has been applied into our studies. A detailed theme classification was performed within general categories using both policy (economy, education, taxes, etc.) and character issues (intelligence, knowledge of current affairs, credibility, abrasiveness, negotiation and goal achieving skills). Similarly as in American study, thematic sequences varied in their length resulting in their different number in messages by particular candidates and analyzed debates. The number of analyzed thematic sequences is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. The number of analyzed thematic sequences

	Kaczyński	Kwaśniewski	Tusk	Total
Debate 1	64	65	–	129
Debate 2	71	–	59	130
Debate 3	–	77	68	145
Total	135	142	127	404

Source: authors.

Next, the distinguished thematic sequences were analyzed. That aimed firstly at defining the discourse function and thus each thematic sequence was noted as ac-



claim, attack or defence. Secondly, each general message was analyzed and attributed to one of the two possible topics: policy or character. Within the confines of general categories (policy versus character) we attributed distinguished units to defined sub-forms. In the field of policy there were accomplishments, future plans and general goals; while character included personal qualities, leadership skills, values/ideals enabling identification of discourse function in particular subcategories.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (THE U.S., ISRAEL, POLAND)

Statement “many similarities, few differences” expressed on the basis of comparative analysis of American and Israeli data, we decided to modify into “many similarities, considerable differences” between the U.S., Israel and Poland. The results are to be presented compared with American and Israeli data.

H1 predicted that *Acclaims would be the most common function followed by attacks and defences*. The hypothesis has been verified positively in the U.S. and Israel where acclaims dominated analyzed themes (57% the U.S., 50% Israel). Attacks were rarer than acclaims (44% the U.S., 38% Israel) but more frequent than defences (8% the U.S., 12% Israel). In those two countries, only inconsiderable differences in a frequency of particular discourse functions application were noticed. In Poland, however, attacks were the most common discourse function (58%), followed by acclaims (32%) and the fewest defences (10%). An inverse proportion of acclaims and attacks in Polish debates has been noticed although defences were noticed on the same level in two remaining countries.⁷ The negative H1 verification of Polish data influences results of a further analysis considerably. Both in the U.S. and Israel leaders discourse oscillates around a positive functions represented by acclaims. In Poland, we are dealing with a negative function reflected in attack statements domination.

H2. As predicted by H2, *policy was more common than character* in all three countries. We are thereby dealing with positive verification in American (77% to 23%), Israeli (75% to 25%) and Polish (66% to 34%) debates. Despite the positive verification of the hypothesis in Polish political debates, character has been considered of a greater importance than in two remaining countries. While observing topic sequences on the basis of a sender criterion, an interesting thing has been revealed: candidates experienced in office more frequently refer to policy than inexperienced ones.⁸ Therefore, we decided to formulate our own hypothesis presuming that policy is addressed more frequently by incumbents than challengers.

⁷ In this context, attacks were analyzed more precisely. That proved 54% attacks were inflicted upon a debate opponent, 4% upon an opponent who did not participate in a debate, which made defence impossible.

⁸ Percentage of policy topics expressed by Polish leaders: Kaczyński – 72%, Kwaśniewski – 67%, Tusk – 57%.



H3. *Predicted that incumbent candidates acclaimed more, attacked less, and defended more than challengers.* Tripartite hypothesis has been positively verified in each of studied countries. Research results on Polish leaders debates are to be presented in two ways, owing to ambiguous classification of Kwaśniewski to incumbent/challenger category. First, it is demonstrated in accordance with attributed incumbent label and second one is based on distinguishing from candidates attributed to that group. Incumbents indeed acclaim more than challengers: in the U.S. (64% to 51%), Israel (55% to 46%) and Poland (37% to 30%). However, it has been noticed that acclaims both from incumbents and challengers in Polish debates are of lower level than in two remaining countries what is proved by H1. Second part of the hypothesis has been verified as positive as well. Incumbents indeed attack less than challengers: in the U.S. (25% to 44%), Israel (29% to 46%) and Poland (52% to 60%). Results of Polish debates deserve our attention demonstrating a higher percentage of defences both from incumbents and challengers than in the U.S. and Israel. Incumbents defence more often: the U.S. (12 to 6%), Israel (16 to 8%) and Poland (11 to 10%), however the latter case demonstrates only a minimal difference. The high occurrence of challengers' defences in Poland may be explained in two ways. First, it results from more frequent attacks from incumbents constraining more frequent defences from challengers. Second and more crucial issue results from attributing Kwaśniewski to challengers (therefore, literally, he was neither a challenger nor an incumbent). Thus, in Table 3 messages by candidates we attributed to challengers were distinguished. Noticeably, experienced Kwaśniewski's discourse was rather of incumbent character, and therefore he increased both challengers' acclaim and defence percentage but lowered their attacks.

Table 3. Functions of themes contrasted of incumbents and challengers in Polish prime ministerial debates (in %)

	Acclaims	Attacks	Defences
Incumbents	37	52	11
Challengers total	30	60	10
<i>Kwaśniewski</i>	36	49	15
<i>Tusk</i>	22	73	5

Source: authors.

H4. *The incumbent party candidate will use past deeds more for acclaims, and less for attacks, than the challenger.* H4, which is a more detailed version of H3, has been verified as positive in all analyzed countries. In the U.S. (72% to 18%), Israel (72% to 31%) and in Poland (53% to 26%) incumbents acclaimed more often than challengers on past deeds. Past deeds were less used by incumbents than challengers to attack: the U.S. (28% to 82%), Israel (28% to 69%), Poland (47% to 74%). In case of



Polish debates lower acclaims frequency and higher percentage of attacks in incumbents discourse compared with two remaining countries were revealed. Moreover, due to Kwaśniewski's previous presidential experiences, we decided to present research results in detail and compared with other candidates attributed to that group.

In case of Kwaśniewski, it is plain that past deeds are used rather to attack (43% to 57%) than acclaim while Tusk tends to acclaim than attack (5 to 95%). The latter has been undoubtedly attributed as challenger. Thereby, Kwaśniewski again increased the acclaim and lowered attack percentage in challenger group (see Table 4).

Table 4. Functions of themes on past deeds contrasted of incumbents and challengers in Polish prime ministerial debates (in %)

	Acclaims	Attacks
Incumbents	53	47
Challengers	26	74
<i>Kwaśniewski</i>	43	57
<i>Tusk</i>	5	95

Source: authors.

H5. *Anticipated that general goals would be used more to acclaim than attack* has been verified as positive on the basis of investigation performed in all countries under discussion. General goals are indeed used to acclaim as demonstrated by research in the U.S. (85% to 15%), Israel (73% to 27%) and Poland (98% to 2%). In Poland, we may notice a higher level of acclaims on past deeds what shows that biased changes are essential and rather indisputable.

H6. *Ideals would be used more to acclaim than attack.* A verification of H6 was possible only on American and Polish data, while in Israeli debates value issues were quite disregarded by participating leaders. In Israel, there were only two instances which were too few for statistical analysis. In American and Polish studies the hypothesis was proved as positive, both in the U.S. (68% to 32%) and Poland (64% to 36%), because values were used more often to acclaim than attack. Moreover, debates in both countries revealed only small differences in their frequency.

Q1. *What are the proportions of the three forms of policy?*

Trying to answer the first research question, one may conclude that in each discussed country the analyzed proportions vary. In all of them past deeds dominate, however, their frequency differs: the U.S. (47%), Israel (49%) and Poland (69%). In the U.S. past deeds are followed by general goals (32%) while future plans are discussed the most rarely (21%). That proves the fact that discussions focus more often



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on necessary directions changes rather than on detailed solutions and procedures. The situation seems to be inversed in Israel and Poland where past deeds are followed by future plans (respectively: Israel 37%, Poland 18%) while general goals are the least frequent (Israel 14%, Poland 13%). Focusing on Polish instance we may notice that accomplishments are on a considerably higher level than in remaining countries what confirms that Polish discourse refers to the past. That may be supported by the fact that two remaining future-referred categories are more rare than in other countries.

Q2. What are the proportions of the three forms of character?

Concerning research results on proportion between three character subforms, a similarity between American presidential debates and Polish parliament debates may be observed. The proportions of particular subcategories demonstrate a similar level. In both countries personal qualities prevailed (40% the U.S., 42% Poland), followed by values (34% the U.S., 30% Poland) and leadership ability (25% the U.S., 28% Poland) confirming that candidates' personal virtues and professed ideals influence the image they create. In those two countries, skills obtained during public office experience are in the third place. The situation is different in Israel where the discourse oscillates around leadership skills (49%) and personal qualities (48%) while candidates' professed values are taken up sporadically (4%).

CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis demonstrated many similarities and considerable differences between American, Israeli and Polish political debates. In case of the U.S. and Israel we were dealing with positive verification of all the research hypotheses while negative verification of the H1 in Poland influencing results of further study is remarkable. Inversed proportions of acclaims and attacks demonstrated by Polish leaders implicate lower occurrence of acclaims and more frequent attacks (both from incumbents and challengers) as compared with other countries. We must stress that challengers would attack more and acclaim less if the results were not modified owing to inclusion to this group Kwaśniewski – more experienced in presidential office. Thus we may conclude, the Polish leaders' discourse is considerably more aggressive than that in two remaining countries. While investigating Polish political debates we noticed a significant role of journalists whose questions determined debates directions and influenced aggression and viciousness level. We regard the weakness of the functional theory of the political discourse as neglected and argue that it may potentially be an element of the empirical research. Polish leaders' discourse appears to be more aggressive, which partly results from candidates themselves, who use the attacks as an effective way to create their own domination against their opponents, and partly from journalists who attempt to increase message attractiveness. Despite focusing on political topics in Polish leaders' dis-



course, character is of greater importance than in other countries. When analyzing statements by various candidates, we noticed an interesting dependence: candidates more experienced in office refer more frequently to policy while, on the contrary, challengers focus rather on character. It may be interesting to verify that hypothesis on American and Israeli studies. We also notice that if general goals are actually undisputable in Poland, resulting in considerably higher level of acclaims demonstrated in that context, values acclaim is yet much lower. Thus, in Poland, there is an agreement on the direction of the changes, while issues on values and ideals taken into consideration are more disputable (example: liberalism in Kaczyński's and Tusk's discourse). Despite these controversies, these are the values and personal qualities which are basic criteria in character evaluation. We notice that leadership skills obtained within the confines of political functions are in Poland of less significance, which is probably associated with communism heritage and an attempt of denying that experience. The discourse under discussion focuses on past deeds, the future is rarely addressed in Poland. Concluding, despite considerable differences demonstrated by comparative analysis we may notice numerous similarities and principles in leaders' discourse in all studied countries. Therefore, despite considerable differences we tend to confirm the opinion that the discourse standardization goes beyond the borders. The differences we have revealed are of journalists' and candidates' responsibility. The first ones determine aggressive discussion styles, while the latter ones are still not experienced enough in political games. On the other hand, the differences may result from a specific timespan (aggressive political fight and attempt of depreciation of ruling elites) and still unstable Polish democracy.

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