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‘The People behind the Voices’ – Portraits of Politicians.
A Media Genre under Scrutiny

1. Political discourse in the media: political voices and private images

Politics as a central social sub-system mainly represents a set of communicative games acted out to varying degrees of publicity and transparency. They invariably involve a number of players who interact in multiple ways: politicians in their institutional frameworks (parties, government, and parliament), social structures, their agents and the political realities they create, the public and the media. Most steps in those communicative games are linguistic in nature in that they entail the use of language to strategic ends, produce and (re-)use texts and (re-)create, process and ultimately alter the political discourse circulating in society.

What has come to be called political linguistics (for succinct surveys cf. Kilian: 1994; Burkhardt: 1996) reflects the centrality of language in politics and demonstrates the diversity of linguistic issues involved. Political language, though, remains an ambiguous term here as it can refer to various functional registers of language use, as Burkhardt (1996, 79ff.) points out. Not surprisingly, the use of language by politicians inside political institutions and bodies, as in parliamentary debate or on party conferences, has perhaps attracted the most attention from linguists, for this is where the terminology of politics is coined. Alongside this internally used kind of political language there is also the language of politicians directed at the public in the form of speeches, pamphlets, election campaigns etc.¹ This domain’s communicative output then forms the basis for what could be called everyday talk about politics engaged in by the layman (initiated to varying degrees) in private or semi-public settings. Mediating between these two broad areas of political language (the language of politics and politicians’ language vs. talking about politics) is the whole array of

¹ The distinction between inward-bound and outward-bound political discourse corresponds to what in political science is termed ‘making politics/policies’ (Politikherstellung; cf. Sarcinelli: 1994) or ‘political decision making’ (Politischer Entscheidungsprozess; cf. Edelman: 1990) on the one hand and ‘presenting politics’ (Darstellungspraktik; cf. Sarcinelli: 1994) or ‘political ritual’ (Politikritual; cf. Edelman: 1990) on the other.
mass media institutions and their agents (i.e. journalists) that process and reflect both the political discourse initiated by politicians and their institutions as well as the discourse about politics generated by the public.

In the present study I want to take a look at how newspapers as a core element of the daily media contribute to political discourse through a special kind of journalistic genre, namely portraits or profiles of politicians. My motivation for following this hitherto neglected line of research is the simple observation that politics presents itself to the public mainly via politicians’ statements on issues of general interest reported and interpreted in various media genres. Thus in printed media politicians are reduced to impersonal voices, loudspeakers for a political cause, with the ensuing effect that the public’s perception of politics is often one of a depersonalised, mechanical system – a game that few only care to see through. While it is true that chat shows (cf. Holly/Kühn/Püschel: 1986; 1989) and broadcasts of political events among others also allow the public a glimpse of the persona, their appearance, their manner of talk and their body language, newspapers command few means to flesh out the characters behind the voices.

Media recipients, however, have a vested interest in what has come to be called the ‘personalization of politics’ as a focus on the people behind political agendas which – according to Sarcinelli (1987, 160-161) – fulfill three major functions for them. Firstly, political matters become less complex and more transparent – their comprehensibility thus increases. Secondly, political issues are associatively tied to certain politicians and thus entrenched in the political consciousness. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, personalization promotes an affective attachment of citizens to individual political issues and also a more positive attitude towards politics as a whole. In a similar vein, Edelman (1990, 4ff) argues convincingly that the images of politicians and their political views construed in the media gain in importance as the ability of the public to make sense of political decision making itself decreases owing to an ever mounting complexity of the issues involved. It would be no exaggeration then to generalize that the politics of communication (cf. Kommunikationspolitik in Münch: 1993 or Symbolische Politik in Beyme: 1994) has come to dominate politics proper (cf. Sachpolitik in Münch: 1993 or Entscheidungspolitik in Beyme: 1994) within the spectrum of the media’s coverage of politics. In the final analysis politics thus turns into a ‘spectator sport’ (Edelman: 1985, 5) and the media’s art of political entertainment consists in the fabrication and manipulation of images.

The trend towards personalization is facilitated by the interplay between the three agents of political discourse: politics/politicians, mass media and the public (Bußkamp: 2002, 41). For political parties, especially during election campaigns, personalizing is a strategy aimed at epitomizing their political views in the idealized image of an individual. The media pursue personalization knowing that the news value of reported events increases the more it can be tied to individual people (Schenk: 1998, 698). Finally, as outlined above, the public feels a need to perceive of political matters as mediated through or tied to concrete people as this strategy of perception is obviously conducive to understanding complex issues. A substantial body of research in communication studies (for a survey cf. Bußkamp: 2002, 43ff) has demonstrated that personalizing strategies work successfully in the practice of political communication, be this as a media presentation strategy, a mode of political perception or a technique of political self-presentation.

In what follows I seek to characterize politicians’ portraits or profiles as a media strategy contributing to the personalization of political discourse in newspapers. Based on the linguistic analysis of 40 portraits sampled from both British and German daily newspapers two main lines of enquiry will be pursued here. Firstly, I shall explore the textual makeup of politicians’ portraits thus filling a gap in the text-linguistic study of newspaper genres. My description follows standard procedures and criteria of newspaper genre analysis (Androustopoulos: 2002) and covers such important aspects as thematic and illocutionary text structure, subtext-types, text design and rhetorical strategies. Secondly, from a cognitive-semantic vantage point, I aim to isolate, order and illustrate intrinsic aspects of a politician’s personality which journalists can harness in the linguistic composition of an individual image.

2. Portraits of politicians – a brief genre characteristics

Interestingly, whereas most newspaper genres are fairly well researched (Pürrer: 1991; Mast: 2000; Häusermann: 2001), linguistic accounts of portraits of politicians or other public figures (managers, artists, entertainers etc.) are few and far between. This may have to do with their relative scarcity in newspapers compared with other popular genres such as news, reports or features, but also compared to their frequency in other media like television or radio. It may, however, also be connected to their hybrid character. In what follows I will run through some major criteria of text analysis in order to pinpoint essential genre

2 Two standard volumes on journalistic texts (Pürrer: 1991, 230-231; Mast: 2000, 264ff.) treat the portrait as a less important media genre and agree on the ‘difficult’, but high-impact qualities of portraits. They also stress their literary character. Other rather linguistically oriented accounts of newspaper texts either choose to completely ignore the portrait (Läger: 1995; Bucher: 1986) or have little substantial to say about it (Straßer: 2000, 81ff).
indicators of portraits or profiles which can facilitate their easy recognition as they are prototypical of the text type.

More often than not portraits are based on interviews, but also on some more or less intimate contact of the author/journalist with the person portrayed.\(^3\) It is, therefore, not surprising that portraits are in some way close to the genre of interview, which is among other things reflected in the relatively high rate of direct speech.\(^4\) In as much as portraits also relate the contexts in which politicians act and the individual aura they exude, the linguistic act of portraying also bears resemblance to the genre of detailed personal reports. Another genre parallel points to commentaries, critiques and essays as portraits display a strong inclination towards evaluation and often also weigh the pros and cons of a character’s traits and their contribution to political success. This kind of formal intertextuality is supplemented by entrenched thematic ties between portraits and news reporting. Usually politicians are portrayed in newspapers when they have in some way hit the headlines or come to dominate media discourse. This may be the case with politicians who have taken bold political steps (e.g. leading a nation to war; cf. TM 03/05/03 – TB), have been nominated for an important office or are running as candidates in a campaign (cf. DT 30/10/03 – MH; G 30/10/03 – MH, W 06/07/01 – ES), or whose responsibilities have become the subject of public debate due to some past or forthcoming event (cf. W 02/11/01 – GB, W 30/11/01 – AM, W 12/01/01 – JF). Media recipients will, therefore, command basic knowledge about the person portrayed and the political issues connected with it which they have gained from collateral texts in the same medium and which they bring to bear on the understanding of the portrait. The genre of portraits can thus ideally fulfil the function of providing background information and explaining the driving forces behind politics often ascribed to newspapers in the competition of rival mass media. While providing reliable facts about political figures, portraits are clearly an ‘opinion-oriented genre’ as they assess the performance of politicians and cannot but present them in some kind of biased light.

Besides interviewing or accompanying the person to be portrayed journalists also sift through and select from all sorts of available information about the subjects of their portraits: utterances from chat show appearances, biography,

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\(^3\) Haller (2001, 172 and 354) argues that portraits can be regarded as a sub-type of the interview or, more precisely, as a reporting form of presenting an interview. I believe this to be an unjustified simplification.

\(^4\) My text corpus (see Bibliography) corroborates evidence that English portraits (cf. e.g. GW 28/06/03 – HC; G2 30/10/03 – MA; G 01/11/03 – RC) prefer a consistent question-answer structure, a feature that may be linked to a stronger and longer tradition of investigative journalism in Britain. German portraits use the interview technique as one device among many so that direct speech is less frequent.

previous press reports or statements about the politician by colleagues, friends or opponents, etc. Portraits, therefore, represent a kind of recycling platform for text fragments of earlier political discourses, which is shaped by both journalists’ watchdog role (Hoffmann: 1999, 27), i.e. their obligation to compose an ‘objective’ account, as well as by their ideological bias (Hoffmann: 1999, 30ff.). Moreover, in composing portraits, the authors are guided simultaneously by an adherence to editorial or media conventions concerning both form and style and also by a determination (common to all other opinion-oriented newspaper genres) to express themselves by creating their own rhetorical strategies and idiosyncratic approach to the task.

Portraits display a number of formal text design properties which act as obvious genre indicators to the cursory reader of a newspaper. First of all the texts are frequently labelled by the explicit genre classification such as portrait or profile. In addition portraits of politicians are invariably placed in the politics section of newspapers, which makes them easily retrievable. Constant design elements in portraits are pictures of the person portrayed (usually replete with visual communication strategies such as distance, angle, framing etc.; cf. Sturken/Cartwright: 2001), separate text boxes with vita, short biographical details or lists of personal friends and enemies, etc.

As journalists absorb so much diverse information prior to writing their texts and as the political backgrounds against which people are portrayed differ so much, portraits demonstrate a great number and variety of topics and quite a varied thematic structure. Yet despite the liberty authors are allowed to take in composing portraits, some genre conventions have developed with respect to thematic and illocutionary structure. I propose that from the numerous and manifold topics possible in portraits the following combinations of illocutions and generalised topics can be abstracted and form a kind of basic textual framework.

i. REPORT biographical details
ii. DESCRIBE working and private environment
iii. EXPLAIN the political situation/context in which the politician acts
iv. DESCRIBE and EVALUATE traits of character
v. OUTLINE politician’s current standing
vi. PREDICT future career and likelihood of political survival

Although these steps may be arranged almost at random or be collapsed into one another and may be realized by a welter of rhetorical strategies (cf. 4.), some principles of text structuring are quite apparent from my corpus observations. One logical design would be to arrange the textual information along a temporal axis; normally this is done by sequencing topics in a present-past-future order. Another organizing principle that rather applies to the sequence of illocutions
takes description as the starting point, then goes on to evaluate the person portrayed and finally makes some predictions about the politician's future based on the professional and private images outlined before. Frequently, this tripartite structure has a frame at the beginning and end, which may provide salient information about the person portrayed suitable for a semantic or meta-communicative game. The topics covered in portraits need to be instrumental in 'painting' a comprehensive picture of the personality at issue. Their selection is only constrained by our cognitive frame of individual characters (cf. 3.). Two very general distinctions may be helpful here. Firstly, information about an individual person can either relate to his/her professional or private image, overlap being probable. Secondly, topics either serve to build an image as perceived or stage-managed by the person portrayed himself/herself (Selbstwahrnehmung) or an image as perceived by related people and detached observers (Fremdwahrnehmung).

If a genre permits a large spectrum of variety both in terms of topic and structure as well as in terms of linguistic and rhetorical means, chances are the genre develops a number of relatively distinct sub-text types. This is common for quite a few media genres (such as commentary, report or news). I believe that the corpus investigated here allows for the distinction of three major, mainly thematically conditioned sub-genres of portraits.

i. Interview-centred portrait: mainly direct speech from the person portrayed

ii. Biography-centred portrait: mainly biographical details (vita, achievements, views)

iii. Character-/Atmosphere-centred portrait: mainly character traits and private details

The unifying property of all possible portraits certainly lies in their intention or textual function. They aim at sketching out a comprehensive picture of a politician which can help the interested reader in forming an individual view of politics and in critically assessing key political figures. Table 1 serves to summarise and order the major genre characteristics discussed above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-writing activities</th>
<th>Interviewing, accompanying, selecting information from various sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text intention</td>
<td>Sketch out full politician's image, enable critical evaluation of backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality</td>
<td>Formal: interview, commentary, critique, essay, thematic: news reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer's perspective</td>
<td>Between seemingly objective (watchdog) and ideological bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text design</td>
<td>Explicit genre labels (portrait, profile), picture of person portrayed, vita etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Professional/private image as perceived by person portrayed and by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illocutions</td>
<td>Report, describe, explain, evaluate, outline, predict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Temporal (present-past-future) or illocutionary logic (describe-assess-predict)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-text types</td>
<td>Interview-centred, biography-centred, character/atmosphere-centred</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1: Genre characteristics of politicians' portraits

3. Conceptual structure of a politician's personality

In this section I want to take a closer look at the nature of possible topics in politicians' portraits. The rationale behind this approach is the belief that writing a portrait crucially involves sifting through facets of an individual personality with the aim of selecting and weighting against one another all those aspects that can effectively contribute towards outlining both a professional and private image of the person portrayed. While the final choice of topics will be influenced by a number of factors (e.g. available information, news value, salience, suitability for evaluation etc.), it is ultimately our cognitive concept of a politician's personality and its constitutive elements that determine and guide thematic control. Text producers of portraits and their recipients alike command a common frame of knowledge which contains all semantic categories and criteria utilizable in the depiction, characterization and assessment of a personality. In what follows I seek to outline this kind of conceptual structure, its elements and their interrelations and illustrate facets of political personalities using text fragments from my corpus. My ultimate aim in this is to demonstrate what effects various personal aspects can produce and why or how they are produced and also to assess their suitability for the composition of portraits. While this section, then, answers the question of what can enter into a portrait,
the next section (cf. 4.) will ask how portraits are linguistically crafted by illustrating and explaining some of their central rhetorical strategies.

Figure 1: Elements of the conceptual frame ‘personality’

Figure 1 surveys essential components of an individual’s personality and thus indicates the breadth of thematic scope possible. The eight elements of the concept ‘personality’ can be conceived of as marking three larger areas. The first would be constituted by the physical side of a person, his/her body and the appearance it generates in public, including facial expressions, gestures, posture, dress, etc. A second conceptual area consists of all the personal activities, processes and states afforded by the specific nature of the individual and forming perceivable patterns or habits. Character traits, interests, achievements and views, working habits and communicative peculiarities belong in this area. A third conceptual area comprises the context, i.e. the local and social backdrop in which people act and subsist. Such contextual or situational features are partly created and shaped by the individuals themselves and thus reflect their personalities, for in part they are momentarily beyond people’s control. Contexts fall into working and private environment. Some of the conceptual facets of personalities such as communication, interests, achievements, etc. also allow for a division into private and public spheres or role-inherent vs. role-independent properties. This reflects the fact that portraits may to varying degrees focus on either the political person as the agent of some political institution or the private person. The next paragraphs will be devoted to describing the eight elements of an individual’s personality (in clockwise order; cf. Figure 1) and their uses in portraying politicians.

Information about the bodily appearance of politicians is often woven into portraits as it attests to the authenticity of the description and decreases the distance between the reader and the person portrayed. Giving details about facial expressions, postures or styles of movement allows every journalist to prepare to get behind the official masks of the depersonalised voices. As it were, an emphasis on the body acts as a literal personalisation device. Frequently the description of looks, clothes and appearances also helps to realise a narrative element in the portraits as they are often scenic and contribute to moving the story and building textual structure. As anything visible can also be perceived as an index of something else, information about the look of politicians is often interpreted by journalists as pointing to character traits, momentary moods or changes in personal views.

Ihr Genscher-Gesicht. Mundwinkelfalten im Sturzflug, Pummelbäckchen schlaff wie aufgewärmte Apfelsäcke. (W 06/04/01 – AM)

Her hair is famously blond, and she wears a large slice band. The latter has been endlessly discussed by commentators and, she says, “is there for a very practical reason that I’m growing the darn thing. I’m trying to keep the fringe back”. (G 03/11/03 – AW)

Zwickel ist müde. Langsam reibt er sich mit Daumen und Zeigefinger fest über beide Augenbrauen, als wolle er die Müdigkeit wegdrücken und seine Gedanken sammeln. (W 31/08/01 – KZ)

According to Spranz-Fogassy (2002, 22-23) communicative skills and habits form a core element of leading public figures’ personalities, because their success and survival crucially depend on them. Aspects of communication stand midway between politicians as voices and politicians as figures in flesh and blood as descriptions of communicative habits can refer both to how things are said and what is said. This central portrait topic then falls into a number of sub-topics, e.g. paraverbal properties (voice qualities, accent/dialect etc.), linguistic style (choice of words), negotiating skills, telephone skills/habits, media performance in general, and famous or notorious key utterances, all of which form the communicative profile of the person portrayed. The effect of such

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5 This terminological distinction derives from Lass (1995), who differentiates personal properties along the dichotomy of rollennah and rollenfern, the former denoting association with some public office and the latter association with a private or family role.
descriptions is an extension of the efforts by the writer to get closer to the person and also a contribution to outlining political views and character traits of the person portrayed. In total a communicative profile indicates the kind of social qualities a politician commands.

The penal slogan most commonly associated with Mr. Howard is “prison works”. (DT 30/10/03 – MH)

Whenever he is firmly in control or is gently keeping a friendship warm, he has his feet up on the desk. If he has his head lunched forward, he is making a case that his hearer does not want to hear. (TM 03/05/03 – TB, 23)

[...] mit seinem rollenden R, seinem lang gestreckten Zungen-L, verwechselt die harten mit den weichen Konsonanten [...] . (W 02/11/01 – GB)

Faced with a TV anchor, she doesn’t sit still or polite. She interrupts constantly, talking over her hosts, denying them the chance to butt into her own stream of arguments. Some are reduced to blubbery jelly. (GW 17/05/03 – AC, 17)

Gysi, Wunder der Beredsamkeit. Man hört den Mann vor lauter Sätzen nicht. (W 14/12/01 – GG)

Working habits are not as frequently commented on as are communicative properties, yet they play their part in forming a complete picture of a personality. Usually portrait writers describe daily routines, the schedule of appointments, but also styles of work, typical approaches to tasks and the philosophies behind them. Ultimately, these fragments of information contribute to illustrating traits of character and sketch out the contexts in which the people portrayed act and perform.

Er ist der Mann mit dem Füller, der Mann mit den Anschlussterminen, der nicht über seine Abende verfügen kann [...] . (W 20/04/04 – JNR)

Weil er zugehört und sich im eigenen Laden besser auskennt als die Vorgänger [...] . Wer die Bahn oben verstehen will, der muss unten anfangen. Sein Credo: ‘Je mehr man aufsaugt, umso besser ist man’. (W 09/03/01 – HM)

As something very palpable, concrete and visible, places of work play a crucial role in portraying people and can occasionally occupy quite some textual space. Aspects of the working environment act as indices to individual tastes, social style and character, which are deliberately used by figures of public interest to distinguish themselves and display their individuality. Usually office locations and interiors are described in some detail preferably including job-related items of symbolic value. Such descriptions often form the basis for the evaluation of a personality and can be instrumental in setting the scene for portraying character traits.

Perched on a leather chair in his stylishly sparse Folkstone office [...] Richard Shirreffs’ executive suite is above the shopping plaza in Eurotunnel’s Shuttle terminal, which is eerily quiet on a weekday lunchtime. (G 25/10/03 – RS)


Explaining achievements and views of the people portrayed forms an inevitable and prototypical component in portraits. The information delivered here amounts to a short biographical sketch and may – due to its matter-of-fact nature – often be graphically separated from the main text body in boxes entitled “vita” or “zur Person”. Whereas steps in the person’s career are simply mentioned, views and outstanding political achievements are explained and illustrated as they often provide the motive for the composition and publication of the portraits. Politicians’ views and the steps taken by them form the link between daily political news reporting and the explanation of background information realised in portraits.

[...] child of asylum seekers wins Ivy League scholarship, marries heir to newspaper dynasty, sacrifices career for children, suffers shocking divorce, gets stuck into politics and [...] at the age of 54, becomes the highest ever appointed woman in American government when President Clinton makes her secretary of state. (G2 30/10/03 – MA)


Interests and leisure activities come as another rather private facet of an individual and help to reduce the distance between the reader and the impersonal professional agent of a political institution. By providing and assessing information about hobbies and aesthetic preferences the authors put the private man behind the politician centre-stage. Recipients will interpret those details as indications as to whether or not they ought to perceive the person portrayed as endearing and as a figure to identify with.

His interests are catholic: he likes football (Liverpool is his team) and horseracing; he enjoys a wide range of music from jazz to pop […] (DT 30/10/03 – MH)

“I come home, I put on a flannel night-gown, make myself the most disgusting thing, which is cottage cheese with ketchup, and go and watch some ridiculous programme on television.” (G2 30/10/03 – MA)
Like achievements and views, traits of character constitute an indispensable ingredient of portraits firmly anchored in readers’ expectations. Individual characters are generally sketched out by allocating attributes to people. This can be done by the author, but may also be realised with the help of comments by colleagues, close friends or family members and even by private enemies (cf. 4.). Depending on who ascribes traits of character, the judgements will have varying degrees of authenticity, reliability and integrity. Generally, the depiction of personal qualities can be oriented towards the professional or the private sphere. At any rate it will argumentatively be tied to other facets of a personality, e.g. achievements and views, working habits or communication.

"Majestätische Allüren", beklagen unisono Presse und Opposition. Und malen garstige Charakterzüge: "eitel, selbstgefällig, humorlos, jähzornig". [...] Ein Nobelpreisträger und seine Schüler – so sah er sich wohl. (W 09/02/01 – KB)

In his memoirs, Mr. Major wrote: "Michael is clever and able, but in private he is a shy and charming man, with an unstuffy, self-deprecating manner [...]. (DT 30/10/03 – MH)

Finally, what places of work are to the professional image, the private environment is to the private image. This aspect of an individual’s personality includes information about family origins and make-up, daily routines and personal principles, biographical details and symbolic events from formative periods in life. The inclusion of these topos is another attempt at fleshing out the people behind the public offices or institutional voices. Authors thereby seek to get at the heart of an individual’s character. Sympathy or antipathy, understanding or disbelief are likely audience reactions to those kinds of personal details.

Auf dem mathematischen Gymnasium [...] war Wiedeking ein respektiertes Raubein, auf dem Fußballplatz ließ der Mitteilterner nichts anbrennen. "Die Narben am Schienbein habe ich heute noch", sagt er [...]. "Die anderen aber auch." (W 02/03/01 – WW)

The Thomas the Tank Engine train set is overflowing its box. At the bottom of the stairs, as though beguiling the Prime Minister to stumble, is a baby-sized drum kit with BAND in large letters on the bass. The music on the piano is the second page of I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat a Creeping Up on Me. (TM 03/05/03 – TB, 32)

4. Rhetorical devices in politicians’ portraits

Whatever short accounts of portraits there are, they all agree that for an author to be able to craft a product generally seen as aspiring to literary qualities it takes great attention to details of composition, phrasing etc. and well developed writing skills. Consequently, politicians’ portraits would seem to be a text type which tends to be rich in diverse rhetorical devices and strategies, a hypothesis substantiated by my corpus observations. This has to do with the relative freedom granted to the journalist by the genre at issue here and by his pronounced desire to demonstrate linguistic mastery and personal style. While textual style also clearly comprises a content-aspect, as it is partly shaped by the selection of topics and illocutions, it is the quality and quantity of rhetorical devices which crucially constitute perceptible traits of style in a given text. Yet content and rhetorical form cannot neatly be separated from one another as they go together in text production and perception.

Generally, rhetoric, understood as techniques of phrasing and composition, operates on various levels of text. A distinction between micro-level and macro-level rhetorical devices may be helpful here as it avoids excessive precision, yet still secures a certain degree of order. Micro-level rhetorical devices relate to word-, phrase- and sentence-structures; their effect is thus local in that it is restricted to certain points in the text. Macro-level rhetorical devices, in contrast, function on the level of separate text-chunks, that is larger parts of a textual structure. Their effect is thus rather global, particularly as they may also pervade larger stretches of text and contribute to lending structure to a given text. From the welter of rhetorical devices present in the politicians’ portraits of my corpus I have selected only those that are either most salient or most frequent (cf. Table 2). In the following paragraphs I shall briefly illustrate these rhetorical techniques and explain their impact on the potential reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MICRO-LEVEL RHETORICAL DEVICES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comment techniques (direct vs. reported speech)</td>
<td>Framing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming techniques: epithets, in-group names</td>
<td>Anecdotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacommunication</td>
<td>Literary allusions</td>
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Table 2: Central rhetorical devices in politicians’ portraits

As we have seen, portraying key political figures inherently involves assessing various facets of their personality. Authors can avoid overt bias and demonstrate apparent impartiality here by delegating the expression of judgements to other people. Consequently, comments about the person portrayed may be presented as utterances made by personal friends (1) or enemies (2), by the portrayed person himself/herself (3) or by journalistic authorities (4), i.e. other journalists and their media. The flexible management of these different types of direct speech comments is of crucial importance as it facilitates authenticity, evaluative balance and professionalism in the approach of the portraying journalist.
Generally, all four kinds of direct speech rendition help penetrate the official public image of a person and contribute to revealing the true personality of the politician portrayed. Yet these different types of direct speech comments accomplish this aim in different ways. Comments by personal friends or colleagues (1) usually function as valuable insights into the aspects of a character otherwise hidden to public perception. Statements made by private enemies (2), on the other hand, can have a high impact on the reader when they give praise to the person portrayed, as it is rather common for enemies to engage in criticism. When personal enemies do criticize, these comments are usually seen as evidence of negative qualities already well known in public or as indicators to the severity of those detrimental traits of character. Utterances by the portrayed person generally seem rare in portraits—usually their function is confined to demonstrating political views epitomized in publicly well known quotes by the politician in question. However, auto-comments (3) may also reveal rather private attitudes, traits of character or working habits. A sub-type of such auto-comments is the motto, a private maxim of behaviour relating to professional or personal matters (cf. W 20/07/01 – JaRo, “Vierzig Stunden für die Medizin, vierzig Stunden für Olympia […]”). Although they may have been sampled from different sources, comments by the politician portrayed make for a high degree of authenticity in the portrait and indicate close and candid insights into the nature of a politician’s personality. Of course, auto-comments might be stage-managed by the person portrayed and thus function as an instrument in the hand of the politician to disseminate a strategic public image. Authors of portraits can balance out this effect by quoting journalistic authorities (4), as these commentaries reflect earlier views formed of the portrayed figure in the media. Such comments come across as less authentic and further removed from the person in question. On the other hand they convey a detached observer’s point of view and may thus carry more objectivity and balance of judgement.

(1) Comments by friends/colleagues

[…] he had married Sandra Paul […], who calls him “an extraordinarily romantic man”. (DT 30/10/03 – MH)

“It is easier to imagine Hilary arguing for legislation to alleviate the plight of underprivileged children than to give assistance to a single child”, someone who has worked with her explains. “She is charming, she can be talkative about things she cares about, but small talk is stretching it.” (GW 28/06/03 – HC, 16)

(2) Comments by enemies

[…] dass ihm die Grünen vorwirfen, er “würde auch Jesus abschieben […]”. (W 02/11/01 – GB)

“That girl sure has some mouth on her”, says one Democrat strategist, shaking his head in quiet disbelief. “She’s an oral copulator for the Republican party.” (GW 17/05/03 – AC, 19)

(3) Auto-comments

“Ich identifiziere mich nie vollständig mit dem, was ich gerade mache.” […] “Ich verliere nie den kritischen Blick auf das, was ich tue.” (W 14/12/01 – GG)

“Ich bin ein mächterner Franke.” […] “Ich trage keine Maßanzüge und so Zeug.” (W 02/11/01 – GB)

“As an Anglo-French person, as somebody who’s spent 20 years in France and 20 years in the UK – so I don’t really know any more whether I’m English or French – […]”. (G 25/10/03 – RS)

(4) Comments by journalistic authorities

Vor Schilys “Lizenz zum Abmeiern” (Handelsblatt) ist niemand gefeit. […] schrieb der Publizist Karl Markus Michel. “Er entzieht sich der politischen Kontrolle, lässt sich nicht organisieren und spielt mit hohem Einsatz. Er möchte, wie jeder, gewinnen, möchte gehört, beachtet werden; aber er tut alles, sein Publikum zu verprügeln.” (W 05/10/01 – OS)

Further rhetorical techniques also answer the need in portraits to succinctly characterize a given personality. Besides direct speech comments (cf. above) this function may be realised, perhaps more directly and efficiently, with the help of epithets and in-group names or nicknames. In phrasing epithets authors of portraits exercise full power over the evaluation of a personality. More often than not epithets pithily sum up various aspects of a politician’s nature described in different text-chunks, which is why they are frequently used in headlines.

Carrie Bradshaw with Donald Rumsfeld’s politics (GW 1705/03 – AC, 19); Dr. Angela Seltzam (W 06/04/01 – AM); Das eiserne Veilchen (W 18/05/01 – FS); Der Klima-Killer (W 13/07/01 – GWB); Der bruchlose Brecher (W 23/03/01 – RK); Bauer und Kneger (W 26/01/01 – AS); Der rote Joker (W 15/06/01 – GG); Der Prügel-Knabe (W 12/01/01 – JF); Der Pseudo-Rebell (W 02/02/01 – KL); Ritter Sport (W 20/07/01 – JaRo); Mr. Nice or Mr. Nasty … (G 10/10/03 – MH)

Leading the reader into the text such epithets also excite curiosity as they are mostly semantic riddles that obscure as much as they reveal about a character. Most importantly, epithets in headlines may provoke the question of why a certain judgement has been arrived at by the author and on what grounds. This might then spark off the desire to read the portrait. While epithets, which also frequently occur in the text body, can be derived from or based upon actual naming practices within the social environment of the portrayed person, in-group names or nicknames are more likely to be authentic in that they have been really used by people to refer to the politician.
“Roko”, wie ihn die Sozis daheim in Eschborn nennen [...]. (W 23/03/01 – RK)

Dass ihr Edi, [...] also der bayerische Läufer als Bettvorlager nach Bayern zurückkommen könnte, ist für die Christsozialen eine Horrorvorstellung. (W 06/07/01 – ES)

[...] – Chilly, Lady Macbeth of Little Rock, Heil Hillary, Shillary – [...]. (GW 28/06/03 – HC, 18)

Her enemies [...] have shaken the thesaurus for damning sobriquets: Bitch Goddess, Conservative Fembot, Right Wing Telebinmo, Ku Klux Coutler. (GW 17/05/03 – AC, 17)

Although authors of portraits usually indicate the currency of the name used, so that it becomes apparent to the reader who uses which name how and why, the status of names allocated to politicians can also remain vague. In this case names are fictitious and thus border on the epiteth, as in the following example.


Family or Christian names of the people portrayed may also be the subject of meta-communicative reflection. This has to do with the inseparable ties between a person and his/her name. In portraying, journalists perceive names as just one among many facets of a personality which might deliver a topos for their texts. It is normally the connotations conveyed by the sound of a name or its polysemantic potential journalists find useful. Here, a parallel to literary texts can be established as novelists usually set great store by carefully choosing the names of their characters so that they reflect parts of their mentality and nature.

Wendelin Wiedeking – das hört sich so gemütlich an, klingt irgendwie nach Flachau oder Blechautos, nach dem freundlichen Okzil aus dem nächsten Spielwarenladen. Der betuliche Name passt so gar nicht zu Porsche, der schärfsten Autofirma der Welt. (W 02/03/01 – WW)

Meta-communication proper, i.e. the thematization of the act of writing a portrait itself, becomes especially relevant when information about the subject of a portrait is scarce and the person in question does not actively pursue the fabrication of an image by constantly feeding the media. Meta-communicative techniques might, however, also apply in other contexts as they generally serve to present somebody as elusive and hard to fathom.

Ach, Dr. Angela Seltsam, lassen Sie uns doch einmal in Ihr Herzchen blicken. [...] Was wohl gäbe es da zu entdecken? [...] Und nicht wenigen ging es wie dem Reporter Alexander Osang. Je näher er ihr kam, desto mehr verloren sich ihre Spuren. Ein Phänomen. (W 06/04/01 – AM)

Macro-level rhetorical devices have, as I pointed out, an impact which goes beyond the single clause or local part of text. They build textual structure as they pervade larger stretches of discourse and link various units of text. Frames are prototypical examples of such rhetorical devices. Consisting of two elements, an intro-frame and a closing frame, they provide formal and thematic symmetry and thus structure the perception of the text. More often than not their effect on the reader is one of encountering the person portrayed in a typical or extraordinary setting (intro-) and saying goodbye to him/her (closing) while returning to the original place. Frequently, portraits open with a symbolic piece of information which announces and signals the sort of perspective or mood underlying the description and evaluation of a politician’s personality. Setting the scene at the beginning or summing up a character at the end may also take a narrative form which in some way resembles an anecdote (see below).

Ihre Lieblingsblume ist die Leuko, eine Abart des Veilchens. Sie herrscht über einen Konzen mit 13600 Angestellten, bescheiden, lyrisch und fromm. [...] Friede Springer spielt die Rolle der bescheidenen Stellvertreterin des jährlichen Patriarchen so lyrisch, dass man fast vergessen könnte, dass es hier nicht um Gott und Goethe geht, sondern um Geld und Gesinnung – “es war ein herzigs Veilchen”. (W 18/05/01 – FS)

Anecdotes, while not spanning the entire text, also clearly pertain to the macro-level, as they usually constitute a self-contained part of the text, which functionally relates to other text elements. Narrative and scenic in nature, anecdotes add tension and memorability to an otherwise descriptive and argumentative genre. Most importantly, the miniature story is told so that it can act as an empowerment to the imagination of the reader. Direct speech, the economical settings of place, time and persona as well as the purposeful navigation towards a humorous climax are some of the elements contributing to this effect. Anecdotes serve to present various aspects of a personality and they do so in quite an immediate and authentic way, owing to their scenic qualities. In argumentative respect anecdotes are illustrations or substantiations of judgments about the character of the person portrayed, which transpire in the minimal story in an indirect yet very clear and easily perceivable way. Through anecdotes readers are positioned in relatively close and familiar proximity to the portrayed person. Formally anecdotes range from the very short, even one-sentence reporting of an event, to the fully elaborated story. They are positioned at exposed and pivotal parts of the text, preferably towards the end or the beginning, underlining their function as a concluding or a-priori evaluation.

He [...] is so straight that when home secretary he had to be told bits of innocuous gossip to pass on to bored journalists, according to a former special adviser. (G 30/10/03 – MH)

Finally, allusions to works of literature or popular culture may, when isolated, belong to the micro-level.

Mit Jassir Arafat verhieilt es sich wie mit dem Scheinriesen Turtur aus Michael Endes Kinderbuch-Klassiker Jim Knopf und Lukas der Lokomotivführer. Er wurde immer kleiner, je näher er kam [...]. (W 07/12/01 – JA)

However, they often form a text-structuring principle in that they occur at various places in the text and thematically relate to one another more or less systematically. In this sense the series of allusions contributes to coherence. Employing this technique authors of portraits show their knowledge of literature off to advantage and seek to imbue their texts with literary qualities. The use of this strategy is sometimes mediated by a thematic focus of portraits on the cultural tastes or entertainment preferences of their subjects. In this case the allusions can be derived from the works mentioned by the person portrayed. Besides being a strategy of self-presentation on the part of the journalist, allusions of a literary kind lend an air of authority to the evaluations realised in portraits and thus increase their credibility.

Es schrieb Honoré de Balzac: "Wenn bei einem Frauenwesen das Herz erbt, wird der Kopf gesund."

Auch zieht uns, wie ihr lieber Romanheld Bruno (aus Lenz' Exerzierplatz) das Versteckspiel [...].

Es heißt bei Siegfried Lenz: "Jeder muss wohl das Instrument spielen, das für ihn gemacht ist. " Wie schön, wenn es davon gleich zwei gibt.

Madame Merker dagegen, die begabte Physikerin, verehrt Michail Bulgakow, verschenkt Gogols Tote Seelen – dazu sei ihr ausdrücklich gratuliert. Und der ersten Satz ihres Lieblingsfilms kennt sie auswendig: "Ich hatte eine Farm in Afrika am Fuße der Nongberge." Darüber hinaus ist sie, wie Tucholsky sagen würde, "im eigenen Saft gekocht". (W 06/04/01 – AM)

5. Conclusion

In the preceding paragraphs I have described and illustrated the thematic, illocutionary and rhetorical structure of portraits with the aim of comprehen-

sively characterising the genre as a media strategy, which at the same time responds and contributes to the personalisation of politics. If we look at possible histories of their making, portraits can on the one hand be viewed as an attempt to critically present the background forces behind political processes. Journalists aim to show how personal characters come to bear on political decision making. They also seek to assess and predict how a politician will, in all likelihood, handle a forthcoming political situation. On the other hand, portraits might also be seen as the result of a politician's public relations activities and the underlying desire to fabricate a favourable public image, which can then serve the political cause. Partly thin, the portrait is a genre that facilitates investigative journalism and equips readers with enough sound information to sustain a fair individual judgement of politicians and political matters. But partly portraits also come as 'politantment' – a motley collection of largely irrelevant second-hand facts which add up to form a politician's public image, glossy and loud, yet without focus and depth.

Journalists must find it hard to deliver quality in politicians' portraits as they are drawing their information from a huge pool of recycled information, which is rife with stage-managed and deliberately fabricated facts and events. The task ahead of every ambitious and engaged journalist consists of critically examining the available information, generating his own impressions and evaluations through direct contact with the person portrayed and composing them in accordance with principles of thematic balance and order, completeness, and most importantly, relevance of the information for the assessment of political developments. Rhetorical means must not shroud these intentions but help to bring them out efficiently. On a critical linguist's note, considering the theatre qualities of politics (Meyer: 1998, Goffman: 1991), portraits ought to avoid providing yet another stage for politicians but rather look behind the scenes of the stage that is politics and dissect the rules of its making.

Bibliography

Text corpus

DT 30/10/03 – MH: A Charming Man whose Tough Image was Forged in a Tough Time (p. 5) – Michael Howard
GW 28/06/03 – HC: Once More from the Heart (pp. 14-18) – Hilary Clinton
GW 17/05/03 – AC: An Appalling Magic (pp. 14-22) – Ann Coulter

The text codes follow the formal convention: name of paper, date of publication – initials of person portrayed: text title (page) – full name of person. Abbreviations used are DT (Daily Telegraph), G (Guardian), GW (Guardian Weekend), G2 (Guardian Supplement), TM (The Times Magazine) and W (Die Woche).
General references