



ACADEMIA EUROPAEA

The Academy of Europe

FROM KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION APPLICATION

Title: Closed-Door Interaction on Politically Sensitive Topics – A Pragmatic Approach

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Category: From Curiosity to Career

Problem (max. 50 words):

This project will explore how politicians use language when discussing sensitive topics behind closed doors, by analysing phone calls between President Nixon and members of his inner circle during the unfolding of the Watergate scandal. The project will open up opportunities for young participants to engage in cutting-edge academic collaboration.

Unmet Need (max. 50 words):

The project:

1. Provides rare insight into the private language use of politicians who normally communicate in public.
2. Allows to consider how the sensitivity of a topic influences language use.
3. Provides an interdisciplinary cross-over between language, politics and historical studies.
4. Triggers the interest of the broader public.

Project Description (max. 200 words):

We will collect and annotate comparable corpora consisting of private videotaped phone calls and public speeches of Nixon, and analyse these corpora from the point of view of speech acts and interaction. We will use our replicable speech act typology and related interactional system (see Edmondson, House and Kádár, 2023). Once we transcribe our data by using system of speech acts and interactional moves, we attempt to interpret recurrent interactional patterns through which Nixon discussed matters relating to the scandal in an unmitigated way. Although due to the size of the project ours is clearly a case study, in interpreting the effect of the closed-door setting on the behaviour of the participants we are able to rely on our team's previous research on the language of closed-door diplomacy. We will focus on the particular issue of how the sensitivity of a topic influences the language use of politicians, which is a fundamental knowledge-gap to fill. In analysing the effect of sensitivity for the language use of Nixon and his colleagues, we will also compare the outcomes of our case study with how Nixon reflected to the Watergate scandal in the media.

Hypothesis (25 words):

The sensitivity of a topic heavily influences the way in which politicians interact in closed-door settings.

Implication for Practice (50 words):

Since political language is particularly important in the current geopolitical situation, our topic is likely to be of interest for the broader public. Our results will also be disseminated in the form of a Cambridge University Press blog and will lead to an ERC grant application.

Implication for Research (50 words):



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We will disseminate our research results in the form of a position paper and another paper focusing on the effect of sensitivity on language use, submitted to D1 journals. We will also present our results in international conferences), and on the basis of our project submit at ERC Advanced Grant.