POLITICAL LANGUAGE AND TEXTUAL VAGUENESS

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1. Introduction

It is common sense to say that vagueness is a characteristic of political language. However, to make the concept of vagueness relevant for linguistic analysis it has to be formulated in terms of a pragmalinguistic theory. According to the literature on political language vagueness occurs most often in the area of (party)political external communication, in which politicians communicate directly with the general public in order to convince them of their programs or ideas (cf. Strauss, 1986). In this area vagueness is put down to ambiguous lexical content, specific usage of pronouns etc. (cf. Dieckmann, 1971; Lerman, 1985; Jucker, 1986; Wilson, 1990). However the explanation should take exactly the opposite direction: slogans, pronouns, etc. are not vague in themselves but rather become vague through their use in various texts and discourse types.

In this paper I will argue that on the pragmatic level vagueness is a characteristic of texts or communicative acts and not of smaller linguistic units. This means that I try to deal with vagueness as a communicative strategy which enables one to perform linguistic actions in a specific way. Therefore vagueness has to be described in terms of components of communicative situations, speakers' intentions, and the expectations of listeners. However, an utterance by a speaker can only be vague to a certain extent or in a particular aspect, i.e. the connection between the information communicated and the actual situation must remain clear to the listener. Now, every communicative act can be considered as an interconnected triplet of form, meaning and situation. The term "situation" refers to a complex web of features which can be split into two related areas: the "objective" and the "subjective" situation. "Objective" situation refers to all aspects of the situation which are "measurable" in some way (e.g. the kind of place where the interaction takes place, the physical condition of the persons involved in the interaction, the communicative channel etc.) whereas the term "subjective situation" coins all those features which can only be reconstructed with reference to the knowledge of the involved persons (e.g. degrees of social distance between the participants, role relationships, mutual knowledge of the interactants etc.). Objective and subjective features of the situation may cause the need to formulate messages in different
ways, and, at the same time, facilitate or complicate the use of certain speech acts. "Direct" communication (as opposed to "vague" communication) thus may be viewed as the use of a maximal effective communicative act in respect to the objective situation only, whereas "vague" communication takes into account the objective and the subjective factors of the situation, exploiting formal, content-specific and situational cues to guide the recipients’ understanding.

However, this does not mean that vagueness cannot be put down to smaller linguistic units than texts, e.g. it may be achieved by using abstract technical terms for naming certain facts and events in front of a lay-audience. But this doesn’t justify considering certain terms or phrases as having some semantic feature like [+vague]. Rather we should find out why they are perceived as vague in particular contexts.

Thus we have to differentiate between two levels of analysis:

- On the *pragmatic level* we have to deal with explanations of vagueness on terms of situational, personal and textual properties and their relationship.

- On the *text-internal level* we have to deal with the realisation of vagueness in different texts and situations. On this level vagueness is the result of a "multi-level-process" ("Mehrstufigkeit", cf. Sandig, 1987), where the term "level" refers to different textinternal levels (from textstructure to wording).

Only if we combine both levels of analysis can we expect to give a full account of vagueness in texts. In order to argue for this position I will firstly define the term "vagueness" in a framework which is mainly derived from Brown/Levinson’s face-concept and in the following analysis of a speech event from the 1986 Austrian Presidential Election Campaign (dealing with the so-called "Waldheim-Affair") show how this conceptualisation accounts for empirical data.

2. Vagueness in political language

There are several reasons for the use of vagueness in political communication has, which I want to outline shortly in the following.

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1 e.g. if one is hungry in a situation along with his peers where food is available it will be perfectly suitable to simply ask for something to eat. This will be perfectly unsuitable if the same person is in the same physical condition but is invited to the home of his boss for the first time.
2.1. Addressing different audiences at the same time

The fact that politicians and the general public normally do not meet directly but rather indirectly by means of electronic media gives rise to a particular characteristic of ideological language, namely what is often referred to as "Doppelung" in the German literature (Strauß, 1986; Holly/Kühl/Püschel, 1986) and what Fill (1986) and Clark/Carlson (1982) called "split illocution". That is, politicians communicate directly in the medium with e.g. another politician or a journalist but wish at the same time to convince an audience, which has no opportunity for direct communicative interaction. Thus, communication takes place on two levels, and on each of them the speaker may wish to realise differing communicative goals.

Another aspect of this issue is the diversity of the audience in the case of televised politics. In their public performances politicians do not want to address only one target group but as many as possible. But this means that they have to convey different messages to different people at the same time. Producing coherent statements in such situations is only possible by using various forms of indirectness or vagueness because different groups of the audience may have dissimilar (and even contradictory) wants. Thus, this aspect of vagueness is caused by the relationship between politician and audience and relates to a special feature of the "subjective situation" which is a characteristic of mass mediated communication.

2.2. Avoiding face threatening acts (FTAs) against other politicians

Face saving activities are commonly viewed as basal for all human interaction (cf. Brown/Levinson, 1987). Thus, they play a crucial role in televised political interaction too. But in order to account for the peculiar situational factors of this speech genre the original concept of face has to be expanded to include the idea that every politician has a public positive face (PPF) which claims the consistent image of himself as being a rational, trustworthy person whose political ideas and actions are better fitted to the wants and demands of the general public than those of his opponents.

In mass mediated political exchanges, culture-specific FTA-avoidance strategies, which are used for reciprocal face-saving in non-political communication, are not (or only partly) rendered inoperative. But (in accordance with the definition of PPF) every politician has to threaten his opponent's PPF to the maximum while at the same time maintaining his own PPF (and the positive and negative face his
opponent) as much as possible.\(^2\) This means that politicians in their public dealings with one another will, on the hand, observe the basic principles of courtesy of a particular culture (= FTA avoidance concerning positive and negative face of the opponent) but simultaneously attempt to damage their opponent’s PPF in front of a not directly present general public. Speaker strategies which will be used in such situations will be mainly off-record FTAs.

Hence, another aspect of vague or indirect communication in political language can thus be traced back to the concept of PPF and is related to interactions between politicians in public.

2.3. Avoiding FTAs against oneself (Communicating tabooed topics)

According to Brown/Levinson FTAs may threaten primarily either speaker’s or listener’s face. If we apply this insight to the extended face conception just outlined we can account for another aspect of vagueness in political discourse.

In some situations politicians may want to communicate issues which are tabooed in society but nonetheless useful for their political aims. In most western European societies racist and anti-semitic statements are of this kind. They are not acceptable in states and societies which perceive themselves as "liberal" and "unprejudiced". Nonetheless numerous investigations (and events) show increasing racist attitudes in most western European countries (cf. van Dijk, 1987). Thus, to communicate racist or antisemitic contents may be accepted (and even approved) by large parts of the audience but at the same time damage one’s own PPF as a respectable (non right-extremist) politician. Therefore these issues may not be expressed overtly but indirectly by using different linguistic strategies which supply the audience with additional meaning.

\(^2\) Wilson (1990), who cites an earlier version of this paper, seems to mistake my concept of PPF as a kind of role-concept when he points out that one can act in different social positions in front of only one audience as well. Of course this is the case but my point is, however that through the very nature of mass mediated political events, every publicly acting person (and in this sense my notion of PPF is not restricted to politicians) obtains an additional aspect of his personality which is due to this special form of interaction and communication. Additionally, the definition of PPF should account for the fact that public political action is often staged as "fight" or "argument" (cf. Burger, 1991) because in order to maintain one’s own PPF every politician has to threaten the other’s PPF. And as PPF is, on the one hand, part of the "person" proper and on the other hand - because of its very nature - permanently threatened by the other publicly acting individuals, losing one's PPF is associated with the public image of being a "loser" and maintaining ones PPF while succeeding in threatening the other’s PPF is associated with being a "winner" in the political arena (cf. Gruber, 1990).
However, the motivation of a politician to use vagueness and indirection in communicating tabooed contents can be traced back to the use of off-record FTAs concerning the speaker's own face, which statements of this kind pose for him/her. Thus, on the pragmatic level we may distinguish between three sources of vagueness in political language:

- addressing different parts of the audience simultaneously
- Maintaining the opponent's face while threatening his PPF
- FTA avoidance concerning one's own PPF

2.4. Concepts of vagueness and political communication

Thus far we have been concerned with the pragmatic level of analyzing the occurrence of vagueness in political discourse. In this section I will turn to the textual level and review some concepts of the linguistic realization of vagueness.

Being vague is a kind of metastrategy which Brown/Levinson (1987) state for conducting off-record FTAs. In their definition of vagueness they rely on Grice's Maxim of Manner and discuss five strategies which exploit this maxim. But as in other cases of their taxonomy it's not quite clear why these specific strategies (and not others) are discussed under this heading. Thus, Brown/Levinson's approach to vagueness is not clear enough to account for the problem.

Pinkal (1980) differentiates between semantic indeterminacy and pragmatic underdeterminacy in his treatment of semantic vagueness. While the former is a property of linguistic terms, the latter is referring to utterances and the information they convey. According to Pinkal these two concepts are not mutually exclusive but refer to different levels of linguistic analysis. Unfortunately he does not show how analyses on these two levels are related to each other and performs no further elaboration of this interesting distinction, but treats only semantic indeterminacy within a truth-conditional semantic framework.

Brenneis (1986) offers an interesting approach in his discussion of communicational indirection. He distinguishes between four types, namely text-, voice-, audience-centered, and event based indirection. In the first case properties of a certain text are responsible for indirection; in the second the ambiguity is created by the uncertainty who the speaker and in the third who the audience is; in the last case only a certain event conveys meaning and not the linguistic activity of the participants. However, this typology is mainly a pragmatic one and linguistic features of the examples are not related systematically to their contexts. Additionally, the four types may not always occur separately but in a mixed form.
Wilson (1990) devotes his entire monograph to the investigation of the question of how "meanings ... may be derived beyond the context of what has been said" (Wilson, 1990: 7) in political communication. According to him indirectness and vagueness are achieved by the use of implications and implicature, personal pronouns, naming and referring strategies, and metaphors. In some respect his work is complementary to Breneis's: while the latter offers a typology of contexts without accounting much for linguistic features, the former investigates a variety of linguistic realizations of vagueness and indirectness without relating them to different speech situations or genres.

In this paper I will present a case study in which I will try to relate the verbal data of two different speech genres with relevant features of the situation to show how these two aspects are interdependent. As I pointed out above, the use of vague communicative acts will be stipulated by the special features of televised policy and face-keeping activities. Politicians in the media have no direct contact to their audience nor do they even know who exactly their audience at a special speech event is (i.e. who watches a certain political speech, debate etc.). Thus they can only minimally rely on situational cues which might help the audience to unravel indirect meanings. Therefore being vague and providing as many people as possible with interpretative cues for one's communicative acts which fit into their world view ("Weltanschauung") as well as in one's own political program is a highly complex and demanding task for a politician which he can only solve by using form and content of his communicative acts in relation to a diffuse speech-situation. I shall call this specific form of vagueness which exploits mainly the tension between form and meaning of a message textual vagueness. If an instance of textual vagueness occurs in political communication various groups of the audience should come to different interpretations of a text with recourse to different aspects of it. This assumption is not disparaged by the "constructionalist" view that the perception of the world by any human being is guided by the fact that he/she is part of one or more social groups and that therefore any act of perception is one of apprehension too (cf. Potter/Whetherell, 1990). Rather it is assumed here, that vague texts invite and trigger different interpretations by different audiences and that this triggering effect can be traced back to certain properties of the text.

3. Empirical Analysis

In the remaining part of the paper I shall try to combine a cognitive approach to discourse analysis (cf. van Dijk, 1980b) with the theoretical framework just outlined in order to account for the peculiarity of the texts under examination. My material
includes the television speech of former Austrian president Rudolf Kirchschläger of April 22th 1986 on the so-called "Waldheim-Affair" as well as the reactions of two Austrian politicians to this statement. Firstly a short overview over the political situation of the 1986 Presidential Election campaign will be given.

3.1. The political situation in Austria during the 1986 presidential election campaign

The two most important candidates for the Presidency in 1986 were Kurt Steyrer of the SPÖ ("Austrian Social Democratic Party") and Kurt Waldheim of the ÖVP ("Austrian People's Party": a Christian Conservative party). There were two other candidates, who were nominated by small parties and who had no real chance in the election.

I will describe the "Waldheim-Affair" only as far as necessary for the analysis and evaluation of the thematic and argumentative restrictions in Kirchschläger's TV speech (for a detailed account of the political situation and prejudiced communication during and following this period in Austria cf. Wodak et al., 1990; Mitten, 1992; Gruber, 1991).

On March 3rd 1986 documents were published in the Austrian news magazine "profil" which revealed that Waldheim had been a member of national-socialist organisations (NSDStB\(^3\) and SA-Equestrian unit). These documents were also published in the New York Times of March 4th. From this date on, the World Jewish Congress (WJC), which joined the campaign of "profil" and the New York Times, published one document after another which showed that Waldheim must at least have known about anti-partisan activities in Yugoslavia and deportations of Jews from Salonika. This was a key issue in the reproaches against Waldheim - namely that he had been a member of Nazi organisations and had either been personally involved in atrocities or war crimes or had at least known about them. The repudiation of these accusations was the principal objective of the majority of the Austrian mass media and of the politicians who supported Waldheim (and - of course - of himself).

There were, nevertheless, two other criticisms, which, however, never became the focus of public interest in Austria. The first concerned Waldheim's previous account of his past. Until this time he had always maintained that he had been regarded as "politically unreliable" during the Nazi era (as he had rejected the Nazi regime because of his Christian Conservative attitude) and in addition he had never mentioned his war years in the Balkans (cf. Waldheim, 1985). Thus, he had given

\(^3\) "Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund", a Nazi students' organisation.
an incomplete (and partly) misleading account of his activities in the 2nd World War.

The second criticism concerned his current behaviour as more and more new charges were made against him. At first he rejected any and all accusations and only admitted to details when documentary proof had already been found. In addition, he did not indicate any change in attitude towards his role in World War II. His answer to a journalist's question has become notorious. When asked what he had done during the 2nd World War, he replied, "I only did my duty".4

The picking out of the Nazi-past (which was heavily repressed in Austrian public discourse until then) as a central theme and the involvement of foreign groups in the public discussion created a tense situation, which was extraordinarily emotionally charged. This was highly untypical for presidential election campaigns in Austria, because in fact the office of the Austrian president is mainly a representational one.

The criticism of Waldheim, which, to a greater or lesser extent, determined public discussion in Austria, can be summarised as follows:

- The charge that Waldheim had been a member of Nazi organisations and had taken part in war crimes or had at least known about them (I shall refer to this as the "factual charge").
- The charge that he had previously not told the truth about his life during World War II.
- The charge that even now he had not dissociated himself from his wartime past (I shall refer to the latter two charges as the "credibility charges").

On April 1st Israel Singer of the WJC announced that he would hand over documents to the then Austrian president Kirchschläger which incriminated Waldheim. The President arranged a television speech for April 22nd in which his intention was to inform the Austrian public about the content of the documents. The speech was broadcast at 7.50 p.m. and lasted approximately 30 minutes. About an hour later, at 9 p.m., journalists of the ORF conducted interviews with four Austrian politicians asking them about their opinion of the presidential statement. The politicians were the two main candidates (Waldheim and Steyrer) and the general secretaries of the two parties involved in the campaign (Heinz Fischer, SPÖ; Michael Graff, ÖVP). In the following I will restrict my analysis to the presidential

4 "Pressestunde", ORF (Austrian Broadcasting Company), March 9th 1986. The ORF-Pressestunde is a weekly talk-show, which is broadcasted every Sunday morning. In this broadcast two newspaper journalists ask a politician their questions, and an ORF-journalist is in the chair. Often lively discussions arise between them and the politician.
speech and the reactions of Heinz Fischer as representant of the SPÖ and Waldheim himself.

3.2. Status hierarchies and face-saving demands between the politicians involved

Between the three politicians under investigation marked status differences existed. Officially, a large power (and moral) differential and considerable social distance existed between the two politicians contesting the presidential election and the president still in office, and even more so between the two party-secretaries interviewed and the president. Therefore we can expect a high frequency of off-record strategies in the comments of both politicians, intended simultaneously to maintain the PPF of the president and to attack that of the political opponent (cf. (2) above).

But there is reason to expect that even Kirchschläger himself had good grounds to avoid FTAs against Waldheim in his statement. Why does one come to this assumption? Aside from possible personal reasons (Kirchschläger was, for instance, an Austrian ambassador at the time when Waldheim was Austrian minister for foreign affairs) - Kirchschläger only held the office of president, therefore he had to prevent a candidate for this office from appearing in bad light publicly (because this would be injurious to the office as well as to the person). Also Austrian history in the years between 1938-45 is a topic which is, in public, taboo and very emotionally charged (cf. Pelikan, 1991). Thus Kirchschläger had not only to address different groups of his audience but also to avoid threatening the face of his public as a whole.

We can now represent the complicated web of open FTA avoidance and off-record FTA execution which exists between the individual participants in the event under examination. The journalists, whose interests in FTA avoidance with respect to the politicians interviewed have not yet been discussed, are also represented here. It is expected that they will use fewer off-record strategies. On the one hand, they ask their questions on behalf of the general public, but, on the other, may not attack the politicians too much, because otherwise they might refuse to give them further interviews or informations. They have, however, no interest in turning the situation to their own personal benefit.5

Thus, which motivation for the use of vagueness can we assume under the conditions described?

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Firstly, Kirchschläger, who was originally nominated for president by the SPÖ but never a member of the party, was at the end of his second term (i.e. he had held the office for nearly 12 years then). Apart from the fact that the Austrian president has a traditional status "above" the parties and everyday (party-)political conflict he had gained a position as a "moral authority" during his years in office. This was not only due to the strict impartiality of his political statements so far but also to the fact that he had called for higher moral standards in Austrian domestic policy several times before. As the description of the political situation in Austria shows, his audience was split into two contrary groups, one of them heavily supporting Waldheim, the other opposing him. Additionally, it was clear that Kirchschläger’s speech would cause international interest too. Thus, provided that Kirchschläger wanted to appeal to any group of his audience (and thus maintain his PPF), we can assume that he was inclined to use some vague linguistic strategies.

Secondly, except on certain "ritualised" occasions (e.g. New-years-day, Austrian National Holiday etc.) televised presidential speeches are extremely rare in Austria. Thus, the situation (i.e. the speech event) itself was extraordinarily relevant for the audience, and, moreover, it had the same potential meaning for all listeners. This means that the very fact that the president was delivering a TV-speech on the Waldheim affair was already an indication that he had something...
important to say, and, additionally, one could expect that he would not accuse Waldheim of being guilty in all charges made against him because of considerations for the office of presidency: what would it look like when a president publicly called one of his possible successors a war-criminal? Thus content and form of the speech remain as possible sources of vagueness.

Thirdly, between different pairs of politicians existed the necessity of mutual face-saving activities while simultaneously threatening the PPF of the respective opponent. As the party politicians' statements represent a different speech genre we can assume that they use different vagueness strategies also.

3.3. The president's TV speech

I will show how Kirchschläger achieved vagueness in his speech with reference to two aspects: on the one hand through analysis of the macrostructural discrepancy between the rhetorical structure and the content of the speech, and, on the other, through the microanalysis of an argumentative passage. The speech itself has a clear structure, metacommunicative units occur frequently. Fig. 2 shows a representation of the textual superstructure, i.e. the formal organisation (or rhetorical structure) of the macropropositions (cf. van Dijk 1980a). The speech can be summarised by the following linear sequence of thematic units:

IU(2): Description of Kirchschläger's actions: Two weeks ago Kirchschläger received documents relating to Waldheim's wartime past.

IU(4-12): Argumentation: the charges affected not only Waldheim but also indirectly the whole of Austria, however, Kirchschläger had only been able to pacify the international media to a certain extent, antisemitic tendencies were however in decline.

IU(13): Appeal to audience: All those bearing political responsibility should support this process.

IU(14-16): Argumentation of IU (13): Antisemitism had never been of benefit to Austria, in addition it is inhuman; Austria's contribution to humanity in Europe since 1945 should not be lost.

IU(19-29): Definition of the normative framework for the following arguments: Kirchschläger had not committed himself to anyone for the use of the documents and had also made Waldheim aware of the contents of the

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6 Cf. van Dijk (1980a), I used the term "intonation unit" (IU) for those units which van Dijk refers to as "micropropositions" because Kirchschläger uses marked intonation patterns which do not coincide with sentence boundaries but rather with propositional boundaries.
files. The procedure is not regulated by any law, nevertheless Kirchschläger had treated it as criminal proceedings. Kirchschläger had no right to give a verdict but a political and constitutional right to give the viewers an unbiased statement of the contents of the files.

**IU(33-38):**
Narration 1: The war crime file from the UNO, which was opened on the basis of a criminal charge by the Yugoslavian National Commission for War Crimes: Waldheim was accused by a former staff sergeant, who had become a Yugoslavian prisoner of war, of having ordered the shooting of several persons as an act of reprisal for the desertion of others. The War Crimes Commission gave this charge highest priority, i.e. the accused should be tried by a national court.

**IU(40,41):**
Evaluation 1: As a public prosecutor Kirchschläger would not prefer charges on the basis of this evidence.

**IU(42-51):**
Argumentative support for IU (40,41): Waldheim had no power of command for retaliatory measures. Possibly the witness had lied to protect himself and also to allow the accused an opportunity for his defence. Yugoslavia had taken no steps towards an actual prosecution.

**IU(53-65):**
Narration 2: The documents of the WJC: From July 1942 onwards Waldheim had been employed as an interpreter with no indication of where he had been stationed. Only from December 1943 on could it be proved that Waldheim had been stationed in Salonika. His post meant that he was responsible for the compilation of despatches concerning the war situation in the Balkans.

**IU(66):**
Evaluation 2: Therefore he must have known about the whole situation in the Balkans.

**IU(67,68):**
Argumentative support for IU (66): He approved the morning and evening despatches, in addition he was present at officer’s meetings.

**IU(69-71):**
Narration 3: The deportation of Jews from Salonika is mentioned twice in the documents.

**IU(73):**
Evaluation 3 and argumentative support: Since there are no documents which show where Waldheim was stationed during this time, no connection can be proved between him and the deportation of Jews.

**IU(74,75):**
Summary of intention: K wanted to give the viewers a sober description of the documents so that everyone had an idea of their contents.

**IU(76-78):**
Appeal to the Austrian people: Each and every Austrian must allow for his fellow-citizens to come to their own conclusions.
IU(79,80):  Appeal to those abroad: The foreign media should also take part in this stabilization process.

IU(81-87):  Argumentative support for IU (79,80): From his own memory, said Kirchschläger, all peoples should be careful in passing a verdict of guilty. No nation has overcome its past. We should try to solve the problems of the present and the future together.

3.3.1. Rhetorical structure of the text

The linear sequence of IUs can be divided into three large sections. These three global parts are above all characterised by different levels of reference in time and space, but also by the communicative acts which occur (in parts 1 and 3 appeals


This constitutes a text which corresponds closely to the classical form of the "genus iudiciale" (i.e. the "closing argument" of a trial in American English, cf. Lausberg, 1971: 18). The genus iudiciale is used with the intention of making "a pragmatic...realisable change in the situation...because a change in the situation...is possible...because of the negotiating position" (Lausberg, 1971: 18). Thus Kirchschlager's evaluations (which contradict his own declared speaker intention, cf. below) in part 2 become clear: they are the "argumentationes", which must follow the "narrationes" (i.e. the details of the course of events, Lausberg, 1971: 25). The expressions in parentheses in the tree diagram in fig. 2 give the appropriate terms of classical rhetorics with which the speech can be described.

The "propositio" has a core function in this framework: it is designed to intimate what the party intends to prove (Lausberg, 1971: 25). Thus we find the first direct statement of Kirchschläger's speaker intention here (IU 29). It can be paraphrased in the following way:

Kirchschläger wants to give the Austrian people an unemotional, factual and sober presentation of the contents of documents which relate to the wartime past of one of the candidates for the Presidency.

However, several authors (Lübbe, 1969; Dieckmann, 1971) emphasise that the desire to give an unbiased representation of facts in a political context is an illusion. Thus, one could describe Kirchschläger's intention as illusory while giving him credit for wishing to use the traditional status of Austria's president "above the parties" and for regarding his words as elevated above the daily political struggle. But how does his intention correspond to the use of a persuasive text-type at all?

If we take into account the role which Kirchschläger establishes implicitly in the propositio together with his overtly stated speaker intention a totally different picture of his aim emerges because the actual terms of reference (the normative framework) of the whole speech become much clearer. In IU (19-28), formulated in the negative mode, Kirchschläger brings up a quasi-judicial framework: in IU (21-25) judicial terms of reference are consistently set up. Although in IU(26-28) a judicial function is explicitly denied by himself this does not disrupt the overall picture: He must set up a "possible world" in an "irrealis band" (cf. Greenacre, 1986) of the text because Kirchschläger is in fact not Austria's highest judge. He is, however, much more: he is the president of whom an impartial stance can be

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7 This global sequencing pattern can also be found when other linguistic parameters like phatic elements etc. are under consideration (cf. Grünauer, 1987).
expected. But here we are at the crucial point again: while Kirchschlager established for himself ex negativo the role of judge in the propositio, the genus iudiciale is the task of the counsel for defense in court!

Now the parts of the puzzle fit together. There is a consistent discrepancy between form and content in Kirchschlager's speech. While on the level of overt content Kirchschlager claims to give an impartial representation of facts and adopts a judicial role, the form of the speech shows that he is partial and wishes to convince a judge (i.e. the audience). Thus, formal features and those regarding content are directed at different parts of the audience: on the content level Kirchschlager is appealing to the whole audience (including Waldheim critics in- and outside Austria), on the formal level he is biased in favour of Waldheim. On the textual level this means that factual information is combined with appellative sequences and couched in a persuasive form, therefore the preconditions for textual vagueness are met. In the next section I will show how features of the textual microlevel contribute to the overall vagueness too.

3.3.2. Argumentative structures

In order to show this I will examine one argumentative sequence of the speech. It is an extract from the first part in which Kirchschlager wished to arouse the interest of his listeners and present his aims (The numbers in brackets refer to the overall numbering of the IUs).

Extract 1:

(10) After all the WJC press conferences which had been taking place daily or every other day have now stopped.

(11) Thus the second hope with which I accepted these documents has already been fulfilled to a large extent.

(12) The tension which arose from a reaction of mass solidarity against an action interpreted as interference from outside in the presidential election campaign and inevitably also affected our Jewish fellow-citizens, is now subsiding.

(13) However, today I ask all my fellow citizens once again, especially those who bear political responsibility, to promote this process of internal stabilisation with all their might.

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8 I apply Toulmin's (1958) approach to analyze the following extract.

9 The original German texts of this and the following extracts are in the appendix of this paper.
Never in our history have anti-Jewish feelings brought us any profit or prosperity.

IU (12) states that anti-semitic tendencies among the Austrian public are dying down. The backing for this is presented in IU (10), the warrant is also presented in IU (12):

In cases of external interference in questions which concern only the Austrian people, solidarity emerges among the Austrians.

Now let's turn to the actual lexical choice. IU (12) represents the most neutral and oblique description of antisemitism one can conceive of. Here Kirchschläger showed the very restraint in terms of evaluation which he swore to observe throughout his speech. Anti-semitism is paraphrased as tension... which also affected our Jewish fellow-citizens. While antisemitism is clearly defined as prejudice on the part of one group against another group, for Kirchschläger there is only tension. Whereas this term expresses that there is hostility between two groups it keeps silent about the irrationality and one-sidedness of prejudice. In addition, the particle also implies that this "tension" affected not only Jews (who else it affected we are not told).

The reason for antisemitism is equally abstractly expressed: a reaction of mass solidarity against an action interpreted as interference from outside in the presidential election campaign. Here, on the one hand an expression with a positive connotation ("mass solidarity") is operative, on the other hand this is a typical victim/offender inversion which so often has to serve as the explanation for antisemitism: The Jews are themselves to blame for anti-semitism! We have, however, only unravelled the second half of Kirchschläger's thread of argumentation. In the following he presents a second backing for his aim "containment of antisemitism."

We find it in IU (13-14). This passage, described above (3.3.1.) as an appeal, simultaneously serves as backing for the cited aim. This is clarified by the phrase once again in IU (13) and the anaphorical relationship between IU (12) and the expression this process in IU (13). Thus we can give the second reason for his acceptance of the documents (aside from his concern for the prestige of Austria) as the wish for an abatement of antisemitism. Now how is this justified? The causal chain described above which contains Kirchschläger's explanation of the origin of antisemitic prejudices promises no good, but worse is yet to come. IU (14) can be taken almost exactly as underlying norm:

Antisemitism has never proved of benefit to us.
The tagged-on second justification *in addition it is extremely inhuman* does not improve the situation. Here Kirchschläger reveals not only himself but, even more so, the Austrian public. What are the moral standards of a nation, of which one can expect that it will accept such an argument?

Furthermore lexical choice and the content of the underlying argumentative norms fit into the overall pattern of textual vagueness: whereas on the content level Kirchschläger is trying to argue that antisemitism is subsiding in the general public, the formal choices he makes to describe this process (i.e. wording) as well as the norms he presumes for this process show that he argues within a general antisemitic discourse pattern (cf. Wodak et al. 1990, Gruber, 1991) which does not threaten the face of any member of his audience (the anti-semites included).

3.4. The politicians' reactions

In this part of the paper I will investigate the statements concerning Kirchschläger’s speech made by Kurt Waldheim himself and by Heinz Fischer, then Deputy Chairman of the SPÖ. These interviews were broadcast an hour after Kirchschläger’s TV speech in an ORF news program, which also covered the speech itself extensively. The interviews were approximately twice as long as the extracts examined here. The sections of text have been chosen to cover each politician’s global assessment of the speech as well as his opinion as to who would benefit from the speech.

I shall restrict the analysis to the study of the relationship between the text of the speech and the statements of both politicians hence I will examine the sequential arrangement of the macro-propositions, their thematic interconnection and the forms of argumentation. Both statements could also be examined with respect to other remarks already made in the course of the election campaign or idiosyncratic rhetorical strategies of the individual politicians. However, my aim is to show that the speech offered, in principle, opportunities to each side, in that they could legitimate their own position by referring to particular aspects of it without distorting the content.

3.4.1. Waldheim

Extract 2:

1 M: Presidential Candidate Dr. Kurt Waldheim, at present on campaign tour in Salzburg, seemed relieved in his reaction.

3 W: I am very grateful to the President for having taken the trouble to give this
4 explanation, which repudiates all charges made against me and I hope that we can now 5 concentrate more constructively on the real problems. ...

6 I: Was this, in your opinion, a help to your campaign?
7 W: I wouldn't say that - um - the President behaved very objectively, very correctly, and 8 that - um - that is the real value of his statement, because I am convinced that now all 9 these charges have collapsed.

The interviewer's first question is summarised by the moderator of the programme and not broadcast on the soundtrack (this is also the case with the other interview).

Waldheim's first answer shows a three-partite structure, which is graphically represented in figure 3.10

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Figure 3

In the first part of the statement Waldheim's mentioning of the trouble (line 3) which the president took, on the one hand emphasises the importance of the speech event, but lays also simultaneously the foundation for an argumentation based on Waldheim personally. The implicit identification of Waldheim with Austria in Kirchschläger's speech (cf. section 4 of this paper) is fully exploited. Crucial for the analysis in the context of this paper is, however, the second part of Waldheim's answer: Here we find Waldheim's actual interpretation of the speech. Waldheim refers to the second part, i.e. Kirchschläger's evaluation of the documents only. Through the use of the quantifier all (line 4) he generalizes from the factual to include the credibility charges also.

In the last part of the statement he sets up a "positive Utopia" compared to the conduct of the election campaign up to that time. In this passage the amassing of positively connotated adjectives or adjectival nouns is striking: if we (whoever this is) should now concentrate constructively on the real problems then this implicates that we have up to now wasted time destructively on non-existent problems. We see that the first two parts of the statement are connected, in that they establish the reference to Kirchschläger's speech and then present Waldheim's own evaluation.

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10 In figures 3-6 the following abbreviations are used: P-President, K-Kirchschläger, W=Waldheim.
and interpretation of it. Both this sections serve only as introduction for the last part of the statement, which once again outlines very vaguely his own election campaign stance.

In the second question-answer sequence the interviewer's question is rather striking. On the one hand Waldheim is offered the possibility of presenting his own interpretation through the relativisation of the question by the parenthetical sequence *in your opinion* (line 6) but at the same time this expression serves to avoid an FTA with respect to Kirchschläger. Since Kirchschläger took an unbiased stance as the main element of his PPF the interviewer's openly questioning whether Kirchschläger's statement was unbiased would precisely attack this aspect of Kirchschläger's PPF. Thus it is clear that this question implicitly gives Waldheim the opportunity of his own interpretation of the speech, as he can also not publicly maintain that Kirchschläger had supported him.

![Figure 4](image)

We can see this from Waldheim's answer. Once again it can be divided into three sections (cf. fig. 4.)

The structure is analogous to that of the first answer. After Waldheim explicitly rejected the FTA against Kirchschläger (however still only in the non factual mode, line 7), he gives a reason for this rejection (paraphrasing Kirchschläger's overtly verbalised speaker's intention: Kirchschläger had behaved *very objectively* and *very correctly* (line 7). After this extremely positive evaluation comes once again the generalised deduction from the central part of Kirchschläger's speech (even if softened by the parenthetical sequence *I am convinced*, line 8): *all charges have collapsed*. Thus we see Waldheim using two strategies in his reaction:

1. Reference to and deference of Kirchschläger's PPF, and
2. Reference only to the second part of the speech as well as a generalisation of Kirchschläger's evaluation of the documents to all charges.
Extract 3:

1 M: Heinz Fischer, deputy chairman of the SPÖ, answered the question whether this speech was decisive for the election:

3 F: I believe the decisive sentence was the call to all voters, to come to their own conclusions - but I find this address really positive. I’m grateful for the intervention on the part of Austria, for the condemnation of all forms of antisemitism and, of course, also for the really fair and carefully considered assessment of the Waldheim file from New York with the crucial statement that the President has no right to find someone guilty nor to find him innocent, and this is in line with our repeated statement that we believe Dr. Waldheim to be innocent and also with the question of credibility in connection with the highest office in the land, which we have made an issue in this election campaign. ...

12 I: Now to the SPÖ’s view of its own candidate, of Dr. Kurt Steyrer. Do you believe that Dr. Kirchschläger’s remarks were good for Dr. Steyrer?

14 F: Well, I feel additionally strengthened in my support for Dr. Steyrer by Dr. Kirchschläger’s remarks and not because the President was in any way biased, but rather because Dr. Steyrer, following his election, will be a representative of our land who is not affected by these things -files- the necessity for a speech by the president, etc. I want for our country a president who, like all previous presidents, has nothing to do with such things.

In his answer Fischer refers not only to Kirchschläger’s manifest speaker intention but also to his assessment of the documents, however in a different way than Waldheim. We can represent this statement in figure 5.

In the introductory sequence (lines 3-4) of the first part Fischer invites the listeners to form their own opinion. At the same time he dissociates himself from this invitation by the parenthetical verb believe and the explicit reference to Kirchschläger’s speech. The following evaluation of the whole speech refers almost exclusively to Kirchschläger’s appeals and manifest speaker’s intention. The only reference to Kirchschläger’s evaluation of the files is much shorter than in Waldheim’s statement and is weakened by two factors: firstly by the adjectival
phrase of course (line 5) but also by the rest of the sentence which follows. Here he emphasises once again his opinion that the crucial part of the speech was that Kirchschläger had no right to pass judgement on Waldheim. Thus the closing of the first part forms a unity with the beginning; in both passages Kirchschläger's authority is weakened Fischer's emphasis on the responsibility of the audience in their judgement of the affair. In this respect the first part represents an off-record FTA against Kirchschläger and his authority to evaluate documents. This becomes obvious through the complete deagentivation of Kirchschläger as a person in the evaluation of the speech, i.e. while Kirchschläger always appears in the role of the agent (i.e. speaker) in the other statement, in Fischer’s he does not appear as a person at all, only in the last sentence of the first part as the president (who) has no right... (line 7) Thus Fischer keeps Kirchschläger as a person completely separate from the speech itself.

In the second part of the answer Fischer transfers to the presentation of the election campaign policy of the SPÖ. Here follows an off-record FTA against Waldheim. Fischer explicitly approaches here, for the first time in all the texts examined, the credibility charge against Waldheim. He uses the same FTA-avoidance strategy as in the first part with respect to Kirchschläger: Waldheim is not mentioned by name in connection with the issue of credibility (lines 9,10) whereas he is in connection with the SPÖ's (alleged) belief of his innocence.

In answer to the question as who might benefit from the speech (the second part of the extract), Fischer can speak in support of "his" candidate, because the speech neither affected nor benefited Steyrer as was already shown. The statement consists of two parts (cf. fig. 6).

Fischer does not answer directly the question put to him; the appeal for Steyrer in the first part is weakened again by embedding it in a parenthetical sequence beginning with I feel (line 14) because he must weaken the potential FTA against Kirchschläger.

In the remainder of the answer Fischer continues with disguised propaganda for Steyrer and FTAs against Waldheim. The most interesting feature of this passage is, that although it is in the future tense it is also completely in the factual
mode, i.e. according to Fischer's statement, there is no alternative: Steyrer will be the future president.

4. Conclusions

I will summarize the results in the following theoretical sketch: On the interactional level it is possible to trace back the motivation for the use of vague statements to the addressing of different groups of the audience by the president and the netting of FTA avoidance and FTA performance which the interactants of this public media event had to establish in order to achieve their political aims.

On the discourse level, the discrepancies between the different components of the individual speech events served as sources for the actual production of vague texts. Thus the realization of a vague text depends (apart from speaker's intention) on text type and the position of the text in a communicative chain. Kirchschläger's speech represents a formal, planned, and monological text type and was the initial move in the communicative chain considered here.11

The formal analysis of the text structure shows that the text reflects the tension between the "apolitical" role of the Austrian President and the highly political occasion for the speech as well as Kirchschläger's aim to appeal to all groups of his (possible) audience inside and outside Austria. A "Doppelung" is taking place as (at least) two target groups are being addressed simultaneously by different features of one communicative act, persuasive speech acts are being presented in the guise of conveying information.

The examination of the argumentation and value structure of the whole speech (which had to be restricted to the analysis of only one sequence in the context of this paper) shows that Kirchschläger only continued those strategies which were customary in Austria from the beginning of the Waldheim affair (and even before): solidarisation of all Austrians with Waldheim, victim-offender inversion in the assessment of the origin of antisemitism and regarding the past as a purely juridical problem (cf. Wodak et al., 1990; Gruber 1991). By reducing the judgement of Waldheim's past to the question of whether particular file materials agreed with one another or were available, Kirchschläger obscured (also through the authority by right of his office) two dimensions of dealing with the Austrian Nazi past: firstly the moral-ethical dimension of participation in a leading position in an offensive war (because Waldheim was not an ordinary soldier but an officer). This

11 Of course it was a reactive move in respect to the election campaign events and the whole political discourse in Austria, cf. above section 3.1.
is mentioned in the lengthy representation of his service, but the significance of this is not. Secondly, Waldheim’s treatment of the topic today (this being exactly the "credibility charge").

The text reveals two dimensions on the latent level: on the one hand, the partisan support of Waldheim (by using a persuasive text type) and, on the other, the adoption of specifically Austrian strategies for dealing with its own past. In contrast Kirchschläger stresses his impartiality and his endeavour to present mere facts on the manifest level of the text. Thus, the concept of vagueness proposed above could be substantiated in this text. Vagueness could be traced back mainly to properties of the whole text, and his underlying values and to lexical choice.

In the reactions of the politicians we saw how they took advantage of this in their statements as well as how the journalists’ questions served as independent sources for vagueness (as they asked questions which allowed no direct answer). According to the different speech genre (dialogical, lower degree of formality and planning) the politicians used other vagueness strategies like deagentivisation and parenthetical verbs according to the different text type of their statement.

Thus the present approach explains phenomena of the microtextual level by properties of the whole situation an not the other way round. The use of parenthetical verbs, for example, in situations other than the one under consideration here may yield different effects on the whole discourse (e.g. in a therapeutic session the use of parenthetical verbs by the therapist may reflect his empathy and non-directiveness, and hence his reluctance of imposing his interpretations on the client, rather than his interest to produce different sources for interpretation of his statement). At the same time my approach allows a differentiation between various degrees of persuasiveness of texts. In the case of

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12 In this way, Kirchschläger’s speech fits not only in the political discourse of the 1986 Presidential Election Campaign but also in the whole political discourse of the 2nd Austrian Republic because the rejection and repression of the past (Austria’s "flight from history") are something unique to this country (cf. Meissl/Mulley/Rathkolb, 1986; Bunzl 1987).

13 It may seem naive to investigate the statements of two politicians who were centrally involved in the whole election campaign and to find out that each of them claimed that Kirchschläger’s speech was in favour of himself (or of his candidate respectively). But there are two reasons which justify this enterprise:
- Firstly, as was shown above both politicians refer to the speech and do not distort it but only refer to different parts of it.
- Secondly, the day after the president’s speech I conducted an informal poll among several persons who either supported or opposed Waldheim but were not involved in the election campaign. And just like the two politicians under investigation here, both groups claimed that Kirchschläger’s speech had either been supportive or detrimental to Waldheim (dependent on their respective partisanship). And interestingly members of each group justified their opinion by relying on different aspects of the speech.
vague texts the audience is provided with contradictory cues for relevance attribution (and therefore for the construction of a semantic representation of the text). As a consequence, listeners will activate their existing belief systems and build up a representation which takes into account only those aspects of the text which fit best into their belief system. Overt discussion of diverse opinions is thus impeded because every listener can claim to be right and try to convince the other of his interpretation instead of discussing the vagueness of the source text.

In the case of overt persuasive texts, the components of the speech event will coincide with listeners' expectations (e.g. if you go to an Election Campaign Meeting or watch a TV commercial you will expect to be persuaded to vote for Mr. X or to buy shoe-creme Y). Building up a semantic representation of such a text will involve existing belief systems as well, but, at the same time, listeners will be aware of discrepancies between the source text and their beliefs. Thus overt arguments about conflicting contents will be possible.

These last remarks were rather hypothetical and show that a lot of research work ought to be done in this field. At the same time, they show that vagueness is a phenomenon which is created in the course of interaction through the interplay of participants. Therefore the investigation of it requires a pragmatic approach as it is provided here and which could yield a typology of the pragmatic functions of political texts.

Appendix

German text of the extracts cited in the paper:

Extract 1:

(10) Immerhin aber haben die täglichen oder in zwei Tagesabständen stattgefundenen Pressekonferenzen des Jüdischen Weltkongresses in New York aufgehört.

(11) Damit hat sich die zweite Hoffnung, die ich mit der Übernahme der Dokumente verbunden habe, doch weitgehend erfüllt.

(12) Die Spannung, die aufgrund einer Reaktion der Massensolidarität gegenüber einer Aktion entstanden ist, die als eine von außen kommende Einmischung in den Präsidentenwahlkampf interpretiert wurde und zwangsläufig ihre Auswirkungen auch auf unsere jüdischen Mitbürger hatte, ist im Abklingen.
(13) Dennoch bitte ich heute erneut alle Mitbürger und Mitbürgerinnen, vor allem jene, die politische Verantwortung tragen, diesen Prozeß der inneren Beruhigung mit ganzer Kraft zu fördern.

(14) Antijüdische Gefühle haben uns in unserer Geschichte bisher nie Nutzen oder Segen gebracht.

Extract 2:


W: Ich bin dem Herrn Bundespräsidenten sehr dankbar - dafür, daß er sich dieser Mühe unterzogen hat, - mit seiner Erklärung sind alle Vorwürfe, die gegen mich erhoben wurden, zusammengebrochen, und ich hoffe, daß wir uns nunmehr in konstruktiver Weise auf die wirklichen Probleme konzentrieren können.

... Ich würde das nicht sagen - äh - der Herr Bundespräsident hat sich sehr objektiv verhalten, sehr korrekt verhalten, und gerade darin äh liegt der Wert dieser Erklärung, weil ich überzeugt bin, daß damit alle diese Anschuldigungen in sich zusammengebrochen sind.

Extract 3:

M: Heinz Fischer, der stellvertretende Parteiführer der SPÖ, antwortete auf die Frage, ob diese Rede wahlentscheidend sei:

F: Ich glaube - der entscheidende Satz war der Aufruf an die mündigen Bürger, sich selbst ein Urteil zu bilden - aber ich beurteile diese Ansprache wirklich positiv, ich bin dankbar für das Eintreten für Österreich, für die Verurteilung jeder Form des Antisemitismus und natürlich auch für die wirklich faire und ausgewogene Beurteilung der Waldheim Akten aus New York mit dem Kernsatz der Bundespräsident habe kein Recht zu einem Schuldspruch und kein Recht zu einem Freispruch und das - deckt sich mit unserer - immer wieder geäußerten Unschuldsvorvermutung zugunsten von Dr. Waldheim aber auch mit der Frage der Glaubwürdigkeit et cetera, die wir in diesem Wahlkampf um das höchste Amt im Staate - gestellt haben.
I: Jetzt mit Blickwinkel der SPÖ auf ihren eigenen Kandidaten, auf Dr. Kurt Steyrer. Glauben Sie, waren die Ausführungen von Dr. Kirchschläger gut für Dr. Steyrer?

F: Also ich fühle mich durch die - Ausführungen des Herrn Bundespräsidenten noch zusätzlich bestärkt für Dr. Steyrer einzutreten und zwar nicht deshalb weil der Bundespräsident hier irgendwie parteiisch gewesen wäre, sondern weil eben Dr. Steyrer ein - Repräsentant unseres Staates sein wird, nach seiner Wahl, der von allen diesen Dingen - Akten - Notwendigkeit einer - Rede des Herrn Bundespräsidenten et cetera, nicht betroffen ist. Ich wünsch für unser Land einen Bundespräsidenten, der - mit allen diesen Dingen so wie die bisherigen Bundespräsidenten nichts zu tun hat.

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