

## **"The EU is not them, but us!"**

### **The first person plural and the articulation of collective identities in European political discourse**

In this presentation I analyze linguistic constructions of collective identities in speeches written in English and delivered (in English) by state representatives speaking for Finland, the United Kingdom and Hungary.

In my research I describe and compare the uses of the first person plural (P1) and its role in constructing collective identities in the speeches. From the grammatical point of view, I consider the different uses of P1 highly representative of a speaker's collective identity because utterances involving P1 pronouns, such as 'we', 'us' and 'ourselves', represent who or what 'we' are, what 'we' do and what is done to 'us'. Hence, the linguistic-analytical part of my research focuses on three interconnected questions: (i) What do P1 pronouns refer to in the texts? (ii) What kinds or aspects of collective identities do they refer to? (iii) What process types (in the sense of Halliday and Matthiesen, 2004) are indexed in the speeches by the use of P1 in relation to the different collective identities established? I examine these questions by cross-comparing three corpora of political speeches (one per each country). In other words, I search for portrayals of 'us' and provide a descriptive account of them. The question I investigate from a social critical perspective in connection to these portrayals is: What motivating factors inform the use of one identity category over another at any given point in these speeches?

Statistically significant tendencies in my quantitative results show that the longer a country had been a member of the EU, the more frequently its representatives identified with the Union and the less frequently with the country they represented. Therefore, the duration of membership of the EU seems to function as a strong influential factor in official constructions of national and EU identities. My further findings indicate statistically significant differences in the types of verbs the speakers used when they identified with the EU in contrast to when they identified with their home countries. The 'we, the EU' collective turned out to be constructed more as 'doers of practical activities' than 'we, the country', since the former collective was most frequently portrayed as performers of material processes in all of the three corpora, i.e. as actors of verbs denoting 'taking', 'challenging', 'achieving', 'doing' and 'making'. By contrast, the latter collective appeared dominantly as experiencers of mental processes that is, as performers of verbs denoting 'thinking', 'feeling' and 'needing'. Since 'we, the country' in all three corpora was used more frequently to express feelings and thoughts, in every corpus the national collective indexed by 'we' came to be constructed more on the basis of intellectual and emotional grounds than the action oriented 'we, the EU' collective. Thus, all of the speakers, regardless of their national background or their official position, used similar patterns of discourse strategies in contrasting collective identities built around their countries with collective identities constructed around the EU.

My qualitative findings corroborate my quantitative results and provide a social-political explanation for the observed differences and similarities in the representations of collective identity groups in the speeches. On the basis of these results it seems that the different (power) positions assigned to each nation in the given setting greatly influenced their constructions of collective identities.