Quitting with Style: Linguistic Analysis of Political Resignation Speeches

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Abstract

Political discourse mainly serves as a platform where a struggle for power takes place. Nevertheless, political resignation speeches stand out because their purpose is completely different – politicians relinquish power to other political actors. Quitting a high-ranking public position is never a simple matter; consequently, politicians are extremely cautious in coming forward with well-structured and well-phrased speeches. This research looks into the syntactic formula politicians apply in announcing their resignation. The focus is placed on determining the types of sentences (both according to function and structure) the resigning politicians prefer; their usage of syntactically marked sentences versus sentences in which the SVOCA rule is observed. Finally, the different realizations of the Subject and the use of passive voice are analysed, since these are deemed to have a direct bearing on the amount of responsibility politicians assume. The study offers a linguistic analysis of the resignation speeches of the last three British Prime Ministers and is directed at finding commonalities and differences in the syntactic features of their resignation speeches.

Keywords: *resignation speeches, politicians, linguistic analysis, syntax*

Introduction

Delivering effective and persuasive speeches is vital for politicians to keep themselves afloat in the political waters. Making a proper choice of words and expressions and constructing grammatically correct, and, sometimes, even syntactically atypical utterances on purpose to draw the attention to a specific point, are perhaps among the most necessary skills of both aspiring and well-established politicians. In other words, given that politics and language go hand in hand, a perfect mastery of language and very skillful language use are instrumental for all those who have entered the domain of politics. Practice has shown that politicians who are adept at using language effectively fare much better not only when it comes to obtaining and maintaining power, but when they have to relinquish power as well. In that respect, Chilton (2004) rightfully remarks that most political actors are normally acutely aware of the importance of their language use for their political career.

Resignation speeches of departing politicians, who have held prominent state positions such as President, Prime Minister, etc., present a special type of political discourse. If the primary goal of every political speech is to convince the public of the truthfulness of the statements made by the political actors so that the public will support to those politicians, the goal of a resignation speech is strikingly different. Apart from informing the general public about their intention to resign, the departing politicians with their resignation speeches set out to explain the reasons for their 'failure' to deliver a specific assignment. It goes without saying that, at the same time, they also try to salvage their personal and political reputation, in the hope of avoiding condemnation, humiliation and criticism (Neshkovska, 2019b).

At the core of this research are three relatively recent resignation speeches given by the last three British Prime Ministers – Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Theresa May, who announced their resignations at 10 Downing Street in front of the media representatives. The socio-political factors underlying their resignations, as might be expected, due to the brevity of the time period within which their resignations occurred (2010-2019), are essentially very similar. Brown gave up his position as PM over the 2008 depression which hit the world hard, the UK included; whereas, Cameron and May both 'fell prey' to the Brexit deal, i.e. the UK's plan to leave and modify the nature of its relationship with the European Union. Being a strong advocate of the Stay option, Cameron submitted his resignation immediately after the 2016 referendum on Brexit. His successor, May, having failed to convince the MPs in the British Parliament to endorse her Brexit deal, left the office as British PM in 2019.

In this study, these three speeches are subjected to a thorough analysis of a quantitative and qualitative nature. Since the main unit of analysis is the sentence, the transcripts of the three speeches were parsed into sentence segments and each sentence was analysed independently. The sentence was placed in the center of this research, as the study is based on the premise that in making a political speech sound logical, reasonable and persuasive, it is not just the wording that matters, but the actual sentence structure too. To put it differently, it is not just the content, but the form through which that content is delivered that enables politicians to achieve their goals, which in the context of resigning include: informing the public that they are stepping down; explaining the reasons why they do that along with saving their personal and political reputation.

Theoretical background

Political resignation speeches as a special type of political discourse is a subject matter that still awaits a more profound and elaborate research. A confirmation for this claim is found in Dobel's (1999) "The Ethics of Resigning", where the fact that "very little has been written about resignation despite its importance" has been particularly stressed.

Politicians resign over a wide variety of reasons. Dumm (1998) notes that "individuals have many reasons to leave office and not all are ethically based". In his research, however, he focuses on the moral reasons for resigning, which occur when a person fails "to live up to the obligations of office", emphasizing the fact that resignation can gravely "affect a person's reputation and employability" in the long run. Felice (2009), too, mentions some of the key reasons why a politician may feel the urge to resign:

> "… inability because of age to fully perform the tasks of the job, failure to master the technical competencies required, … or resigning over principle—reaching the decision that the demands of the government are in conflict with an individual's basic moral beliefs. When one's ability to impact policy is gone, it is hard to accept staying in government and supporting a policy the individual believes is morally bankrupt."

Political resignation, as in the case of any other resignation, is not a one-sided act. Dumm (1999) defines resignation as "a collaborative act undertaken by the resigner and those who are charged with the duty of accepting it". In the context of high-ranking politicians, despite the officials, the general population also has to give a green light (not formally of course) to the resignation because they voted for and endowed that politician with an authority to make decisions on their behalf.

Consequently, the resigning politician has a special duty to make his/her resignation speech acceptable, convincing and even appealing to the general public.

Reisigl (2008) investigates the features of different types of political speeches, and comes to a conclusion that resignation speeches should be subsumed under a joint category alongside with inaugural addresses, speeches of appointment, speeches of award, welcoming speeches and farewell addresses, since all of them have performative/illocutionary quality, i.e. they can all be easily recognised as "deeds done in words".

Literature overview shows that research on political resignation speeches, which deals with resignation speeches from a linguistic point of view, is definitely very scarce. Collins & Clark's (1992) study is one of the few studies dedicated to this issue. The study looks into the resignation speech of an American congressman, and sheds some light on the possible reasons why his resignation speech failed to come out as convincing and effective. Collins and Clark suggest that through his *choice of lexis* the politician tried to re-legitimize himself, presenting himself as a victim, and simultaneously, delegitimize the Congress, depicting it as "blood-stained" and in need of cleansing. Eventually, they conclude that not acknowledging personal guilt and pointing the finger at somebody led merely to further delegitimisation of both the departing politician and the institution he represented.

Another study relevant for the research at hand is Charteris-Black's (2005) study in which they argue that successful speakers in political contexts need to appeal both to the attitudes and emotions of their listeners. This, he claims, cannot be done solely by *lexical means* although these are the most important factors for delivering a successful political speech (Charteris-Black, 2005). According to Charteris-Black effective political speeches are often a result of many distinct

strategies combined together such as the use of *metaphors, metonymy, analogy, pronouns, active versus passive voice, contrast or antithesis,* etc.

Irimiea (2010) also investigates the usage of *pronouns* in political speeches and states that the pronouns that political speakers use to refer to themselves can be a significant part of the message, as they use them either to foreground or to obscure their responsibility and agency. Thus, according to her, the first person pronouns 'I', 'Me' and 'My' are used when the political leader is expressing his personal views and opinions. The use of the pronoun 'we' can become fairly complicated in that it can refer to a number of different people. Pennycook (1994) sees 'we' as always simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, as a pronoun of solidarity and rejection, of inclusion and exclusion.

There are other recent studies on political discourse, which, unfortunately, do not dwell on political resignation speeches, but which offer valuable insights that can serve as a solid basis for launching research on political resignation speeches. Thus, Dlugan (2009) investigates Martin Luther King's "*I have a dream*" speech, and finds that special effects are achieved through the techniques of *repetition*, particularly by repeating the key theme words. Dlugan also marks that the frequent use of *direct quotation, allusion* and *metaphor* makes King's speech particularly effective. Bird (2011) investigates the rhetorical style in President Clinton's speeches delivered during harsh moments of domestic tragedy and concludes that these speeches are memorable due to the frequent *religious connotations, the use of repetition* and *metaphorical expressions*. Ayeomoni (2012) looks into the Nigerian military coup speeches of three military political rulers and focuses on *the lexical items (repetition, synonymy, antonym, hyponymy,* and *collocation)* used in their coup speeches, his final purpose being

to discover the relationship between the lexemes and the political ideologies of the politicians in question.

Clearly, the above-discussed studies dwell on various linguistic features of political speeches, but mainly, on the lexical level. The fact that none of them deals solely with the syntactic features of the political speeches provides further legitimacy to the research at hand which aspires to yield some salient insights into the syntactic features of this specific genre of political speeches – resignation speeches.

Research Methodology

As mentioned previously, all three political resignation speeches were analysed from the point of view of syntax with the sentence being the main unit of analysis. The main questions addressed here were whether the departing politicians in their final speech observed the rules of syntax and what sorts of syntactic preferences they had in building their sentences, in view of the goals they wished to accomplish – to provide valid reasons for their failure to accomplish the task they were entrusted with, as well as to preserve their personal and professional integrity and repute.

The sentences in the three resignation speeches were analysed from several different perspectives. Firstly, the focus was placed on the function of the sentences, i.e. whether the departing politicians were making statements (declarative), asking questions (interrogative), expressing emotions (exclamative), or issuing orders and directives (imperative). Secondly, the sentences were analysed in terms of their syntactic structure. In other words, what was inspected was whether the departing politicians packaged their final messages in the form of simple, compound, complex or even compound-complex sentences. Thirdly, the syntactic structure of the

sentences was put under scrutiny in order to establish whether the regular pattern of sentence elements in English known as SVOCA (Subject + Verb + Object + Complement + Adjunct) was observed, or, whether perhaps, the sentences were syntactically marked, i.e. atypical and did not follow the SVOCA rule. The realisations of the Subject in the analysed sentences was investigated as well, in order to ascertain whether the politicians preferred speaking in their name (by using the personal pronoun 'I'), or on behalf of the political faction they represented (by using the personal pronoun 'we'), which, in this context, could be interpreted as an attempt to share the blame and relativize the gravity of their 'failure'. Finally, the sentences were explored with regard to the usage of the passive and active voice, since this sentence feature is also deemed to be in a direct correlation with the extent of responsibility a politician wishes to assume for his political deeds. The ultimate goal of the analysis was to discover whether any recurrent patterns of linguistic behavior in terms of syntax in the speeches of all three departing MPs were traceable, and whether that specific linguistic behavior was somehow relatable to the goals the politicians wished to achieve with their resignation speeches.

The corpus is obviously not very extensive, but we believe that a thorough analysis can provide some key insights into the syntactic features of political resignation speeches. More specifically, Gordon Brown's speech[i] is the shortest – it lasted only 3 minutes – and contains 459 words. Both David Cameron's speech[ii] and Theresa May's speech[iii] are about 7 minutes long and contain 932 and 1099 words, respectively. This basically means that 17 minutes of oral discourse and about 2490 words were subjected to analysis for the purposes of this study.

Bas Aarts' (2001) "English Syntax and Argumentation" provided the foundations for this research as this textbook intended for English majors offers elaborate explanations on most of the syntactic features (sentence types, sentence structure, marked sentences, etc.) explored in this study.

Results

A) Types of sentences in the resignation speeches according to their function

The first syntactic feature explored in the three departing MPs' speeches was the type of sentences politicians used according to their function[iv]. More precisely, the aim was to detect whether they preferred using **declarative, interrogative, exclamative** or **imperative** sentences, and to what extent they did that in their resignation speeches.

The analysis of the three resignation speeches in this respect showed almost completely identical results (see Chart 1 below). Namely, all three resignation speeches were chiefly, or rather almost exclusively, composed of declarative sentences. Also, no instances of interrogative and exclamative sentences were found in the analysed speeches.
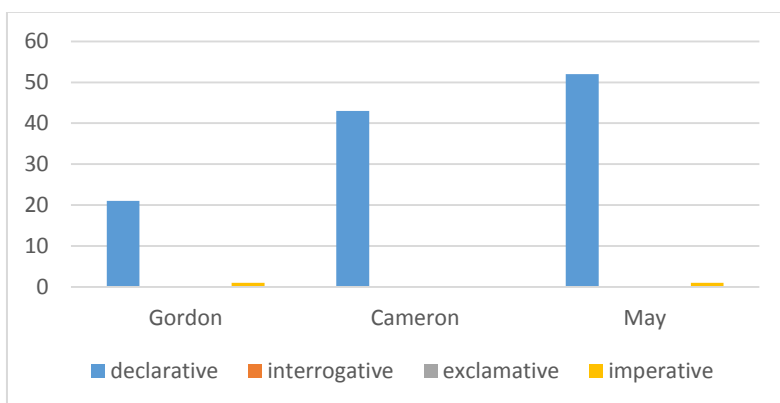
Chart 1 Types of sentences according to function

In Gordon Brown's speech, almost all of the sentences were of the declarative type (90%) (e.g. *My resignation as leader of the* <u>*Labour*</u> *party will take effect immediately.*) and there were only a few instances of imperative sentences starting with 'let me', which in fact is not a true imperative but only a polite way of beginning a new statement (e.g. *And* <u>*let me add*</u> *one thing also!*). David Cameron's speech consisted only of declarative sentences (100%) (e.g. *I have spoken to Her Majesty the Queen this morning to advise her of the steps that I am taking.*). In May's speech, also, all sentences (98%) were declarative (e.g. *So I am today announcing that I will resign as leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party on Friday 7 June so that a successor can be chosen.*), apart from only one imperative sentence (2%) (e.g. *Never forget that compromise is not a dirty word*!), which again was not a real issuing of a directive in the given context, but simply a quotation of somebody else's directive issued previously[v].

These results come as no surprise considering that all three analysed speeches were resignation speeches, in which the departing MPs, covered, more or less, the same topics (e.g. they explained the reasons for their resignations; expressed

gratitude to their supporters and collaborators; praised their country; made positive and bright predictions about their country's future, etc.) (Neshkovska, 2019b), and in doing that they made statements, understandably, in the form of declarative sentences with which they wanted, first and foremost, to inform the general public about their decision. Also, since none of the three departing MPs tried to shift the blame and criticize their political opponents for their failure, and none of them tried to incite their supporters to be disrespectful towards their unlike-minded political rivals, it is little wonder that no interrogative nor exclamative sentences were used, as it is generally the case, for instance, with pre-election speeches (Neshkovska, 2019a).

B) Types of sentences according to structure

The next analysed feature was the types of sentences used in the resignation speeches according to their syntactic structure. Namely, the aim was to inspect whether the departing PMs preferred using **simple, complex, compound** or **compound-complex sentences** in their resignation speeches.[vi]

The three analysed speeches, in this respect as well, demonstrated more similarities than differences (see Chart 2 below). The *simple sentences*, composed naturally of one independent clause, and the *complex sentences*, composed of one independent and at least one dependent clause, were the two predominant types of sentences in all three speeches. The compound sentences which comprise two or more independent clauses and the complex-compound type of sentences which are rather complex as they include at least two independent and one dependent clause were used considerably less frequently. Finally, it is interesting to note that there were some instances of incomplete sentences, composed either of a list of words or

phrases or of a dependent clause, but these were the rarest type of sentences used in the analysed political resignation speeches.
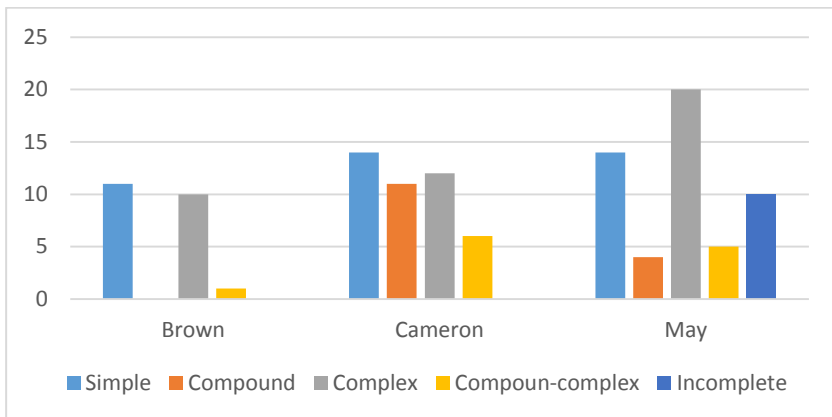

Chart 2 Types of sentences according to structure

In Gordon Brown's speech, the majority of the sentences were **simple** sentences (50 %) (e.g. *My resignation as leader of the* Labour *party will take effect immediately.*). Nevertheless, half of the simple sentences were, in fact, a bit longer (54 %), as they contained either an adjunct or an object realized as a longer phrase or a clause (e.g. *Only those that have held the office of prime minister can understand <u>the full weight of its responsibilities and its great capacity for good.</u>* (DO)). The other half of the sentences in Gordon Brown's speech (45 %) were **complex**, meaning they comprised one independent and one dependent clause (e.g. *In the event that the Queen accepts, I shall advise her to invite the leader of the Opposition to form a government.*). Merely 5 % of the sentences in this resignation speech were **compound-complex**, i.e. a combination of at least two independent clauses and a dependent clause (e.g. *And now that the political season is over, let me stress that having shaken their hands and looked into their eyes, our troops represent all that is best in our country and I will never*

forget all those who have died in honour and whose families today live in grief.).

David Cameron's speech was composed mostly of **simple** sentences (33 %) (e.g. *The will of the British people is an instruction that must be delivered.*). Here as well, 21 % of the simple sentences were not that short since they contained clauses and longer phrases, functioning as adjuncts, subject complement and objects (e.g. *There will be no initial change <u>in the way our people can travel, in the way our goods can move or the way our services can be sold</u>.* (Adjunct)).

In Cameron's speech 28 % of the sentences were classified as **complex**, since they contained one independent and one dependent clause (e.g. *I will attend the European Council next week to explain the decision the British people have taken and my own decision.*). A significant number of sentences in Cameron's speech were **compound** sentences (26 %). More specifically, they were either **copulative,** i.e. joined with the conjunction "and" (e.g. *Delivering stability will be important and I will continue in post as Prime Minister with my Cabinet for the next three months.).* In some sentences 'and' was only implied (e.g. *I have also always believed that we have to confront big decisions, (and) not duck them.*). The rest of compound sentences were of the **adversative type,** i.e. joined with the conjunction 'but' (e.g. *I will do everything I can as Prime Minister to steady the ship over the coming weeks and months <u>but</u> I do not think it would be right for me to try to be the captain that steers our country to its next destination.*). Of all the compound sentences 50 % were in fact longer since they consisted of more than two independent clauses coming one after the other (e.g. *I love this country <u>and</u> I feel honoured to have served it <u>and</u> I will do everything I can in future to help this great country succeed.*). Finally, in Cameron's speech there were also instances of **compound-complex sentences** which were considerably longer than the rest of the sentences

(13 %) (e.g. *I want to thank everyone who took part in the campaign on my side of the argument, including all those who put aside party differences to speak in what they believe was the national interest and let me congratulate all those who took part in the Leave campaign for the spirited and passionate case that they made.*).

As to May's speech, the analysis showed that about one third of her sentences were **simple** (26 %). Almost all of May's simple sentences were rather short (e.g. *Back in 2016, we gave the British people a choice.*) and only few (21 % of the simple sentences) were slightly longer because they contained an adjunct realized as a longer phrase or an object realized as a clause (e.g. *My focus has been on ensuring that the good jobs of the future will be created <u>in communities across the whole country, not just in London and the South East, through our Modern Industrial Strategy</u>.* (adjuncts)).

The majority of the sentences in Theresa May's speech were **complex** (40 %) (e.g. *I believe it was right to persevere, even when the odds against success seemed high*), and consisted of at least two and sometimes (although much more rarely) of more than two clauses. Only 8 % of the sentences were **compound** and consisted of 2, and rarely of more than 2 independent clauses. Again some of them were **copulative** ones, i.e. joined with the conjunction 'and' (e.g. *At another time of political controversy, a few years before his death, he took me to one side at a local event <u>and</u> gave me a piece of advice*), and some were **adversative**, i.e. joined with the conjunction 'but' (e.g. *Our politics may be under strain, <u>but</u> there is so much that is good about this country.*). May only came up with longer **compound-complex sentence** several times (9 %) (e.g. *I have kept Her Majesty the Queen fully informed of my intentions, and I will continue to serve as her Prime Minister until the process has concluded.*). Interestingly, only in May's speech there were atypical, or incomplete sentences (17 %). These atypical

sentences can also be ascribed to the fact that May, at points, was abandoning her previously prepared speech, and being evidently overwhelmed by emotions, she ended up producing a number of grammatically incomplete sentences (e.g. *So much to be proud of./So much to be optimistic about.*).

To conclude, all three departing politicians predominantly made use of either simple or complex sentences. Most of their complex sentences consisted of two clauses (an independent and dependent one), which means that they were not very long. The majority of the simple sentences of all three politicians, on the other hand, were also relatively short as they were composed only of SVO; but, about 30 % of them were slightly longer and contained finite and nonfinite clauses functioning as object, subject complement or adjuncts. Compound sentences were, generally speaking, much rarely used, and using long compound-complex sentences was almost completely shunned. All these findings clearly point to the fact that the resigning politicians clearly avoided using long compound and complex sentences. This means that they aimed at making their points in a relatively straightforward manner, in order to make sure that everybody could fathom the messages they wished to impart.

C) Regular versus syntactically marked sentences

The analysis of the three resignation speeches was also directed at discovering whether the departing politicians had a more pronounced tendency towards producing regular (in which the SVOCA rule is observed) or stylistically marked sentences (in which the SVOCA rule is somehow bended).

The close inspection of the sentences yielded the following results – in two of the analysed speeches the syntactically marked sentences prevailed over the regular ones (see Chart 3 below). Namely, in Gordon Brown's speech, the

sentences were predominantly syntactically **marked** (73 %). The same was the case with the sentences in Theresa May's speech (60 %). In David Cameron's speech, however, somewhat more than half of the sentences were **regular** (56 %), whereas the other half were categorized as syntactically **marked** (44 %).
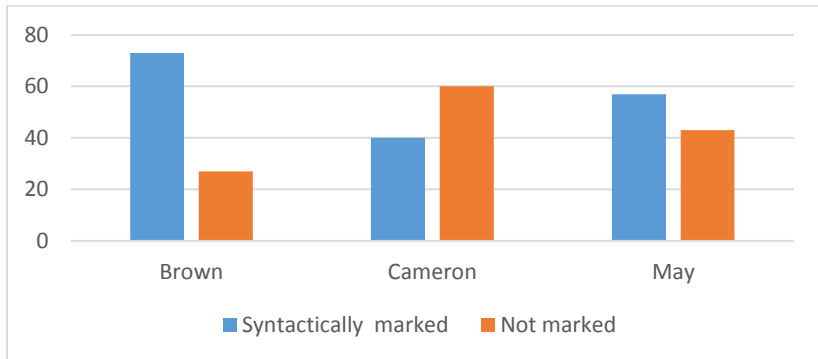

Chart 3 Regular versus syntactically marked sentences

The syntactically marked sentences were of several different types (see Table 1 below). Namely, some of the sentences had atypical beginning, i.e. they had **a conjunction 'and'**, or '**but'**; or a **phrase** such as **'above all'** in sentence initial position. Another instance of a syntactically marked sentence was when the usual word order – SVOCA – was neglected, as the **adjuncts** which are expected to be used at the end of the sentence, were dislocated and placed either at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence. Given that movability is one of the core features of adjuncts, these sentences, strictly speaking, were not grammatically incorrect; their dislocation was done only for stylistic reasons, i.e. for emphasis. Also, among the syntactically marked sentences there was an instance of sentences in which **extraposition from noun phrases** was detected[vii]. In the category of syntactically marked sentences we also included

those in which a particular part was **omitted**, although still implied in that specific context.

Table 1 Different types of syntactically marked sentences

	Conjunction at the beginning	Dislocated adjuncts	Extraposition from NP	Omission	Total
Gordon Brown	9	2	1	0	**16**
David Cameron	6	2	0	1	**19**
Theresa May	7	7	1	12	**32**
Total	**22**	**11**	**2**	**13**	**67**

In Gordon Brown's speech the majority of the syntactically marked sentences were sentences which began with **a conjunction** ('and' or 'but') (56 %) (e.g. <u>*And*</u> *let me add one thing also.*). Moreover, there were just a few syntactically marked sentences in this speech in which **dislocated adjuncts** (13 %) (e.g. <u>*In the face of many challenges in a few short years, challenges up to and including the global financial meltdown*</u>*, I have always strived to serve, to do my best in the interest of Britain, its values and its people.*) and **extraposition from NPs** (6 %) (e.g. *I said I would do all that I could to ensure* <u>*a strong, stable and principled government*</u> *was formed,* <u>*able to tackle Britain's economic and political challenges effectively*</u>*.*) were tracked down.

In David Cameron's speech also the predominant type of syntactically marked sentences was the one with **a conjunction** in the beginning (32%) (e.g. <u>*But*</u> *above all this will require strong, determined and committed leadership.*). Less frequent syntactically marked sentences were the ones which contained **dislocated adjuncts** (11 %) (e.g. *I love this country and I feel honoured to have served it and I will do everything I can* <u>*in future*</u> *to help this great*

country succeed.) and **omission** (5 %) (e.g. *Britain is a special country - we have so many great advantages - a parliamentary democracy where we resolve great issues about our future through peaceful debate, a great trading nation with our science and arts, our engineering and our creativity, (which are)* <u>*respected*</u> *the world over*).

Omission of a part of the sentence was the most frequent type of syntactically marked sentences in May's resignation speech (38 %) (e.g. *So much to be proud of.* – the subject is omitted). May was also quite frequently producing syntactically marked sentences which contained **a conjunction** at the beginning of the sentence (22 %) (e.g. <u>*But*</u> *the unique privilege of this office is to use this platform to give a voice to the voiceless, to fight the burning injustices that still scar our society.*), **dislocated adjuncts** (22 %) (e.g. <u>*For many years*</u> *the great humanitarian Sir Nicholas Winton - who saved the lives of hundreds of children by arranging their evacuation from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia through the Kindertransport - was my constituent in Maidenhead*). The least frequent types of syntactically marked sentences in May's speech was the **extraposition from NPs** (3 %) (e.g. *My focus has been on ensuring that* <u>*the good jobs of the future*</u> *will be created* <u>*in communities across the whole country, not just in London and the South East*</u>*, through our Modern Industrial Strategy.*).

Overall, the results show that, on the one hand, by using predominantly syntactically marked sentences, the resigning PMs most likely wished to draw the audience's attention to what they were saying. On the other hand, considering the types of 'irregularities' they were introducing to their sentences, such as starting the sentence with **a conjunction** ('and' or 'but'), which was the most frequent type of syntactically marked sentence in the analysed corpus; **the adjunct being placed in sentence initial or medial** instead of final position, and the **omission** of a major sentence element, both of which were used with moderate frequency, clearly point to an attempt on the

part of the speakers to simplify the manner in which they imparted their messages. In other words, given the fact that the resigning politicians evidently avoided using other types of syntactically marked sentences such as cleft and pseudo-cleft sentences, for instance, reveals that they were not particularly obsessed with producing atypical sentences that will make their speech sound more elevated and pompous.

D) The realization of Subject ('I' vs. 'we')

The aim of this part of the research was to detect to what extent the departing PMs used the personal pronouns 'I' and 'we', and whether they used some other linguistic means as realization of the subject apart from these two personal pronouns. Investigating the realisations of the subject in the context of political resignation speeches is particularly important as it reveals how much responsibility politicians wish to assume for their political dealings.
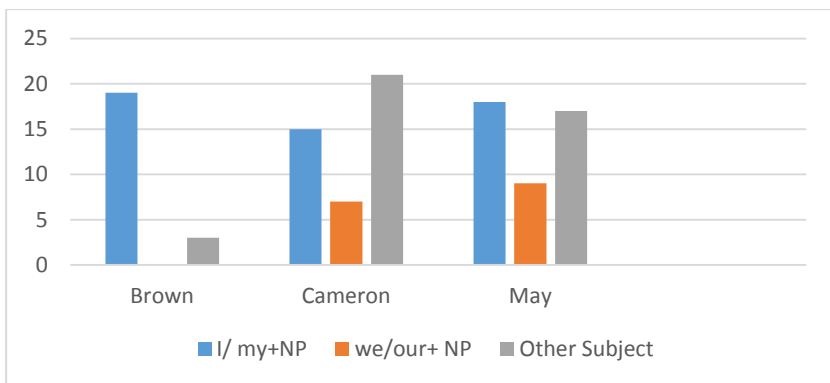

Chart 4 Realizations of Subject

Almost all of Gordon Brown's sentences had **the personal pronoun 'I'** as their subject (86 %)(e.g. *I said I would do all that I could to ensure a strong, stable and principled government.*) or **my +**

noun (e.g. *My constitutional duty is to make sure that a government ...*) The instances where the subject or the doer of the action in the sentence was somebody else and not the speaker himself were rather rare (14 %) (e.g. <u>*Only those that have held the office of prime minister*</u> *can understand the full weight of its responsibilities and its great capacity for good.*). This implies that in his resignation speech, the speaker drew almost all the attention towards himself. He never used the personal pronoun 'we' as sentence subject, which implies that he avoided making references to his Cabinet members and his government in general, or any other party for that matter.

In Cameron's speech, the role of subject was most frequently attributed not to himself or his Cabinet, but **a third party –** the British people and Britain (50 %) (e.g. <u>*The British people*</u> *have voted to leave the European Union and their will must be respected.*). As can be seen in the examples above, by using Subject realisations that referred to a third party, the speaker was mainly honouring his country and his countryman, but, at the same time, he was also shifting the focus away from himself. He uses **the personal pronoun 'I'** in subject position in 35 % of his sentences (e.g. *<u>I</u>'m very proud and very honoured to have been Prime Minister of this country for six years.*). The **personal pronoun 'we'** in this resignation speech was found merely in 15 % of the sentences, which indicates that Cameron only occasionally showed readiness to share the credit for what was achieved in his country during his time in office with the rest his political collaborators *(e.g. That is why <u>we</u> delivered the first coalition government in 70 years....*).

The analysis of May's speech shows that that she too strived in her speech not to place the entire stress on herself. Thus, although she used **the personal pronoun 'I'** as a realization of the subject in about a third of her sentences (34 %) (e.g. *<u>I</u> will shortly leave the job that it has been the honour of my life*

to hold – the second female Prime Minister but certainly not the last.), very frequently, she shifted the attention to **some other** party by using other linguistic means as subject realizations (32 %) (e.g. *For many years <u>the great humanitarian Sir Nicholas Winton</u> – who saved the lives of hundreds of children by arranging their evacuation from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia through the Kindertransport - was my constituent in Maidenhead.*). Only occasionally did she show an inclination to share the successes achieved during her term with her **government** by using **the pronoun 'we'** (17 %) (e.g. <u>We</u> *have helped more people than ever enjoy the security of a job.*). Finally, it is worth noting that 17 % of May's sentences, being of the incomplete type of sentences, were subjectless (e.g. *So much to be proud of. So much to be optimistic about.*).

In view of the above discussed findings, it is obvious that the usage of the personal pronoun 'I' prevails. This implies that the politicians in their resignation speeches mainly placed the stress on themselves, but they did that in a positive context, i.e. by discussing their achievements and the contributions they have made to the well-being of their country. In other words, since they barely touched upon the reasons for their failure as PMs, they had practically no reason to avoid using the personal pronoun 'I' as realization of the subject. It is also worth noting that quite often the role of the subject in their sentences was played by a third party, most commonly the British people and Britain in general; this was done mainly in the context of praising them and predicting a bright future for them. This can be interpreted as an attempt to make the resignation speeches appealing to the audience, and consequently, convincing. The personal pronoun 'we' was the least frequently used as subject in the three departing MPs' speeches, overall. This unveils a clear inclination on the part of the resigning PMs not to mention their government or their political allies in their resignation

speeches. However, whenever they did that it was done in the positive light and through the prism of their achievements.

E) Active versus passive voice

The final point of interest in this research was the usage of **passive** and **active voice**. Given that passive voice is also generally deemed suitable for formal speech and particularly useful when the speaker wishes not to disclose the identity of the doer of the action or to distance himself/herself from the action[viii], it was assumed that the departing politicians would prefer using passive over active voice in their sentences, especially, when they disclose the reasons for their failure as PMs.
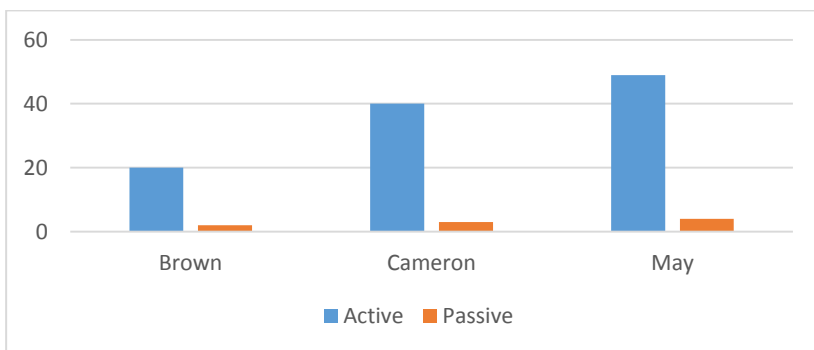

Chart 5 Active versus Passive Voice

Interestingly and quite unexpectedly, in all three speeches only active sentences were used (95 %) (see Chart 5 above). More precisely, only few instances of passive voice were detected (5 %) (Cameron: *It was not a decision that was taken lightly, not least because so many things were said by so many different organisations about the significance of this decision.*/ May: *Such a consensus can be reached if those on all sides of the debate are willing to compromise.*/

Cameron*: The British people have voted to leave the European Union and <u>their will must be respected</u>.).*

These findings present a clear indication that the departing MPs had no intention to be overly formal in their resignation speeches. Furthermore, given that all three of them did not dwell too much on the reasons for their failure, but, instead, focused on praising their country, their successfully completed projects, etc., logically, the right conditions were created in which rather than hiding their agenthood the politicians felt like promoting it.

Conclusion

The study looked into a selection of syntactic features of three political resignation speeches. Although each departing politician undoubtedly had his or her personal preferences as far as the form in which he/she was imparting their messages, still, there is no doubt that some general and recurring patterns in the three analysed speeches emerged, which can be interpreted as indicators about the syntactic features of political resignation speeches in English in general. Thus, for instance, one of the insights gained from this research is that resigning politicians, in general, tend to use mostly short and simple declarative sentences. They also seem to have a clear preference of complex sentences composed of one dependent and one independent clause, which are also relatively short, over using compound and long complex-compound sentences, where they would simply string independent and dependent clauses one after the other.

These findings indicate that the departing politicians are aware of the fact that their points should be simple and clear, so that their audience can understand and accept them. Long and clumsy sentences are clearly avoided as politicians seem to

know that their audiences might find them irritating, difficult to follow, and, consequently, confusing.

The politicians know that their statements should be well-formulated, so very frequently they resort to versifying the syntactic structure of their sentences by using not just the regular SVOCA sentences but also by producing syntactically marked sentences. Additionally, they have demonstrated clear preferences for certain types of syntactically marked sentences (e.g. starting with a conjunction, omission, etc.) which again points to a tendency of simplifying the form in which the message is imparted.

Given that the politicians dwell much more on their achievements than on the reasons for failure in their resignation speeches, it is no wonder that the personal pronoun 'I' was more frequently used in their speeches than its plural counterpart 'we' and the other possible realizations of the Subject.

Finally, quite unexpectedly, the passive voice is only rarely used and the active voice prevails in the analysed resignation speeches. This might be attributed to the topics discussed which were mainly positive (e.g. praise of UK, their achievements, predictions about their country's bright future, etc.), which means that the departing PMs did not find it not necessary to hide their agenthood, i.e. their contribution to all those positive developments in their country.

All these findings could be correlated very nicely with the main goals of the departing politicians. Namely, the tendency to use short and rather simple sentences, mostly of the declarative type; the inclination to bend the SVOCA rule and produce syntactically marked sentences with which the message is imparted in a rather straightforward and simplified manner is in line with their goal to ensure that their speech and the arguments in it are understood and accepted by the general

public. The politicians' clear preference for the personal pronoun 'I' and the active voice in the majority of their sentences, is also in favour of their quitting with 'style' as they point to the politicians' efforts towards self-legitimation, i.e. saving one's personal and professional reputation, and, consequently, avoiding condemnation, humiliation and criticism.

Two obvious shortcomings of this study are: a) that it is not an exhaustive one as other syntactic features can be explored as well (e.g. repetition of words/phrases, the use of various tenses, etc.), and b) the size of the corpus is rather limited (only three resignation speeches were analysed). The findings discussed above would definitely gain far greater relevance and objectivity by enriching the corpus, i.e. by investigating a larger sample of political resignation speeches.

Endnotes

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i https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/may/11/gordon-brown-resignation-speech

ii https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/david-cameron-announces-his-resignation---full-statement/

iii https://www.businessinsider.com/full-text-theresa-may-resignation-speech-2019-5

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[5] Sentences can be classified on the basis of their function as declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamative sentences. Declarative sentences are used to make a statement. They are syntactic configurations which usually display an unmarked (i.e. expected) order of the functional categories Subject, Predicator, Direct Object, etc. Interrogative sentences are normally used to ask questions. There are several types of interrogatives: yes/no interrogatives, Wh-interrogatives and alternative interrogatives. Imperative sentences are sentences that are normally interpreted as directives, i.e. someone is telling someone else to (not) do something. They do not normally

contain Subjects and that their verb is in the base form. Exclamatives, like the open interrogatives, are formed with an initial Wh-word (Aarts, 2001).

v Theresa May: "*For many years the great humanitarian Sir Nicholas Winton ... was my constituent in Maidenhead. At another time of political controversy, a few years before his death, he took me to one side at a local event and gave me a piece of advice. He said, 'Never forget that compromise is not a dirty word. Life depends on compromise."*

vi Sentences can be classified into 4 categories according to their clause structure: simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences. Simple sentences consist of only one independent clause. They may, however, contain more than one phrase, often making them lengthy and therefore more difficult to identify as a simple clause. Compound sentences contain two simple sentences, i.e. two independent clauses. Complex sentences include one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Compound-complex sentences include elements of both compound and complex sentences, i.e. they include two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses (Aarts, 2001; Janeva, 2009).

vii Long and complex NPs, usually functioning as direct objects, can be split into two parts with the first part remaining in its original position and the second part being removed to sentence final position (Aarts, 2001).
viii By putting sentences in the active or passive voice the speaker shows to what degree he/she wishes to be related to various ideas. The active voice demands an actor, or an active subject, while the actor does not have to be mentioned in the sentence with passive voice (Beard, 2000 in Kulo, 2009).

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