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Navigating the Audience: Trump's Persona Management Processes Across Political Contexts

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Speakers can project different personae when engaging in stylistic practices, which can be characterised by a consistent or variable use of linguistic features. This becomes relevant when addressing how politicians attempt to position themselves in communicative interactions through their use of language. The present study takes a third-wave approach to the analysis of Donald Trump's sociolinguistic behaviour across various speech events by focusing on the indexical mutability of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping. The results evidence intra-speaker variation in Trump's populist speech style used for interactional and political purposes in that he alters his use of mainstream and non-mainstream forms as he operates across speech events. Thus, Trump exhibits a different sociolinguistic performance across different contexts, where he also takes a different approach towards the management and projection of his public persona, and therefore, transmits different social meanings through his language use. The results further suggest that the context, format and audience of the political event and the social meanings indexed by the selected linguistic features are what condition Trump's sociolinguistic behaviour. We conclude that Trump's speech style is characterised by the meaningful choices he makes about the linguistic resource to be used in a specific context and its corresponding social meaning.

Keywords: stylistic practices; persona management processes; speaker's agency; political identity; social meaning; indexing mutability

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Navegando por la audiencia. Los procesos de gestión de personalidad de Trump en contextos políticos

Las y los hablantes pueden proyectar diferentes personalidades cuando participan en prácticas estilísticas, que pueden caracterizarse por un uso constante o variable de rasgos lingüísticos. Esto cobra relevancia cuando abordamos cómo las y los políticos intentan posicionarse en las interacciones comunicativas a través del uso del lenguaje. Este estudio adopta una perspectiva de tercera ola para el análisis del comportamiento sociolingüístico de Donald Trump en diferentes contextos políticos centrándose en la mutabilidad indexical de PRICE/PRIZE y R-Dropping. Los resultados evidencian una variación intra-hablante en el estilo de habla populista de Trump con fines interactivos y políticos, ya que su uso de variantes convencionales y no convencionales se ve alterado conforme cambia el contexto del evento de habla. Así, Trump exhibe un comportamiento sociolingüístico diferente a través de diferentes contextos, adopta un enfoque diferente hacia la gestión y proyección de su personalidad pública y, por lo tanto, transmite significados sociales diferentes a través del uso del lenguaje. Los resultados sugieren que el contexto, el formato y la audiencia del evento político y los significados sociales indexados por PRICE/PRIZE y R-Dropping condicionan el comportamiento sociolingüístico de Trump. Concluimos que el estilo de habla de Trump se caracteriza por las elecciones que hace sobre el recurso lingüístico a utilizar en un contexto específico y su correspondiente significado social.

Palabras clave: prácticas estilísticas; procesos de gestión de personalidad; agencia del hablante; identidad política; significado social; mutabilidad de indexación

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the most flexible and common symbolic device that can be used in the construction of a speaker's identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2004). Similarly, identity is a fluid construct, as speakers can display diverse identity aspects and vary their degree of saliency through language use. This evidences speakers' engagement in stylistic practices, which can be consistent or variable (D'Onofrio and Stecker 2020). *Stylistic* (or *intra-speaker*) variation emphasises the pivotal position of style, which operates as a construct that shapes the speaker's sociolinguistic behaviour (Bell 1984; Rickford and Eckert 2001). This becomes relevant when speech style analyses are conducted in the political sphere, where politicians seek to identify with potential voters through communicative interactions in order to gain their support and approval.

This analysis attempts to add further to the practical background of the study of identity management processes and their subsequent transmission of social meaning in the political domain by focusing on the speech style of Donald Trump and on the indexical mutability of linguistic features across multiple political contexts. Specifically, it tests the hypothesis that the social meanings indexed by PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping will

be used stylistically across different political speech genres for interactional purposes. To do this, our analysis a) takes a multidimensional, socio-constructionist, speaker oriented and, subsequently, third-wave perspective to the study of the social meaning of stylistic variation; b) considers a speaker's identity as a dynamic phenomenon that can be created and recreated across different communicative contexts; c) conceives style as a holistic and multilevel phenomenon that is linguistically and socially interpreted; and d) regards linguistic variation as a socially meaningful resource that can be used by speakers in the construction of their speech style and identity.

We address Trump's sociolinguistic behaviour motivated by his political, social and cultural implication for the U.S. and specifically, because of his high public and political profile, his intention to run again in the 2024 U.S. presidential race and the polarised reactions that his racist, xenophobic, dishonest and violent discourse and ideology have generated among the electorate. Prior research has addressed his oratorical skills, writing style on Twitter (now X), racist and sexist discourse and the discursive strategies that are frequently used in his speeches, among other aspects (Winberg 2017; Sclafani 2018; Lacatus 2020; McIntosh and Mendoza-Denton 2020; Rong 2021), but few studies have addressed the use that Trump makes of phonetic variables across political contexts from a sociolinguistic perspective in terms of the construction of his public identity.

Our results suggest that rather than presenting a stable sociolinguistic behaviour across different political genres, Trump engages in stylistic practices when making use of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping. We argue that the regional identity, formal, contextual and social-status meanings indexed by these two linguistic features, together with specific characteristics of the speech events analysed, condition Trump's sociolinguistic behaviour. This translates into him exhibiting a different sociolinguistic performance across different speech events, having a different approach towards the management and projection of his public persona, and therefore a different social meaning to be transmitted through language use.

We conclude that each time that a politician operates in public speech events new opportunities emerge when it comes to projecting a unique persona on the basis of that particular audience and the political context that characterises the communicative interaction in hand. The present analysis emphasises the importance of addressing how linguistic variables can be used by politicians in identity creation and persona management processes when attempting to transmit social meaning, connect with the electorate and navigate large audiences in the political domain.

2. A SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH TO STYLISTIC VARIATION

2.1. Creating In-Group Links through Language Use

Language operates as a key transmitter of social meaning, being its transmission crucial for creating and maintaining group membership, group identity and loyalty

(Trudgill 2000; J. Edwards 2009). Individuals enhance in-group linguistic connections through their participation in speech acts or *acts of identity* (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985), which consists in using a particular language, dialect, accent or style in a given social context under the influence of several factors (J. Edwards 2009). This leads to the emergence of fluid and dynamic differentiation processes where speakers align themselves with specific groups while inevitably disassociating themselves from others (Omoniyi 2006; J. Edwards 2009).

These processes are crucial for politicians, as they must simultaneously prove both their suitability to political office and their capability to engage with and understand the electorate in order to gain support and approval (Alim and Smitherman 2012; Fetzer and Bull 2012; Kirkham and Moore 2016). It is also common for politicians to pursue the portrayal of a “likeable” and “authentic” identity, qualities that tend to be positively evaluated by voters, often overriding their views on the candidate’s political trajectory or approach (Aylor 1999; Hacker 2004). For instance, politicians may engage in a more informal speech style so as to portray an approachable persona to the public (Holliday 2017). In this sense, linguistic features operate as stylistic resources that can be used by politicians to recruit specific social meanings as a means to construct their public persona, and therefore, to align themselves with their potential voters in communicative interactions (Podesva et al. 2015; D’Onofrio and Stecker 2020).

2.2. Politicians’ Agency in Stylistic Practices

Speakers may exhibit variability in the use of stylistic resources both across and within speech events in their construction of a public image (Coupland 2007; Schilling 2013). This sociolinguistic behaviour mirrors style-shifting moves, which evidence a speaker’s agency through their proactive use of linguistic features and the subsequent transmission of social meaning (Eckert 2008; Zhang 2008). This agency results in the speakers’ engagement in persona management processes and social positionings for interactional purposes (Mendoza-Denton 2002; Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Jaffe 2009b), and implies an alteration and reorganisation of the identity that is projected in a specific context (Omoniyi 2006). That is, the persona that a speaker projects across different speech events is fluid as it is constructed and reconstructed when engaging with the audience. Thus, stylistic variation operates as a crucial linguistic device which speakers can make use of to position themselves in society on the basis of various macrosocial identity categories, such as geographical region of origin, social class, formal education, occupation, gender, religion and ethnicity, among others (Jaffe 2009b).

A growing body of research has addressed how speakers engage in persona management processes and social-positioning movements to project a particular self through their participation in stylistic practices when operating in the political domain (Cutillas-Espinosa et al. 2010; Hernández-Campoy and Cutillas-Espinosa 2010; Hall-Lew et al. 2012; Podesva et al. 2012; Soukup 2012; Podesva et al. 2015; Kirkham

and Moore 2016; Hall-Lew et al. 2017; Holliday 2017; Sclafani 2018; D'Onofrio and Stecker 2020; Meer et al. 2021).

2.3. Social Indexicality of Sociolinguistic Signs

Sociolinguistic variation operates as a semiotic system where indexical connections are built between social meanings and linguistic features, which results in the creation of sociolinguistic signs. Through their repetition, sociolinguistic signs acquire saliency and become easily recognisable by the audience to which they are directed (Ochs 1993; Silverstein 2003; Eckert 2008; Moore and Podesva 2009; Campbell-Kibler 2011). That is, each linguistic form is characterised by its specific indexical field, which is made up of the different meanings it can index. These meanings operate as interactional components and can be invoked by speakers to construct and reconstruct their identities to project different personae across different communicative interactions (Silverstein 2003; Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Zhang 2008; Kiesling 2009, 2013).

Rather than being static, the meanings indexed by linguistic forms are acquired and shaped by contexts of style, which means that speakers can interpret and reinterpret them in communicative interactions (Silverstein 2003; Eckert 2008). This illustrates the dynamicity and mutability that characterises linguistic features in meaning indexation, which becomes crucial for speakers when attempting to index membership of or disassociate from a specific social group (Labov 1963). Consequently, the style of a speaker will be characterised by a cluster of indexical signs, and therefore, by the meaningful choices they make about the linguistic feature they use in social practice (Eckert 2001; Coupland 2007; Eckert 2008; Podesva 2012; Kiesling 2013). Analysing how speakers make use of the mutable nature of sociolinguistic signs to index social meaning is of utmost importance when addressing how politicians construct their public persona and navigate the audience through their participation in stylistic practices.

3. METHODS

3.1. Donald Trump: Biographical Profile

Trump was born in 1946 into a wealthy family in the borough of Queens, New York.¹ He attended elitist educational institutions, such as the New York Military Academy school, and the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce in Philadelphia Pennsylvania, where he studied economics. After graduating, Trump worked for Trump-owned corporations and partnerships, eventually reaching the presidency and increasing his wealth.

¹ Biographical data on Donald Trump was retrieved from the White House official webpage and the White House Historical Association official webpage.

Trump also produced and hosted the television reality show *The Apprentice* from 2004 to 2015, which fostered his consolidation as a public figure in the U.S. and generated a largely positive opinion of him being a competent leader among the audience. This celebrity identity and persona, among other external aspects, facilitated Trump's ascent to the presidency of the U.S.—from 2017 to 2021—despite him lacking any extensive political trajectory. In fact, his self-made-man, television and elitist background were strongly appealing traits for much of the American electorate.

Trump's political figure has profoundly affected—and is still affecting—the democratic legacy of the U.S.² His positions on immigration, health care and climate change, among other aspects, deepened the divisions in a country that was already split along partisan lines. Specifically, his authoritarian political positions have led to the emergence of *Trumpism*, an extreme far-right populist ideology that is spreading worldwide.

3.2. PRICE/PRIZE

PRICE (i.e., /aɪ/ before voiceless consonants) and PRIZE (i.e., /aɪ/ in other phonetic contexts) can be pronounced as a diphthongal or monophthongal form in North American English (Thomas 2004). Specifically, monophthongisation of /aɪ/ in the South of the U.S. dates back to the nineteenth century (Thomas 2004). This development constitutes the first stage of the Southern Vowel Shift—which makes it the oldest change—as well as the one with the widest geographic distribution across Southern areas of the U.S. (Tillery and Bailey 2004; Boberg 2015; Hazen 2022).

Monophthongisation of /aɪ/ before voiceless consonants (PRICE) is geographically restricted, mainly being heard in Southern regions of the U.S., inevitably indexing a Southern speech style, Southern culture and identity (Thomas 2004; Lippi-Green 2012; Boberg 2015). More precisely, it is common for Southern speakers from different social classes to use this variant to depict an authentic Southern persona, even in professional contexts (Forrest et al. 2021). However, this variant is also socially restricted, as it indexes a working-class speech style elsewhere (Thomas 2004; Hazen 2022). Consequently, individuals aspiring to move up the social ladder tend to avoid this variant, such avoidance being more prevalent in urban areas (Thomas 2004; Labov et al. 2006). In addition, evidence suggests that the monophthongal realisation of PRICE indexes masculinity and toughness (Tamminga 2019).

Monophthongisation of /aɪ/ before voiced consonants and in other phonetic contexts (PRIZE) is not subject to the same constriction and stigmatisation. As a result, this variant seems to be used to a greater extent by American speakers irrespective of their geographical region of origin or social status (Wells 1982; Labov et al. 2006; Forrest et al. 2021).

² Data about Trump's political trajectory was retrieved from Aguirre (2020) and Mollan and Geesin (2020).

A PRICE/PRIZE monophthongal realisation also indexes an African American speech style—i.e., the variety of English spoken by African Americans, mainly those from a working-class background (Wells 1982; W. F. Edwards 2004; Lippi-Green 2012). Previous research has explained the similarity in the monophthongal realisation of the PRICE/PRIZE lexical set between African American and Southerner speakers by touching upon historical aspects and locating the origin of African American Vernacular English in Southern U.S. regions (Thomas 2007).

Contrarily, the monophthongal variant fades as we move away from Southern regions (Wells 1982; Gramley and Pätzold 2004), being the diphthongal realisation of PRICE/PRIZE commonly used in other areas of the U.S. This variant is frequently used in *General American English* or *Standard American English*, the prestigious English variety spoken in the U.S. It indexes a high level of formal education and socio-economic background and is commonly used in formal contexts (Gramley and Pätzold 2004; Kretzschmar 2004).

3.3. R-Dropping

R-Dropping occurs in unstressed syllables (as in *letter*) and in syllable codas in word-final position (as in *here*) and pre-consonantal position (as in *fourth*). Additional phonetic contexts may also foster /r/ deletion, such as stressed, syllabic positions (as in *work*), intervocalic contexts (as in *carry*), between [θ] and a rounded vowel (as in *through*), and after a consonant in certain unstressed syllables (as in *professor*) (Wells 1982; Thomas 2004). This realisation change was imported from England and irregularly diffused from the East coast to other American areas in the post-settlement period (Trudgill and Hannah 2008). As a result, a graded use of this phenomenon can be observed across different U.S. regions. For instance, while Inland Southern areas are firmly rhotic, the speech style of individuals from Lower Southern regions is characterised by its non-rhoticity (Wells 1982; Thomas 2004). Thus, two major accent groups can be identified in the U.S. according to speakers' use of /r/: rhotic and non-rhotic (Hughes et al. 2013).

Non-rhoticity indexes geographical region of origin. Thus, while the speech style of individuals based in the North, West and Midlands of the U.S. tends to be stereotyped as rhotic, that of individuals from the Inland South of the U.S., Eastern New England and New York City is frequently characterised as non-rhotic (Trudgill and Hannah 2008).

In addition, non-rhoticity indexes socioeconomic and formal education meanings (Thomas 2004). Even though this variant used to be associated with upper-class Southerners, its realisation has experienced a process of prestige loss, it is the rhotic variant that is now associated with high social status (Wells 1982; Thomas 2004; Tillery and Bailey 2004; Thomas 2007). This trend is also identified in the speech style of individuals from Eastern New England and New York city, where the association of non-rhotic pronunciations with speakers belonging to working-class backgrounds results in the stigmatisation of this variant (Gordon 2004; Labov 2006; Labov et al.

2006). As a result, rhotic forms tend to be adopted when speakers operate in formal contexts, this being especially noticeable on the part of urban speakers of high social status (Wells 1982; Gordon 2004; Trudgill and Hannah 2008; Lippi-Green 2012).

Non-rhoticity also indexes ethnic identity meanings, as it has long been associated with the speech style of African Americans (Wells 1982; W. F. Edwards 2004; Thomas 2004, 2007; Lippi-Green 2012). In fact, evidence suggests that African Americans located in the South are more conservative than white Southerners with regard to the use of rhotic forms, as the former have maintained this realisation while the rhotic variant has been adopted by the latter (Labov et al. 2006; Thomas 2007; Wolfram and Thomas 2008).

Contextual and stylistic meanings are also indexed by R-Dropping, as there is a tendency for rhotic forms to be increasingly used as the situational context becomes more formal (Thomas 2004, 2007). However, it seems that these aspects condition the speech style of white Southerners to a greater extent, in that non-rhotic forms are more likely to be maintained in the speech of African Americans when operating in formal contexts (Thomas 2004).

3.4. Data Collection

Video recording samples of four different political speech events that took place during Trump's presidency were assessed to analyse potential stylistic moves, their subsequent persona management processes and their transmission of social meanings. The speech events belong to three different speech genres, namely, one political statement, one interview and two rallies, one held in the North, the other in the South of the U.S. The two geographically distinct rallies were included, as it has been suggested that speech styles can be conditioned by regional aspects (D'Onofrio and Stecker 2020). The political statement consisted in Trump's 2018 State of the Union Address to the U.S. Congress; the interview was conducted by the CNBC in Davos, Switzerland, during the 2020 World Economic Forum; the Northern rally took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2019, and was framed within the 2020 U.S. Presidential Elections; finally, the Southern Rally was held in Huntsville, Alabama, in 2017 within the framework of the 2017 Senate Special Election. These speech events were respectively coded as "Statement," "Interview," "Rally (North)" and "Rally (South)" (table 1) (Zapata-Barrero 2021).

Our samples were obtained from available and official online mass media sources (appendix 1), and they yielded a total of 01:50:00 minutes for the analysis of Trump's speech. The duration of the analysed speech events ranges from 17 to 19 minutes: the first 19 minutes being selected for Statement and the first approximately 17 minutes for the remaining contexts. This decision was methodologically conditioned by the characteristics of each communicative interaction, as in order to collect a similar number of tokens to the other contexts, a longer excerpt was required from Statement.

TABLE 1. Speech Events Selected for Trump's Speech Style Analysis

Speech event	Political context of style	Duration
U.S. Congress (31 January 2018)	Statement	19:00 min
Interview: <i>CNBC</i> (22 January 2020)	Interview	17:00 min
Rally in Minneapolis, Minnesota (10 October 2019)	Rally (North)	17:25 min
Rally in Huntsville, Alabama (22 September 2017)	Rally (South)	17:15 min

3.5. Data Processing

Orthographic transcriptions of the video recording samples were obtained from YouTube and the official websites of CNBC, CNN and C-SPAN (appendix 1). Video recordings were downloaded and converted to WAV files for annotation and transcription correction tasks, which were implemented using ELAN (Version 6.3 2022). Then, impressionistic coding techniques were applied following Milroy and Gordon's (2003) measurement methodology, the process being on the binary distinction of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping. Thus, both linguistic variables were addressed as binary constructs, coding two main variants for each variable:

- (1) Variant 1: mainstream and prestigious realisation of PRICE/PRIZE (/aɪ/) and R-Dropping (rhotic form);
- (2) Variant 2: non-mainstream and often stigmatised realisation of PRICE/PRIZE ({a:}) and R-Dropping (non-rhotic form).

Both linguistic variables were additionally coded for "Word type" (content or grammatical) and "Phonetic context" of occurrence. Two main phonetic contexts were coded for each linguistic feature: PRICE (/aɪ/ before voiceless consonants) and PRIZE (/aɪ/ in other phonetic contexts) for PRICE/PRIZE, and /r/ being realised in pre-consonantal or word-final position for R-Dropping.

Given the satisfactory auditory quality of our samples, no instances needed to be excluded from our data. The resulting data set contained a total of 1,627 tokens for speech analysis: $N_{\text{PRICE/PRIZE}} = 618$ and $N_{\text{R-Dropping}} = 1,009$ (table 2).

TABLE 2. Tokens Yielded for Trump's Speech Analysis, by Context

	Political context of style				Total
	Statement	Interview	Rally (North)	Rally (South)	
PRICE/PRIZE	91	215	123	189	618
R-Dropping	257	249	214	289	1009
Total	348	464	337	478	1627

3.6. Analysis Method

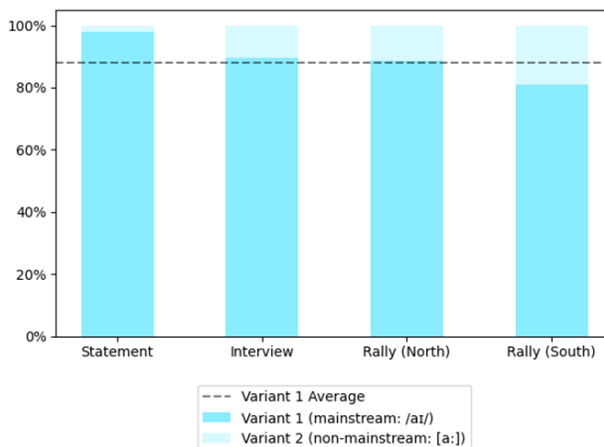
We implemented two statistical tests in RStudio (RStudio Team 2020) using R programming language (R Core Team 2018) and extracted model predictions using Rbrul (Johnson 2008-2016, 2016a, 2016b), lme4 (Bates et al. 2015) and Matrix (Maëchler and Bates 2006). First, we performed the Pearson's chi-square non-parametric statistical test to examine how our data was distributed across the categories under analysis (Levon 2010). Then, we performed logistic regressions within a non-mixed effects model to predict sociolinguistic patterns in the speech style of Trump across the speech events studied (Tagliamonte 2012; Speelman 2014). Two models were designed, one for PRICE/PRIZE and one for R-Dropping, though both were similar. The linguistic feature in each corresponding model was treated as the dependent variable, while the political context of the speech event, word type and phonetic context of occurrence were addressed as independent variables, and no random intercepts were included.

4. RESULTS

4.1. PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping

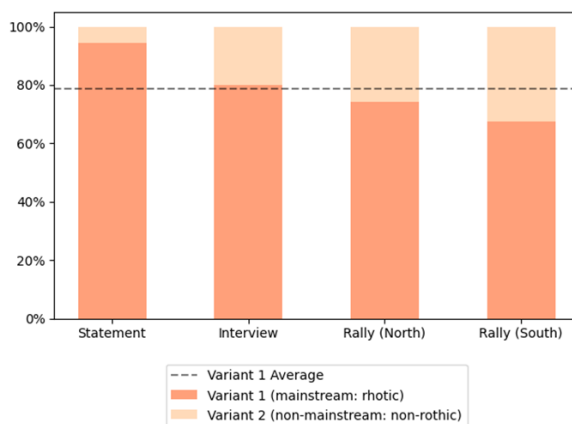
Trump's use of PRICE/PRIZE evidences intra-speaker variation across the political contexts studied. From an overall perspective, even though Trump predominantly uses the mainstream form (variant 1: /aɪ/), as observed in the context of Statement, a noticeable increase of the non-mainstream realisation (variant 2: [a:]) can be observed when we compare this context to those of the Rallies, and even to the Interview (figure 1). Looking at a four-way comparison, the difference in Trump's sociolinguistic practices across the different contexts is significant at $p \leq 0.01$ ($\chi^2 = 17.883$; $df = 3$). But when doing two-way analyses on Statement vs. Interview and Rally (North) vs. Rally (South) we only find significant differences when comparing the former pair ($p \leq 0.05$; $\chi^2 = 5.711$; $df = 1$), and not when comparing the latter ($p \geq 0.05$; $\chi^2 = 3.253$; $df = 1$) (Zapata-Barrero 2021).

FIGURE 1. Trump's Percentages of Use for PRICE/PRIZE across the Different Contexts (Adapted from Zapata-Barrero 2021)



Trump's use of R-Dropping also evidences intra-speaker variation across the political contexts studied. From an overall perspective, even though Trump predominantly uses the mainstream form (variant 1: rhotic), as observed in the context of Statement, a noticeable increase of the non-mainstream realisation (variant 2: non-rhotic) can be observed when we compare this context to those of the Rallies and to the Interview (figure 2). Looking at a four-way comparison, the difference in Trump's sociolinguistic practices across the different contexts is significant at $p \leq 0.01$ ($-2 = 63.849$; $df = 3$). But when doing two-way analyses on Statement vs. Interview and Rally (North) vs. Rally (South) we only find significant differences when comparing the former pair ($p \leq 0.01$; $-2 = 24.51$; $df = 1$), and not when comparing the latter ($p \geq 0.05$; $-2 = 2.849$; $df = 1$) (Zapata-Barrero 2021).

FIGURE 2. Trump's Percentage of Use for R-Dropping across the Different Contexts (Adapted from Zapata-Barrero 2021)



The results evidence that the starkest contrast in Trump's use of mainstream and non-mainstream forms of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping occurs between Statement and the Southern rally. The former is characterised by Trump's highest percentage of use for both mainstream forms. This speech event, the State of the Union Address, is a very solemn event in American politics with a level of ceremony that is not really surpassed by any other political event in the U.S., except perhaps the presidential inauguration. The State of the Nation Address normally serves as a tool for the President to prove to the electorate that their term in office has been a success. Nationally important political issues and accomplishments and the objectives of the government for the remainder of the incumbent's mandate are covered, making it extremely interesting at both the national and international level. The audience for this speech event consists of the whole body of Congress—House and Senate—, members of the Supreme Court and special guests, all of them in the chamber, as well as the audiences who watch it on TV. The extra-linguistic aspects mentioned in this work have the potential to condition Trump's use of mainstream forms, since implementing a “careful,” “educated” or “correct” speech style fosters the achievement of persuasive goals in such a formal context (Cutillas-Espinosa et al. 2010, 44). However, the Southern rally was attended by constituents from Huntsville, Alabama, and is characterised by Trump's lowest use of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping mainstream variants. This turn in his sociolinguistic behaviour could be influenced by other features associated with the format of this speech event and the regional and informal index of the non-mainstream variants analysed, which could have been stylistically used to deploy a populist speech style to enable Trump to project the identity of a “normal guy” who can connect with “real Americans.”

Conversely, the degree of difference in Trump's stylistic practices decreases when comparing his performance in the Interview with that in the Northern Rally, as both contexts reveal a predominant use of the mainstream form. Yet, we argue that the aspects of an in-person audience and the formality of these speech events might have played a role when explaining the subtle differences between Interview and Rally (North) regarding Trump's use of the non-mainstream variant: there was not an in-person audience in the Interview, while the Northern Rally was attended by constituents from Minneapolis, Minnesota. The absence of the audience “pressure” together with a slightly higher degree of formality in the Interview could explain why our speaker uses the mainstream variant more in this context than in the Northern Rally. On the other hand, if we address these contexts as a set and compare their scores with those of Statement it can observe an increase in Trump's use of the non-mainstream variant with respect to the latter. This increase may have been motivated by a lowered degree of mainstream awareness and attention to one's speech (Labov 2006), leading to the emergence of a more relaxed and conversational tone that characterises interviews and rallies. However, the emergence of the non-mainstream variant is not as significant as in the Southern Rally. Thus, it seems that the Interview and the Northern Rally operate as middle-ground arenas for Trump's use of the linguistic variables studied.

Another factor that could be conditioning Trump's sociolinguistic performance is the read versus written format that characterises the speech events analysed. To this end, Trump exhibits a rather poor performance when he operates in more formal contexts where there is no place for improvisation because a script must be followed, as in the State of the Union Address. However, a rather different persona projection—Trump the populist—and a deft ability to command the audience's attention is observed during his speeches at both rallies, where he freely interacts with the audience and seems to be having fun. Again, the Interview acts as a middle-ground arena, as this is not such a rigid and formal context as the Statement is, but still has less room for improvisation than the rallies.

4.2. Predictability Patterns across Contexts

As depicted in tables 3 and 4, a non-mixed effects analysis confirmed that Statement—i.e., the State of the Union Address—is the context that favours the greatest use of mainstream forms (diphthongal /aɪ/ and rhotic realisations) in the speech styles of Trump, followed by Interview. Conversely, Rally (North) and Rally (South) disfavour the emergence of mainstream variants in Trump's speech (see the negative numbers in the “logodds” column). Thus, Rally (South) is the context in which Trump uses non-mainstream variants. Regarding word type and phonetic context, our analysis revealed that while grammatical words in a PRICE and pre-consonantal context favour the use of mainstream realisations, content words realised in a PRIZE and word-final context favour non-mainstream forms of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping.

TABLE 3. One-Level Analysis: Contribution of “Political context,” “Word type” and “Phonetic context” to the Probability of the PRICE/PRIZE Mainstream Form (/aɪ/ realisation) being Used by Trump (Adapted from Zapata-Barrero 2021)

Variable	logodds	n	Uncentred factor weight	Centred factor weight
Political context				
Statement	0.734	91	0.978	0.676
Interview	0.262	215	0.898	0.565
Rally (North)	-0.327	123	0.886	0.419
Rally (South)	-0.669	189	0.810	0.339
Word type				
Content	1.83	266	0.996	0.862
Grammatical	-1.83	352	0.793	0.138

Phonetic context				
PRICE	8.335	133	1.000	> 0.999
PRIZE	-8.335	485	0.847	< 0.001
Misc. 1	N= 618; df= 6; Intercept= 11.594; Overall proportion= 0.88; Centred input probability= 1.			
Misc. 2	Log likelihood= -173.373; AIC= 358.745; AICc= 358.883; Dxy= 0.637; R2= 0.948			

TABLE 4. One-Level Analysis: Contribution of “Political context,” “Word type” and “Phonetic context” to the Probability of the R-Dropping Mainstream Form (/r/ realisation) being Used by Trump (Adapted from Zapata-Barrero 2021)

Variable	logodds	n	Uncentred factor weight	Centred factor weight
Political context				
Statement	1.262	257	0.946	0.779
Interview	-0.092	249	0.799	0.477
Rally (North)	-0.382	214	0.743	0.406
Rally (South)	-0.788	289	0.671	0.313
Word type				
Content	0.714	634	0.896	0.671
Grammatical	-0.714	375	0.605	0.329
Phonetic context				
Pre-consonantal	0.313	332	0.925	0.578
Word-final	-0.313	677	0.721	0.422
Misc. 1	N= 1009; df= 6; Intercept= 1.647; Overall proportion= 0.788; Centred input probability= 0.838.			
Misc. 2	Log likelihood= -429.275; AIC= 870.549; AICc= 870.633; Dxy= 0.567; R2= 0.323			

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Consistency versus Variability

It has been acknowledged that one feature that characterises successful politicians is their construction of a unique public identity or political self that is branded and marketed

for the electorate's consumption (Lempert and Silverstein 2012; Sclafani 2018). In fact, a politician's linguistic choice serves as the basis of enregisterment processes whereby the audience is able to recognise and enregister (or link) the use of specific linguistic resources with the speech style of a particular public persona (Silverstein 2003; Agha 2005).

For this to be achieved, it has been suggested that politicians must produce a consolidated, consistent and coherent idiosyncratic speech style over time and across speaking contexts (Sclafani 2018). In doing so, politicians need to consider the social meanings that can be recognised and interpreted by the audience when using a particular linguistic feature. This task becomes difficult when large and varied audiences are addressed: even though a specific social collective might be borne in mind, there is no guarantee that the content understood by the whole audience and their subsequent feelings towards the performance of a politician will be totally controlled and predicted. In this sense, engaging in stylistic variation across speech events is a potential solution, in this case for Donald Trump, when attempting to connect with different audiences. Specifically, not only consistency but also variability when using linguistic devices, and therefore when engaging in stylistic practices, can accumulate to create a public identity and a political self (D'Onofrio and Stecker 2020). The present analysis reveals that Trump does not create a fixed style across contexts; he engages in stylistic variation instead. Thus, we argue that cross-context stylistic variation can itself contribute to the creation of a politician's public identity.

5.2. Projecting a Relatable and Authentic Persona

Trump's use of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping seems to be influenced by geographical and identity meanings and by other social traits indexed by both linguistic features, together with the format, degree of formality and type of audience of the speech events analysed. As noted above, the most noticeable increase in Trump's use of both non-mainstream forms, which primarily index a low socio-economic background and a Southern speech style and, thus, Southern culture and identity, takes place at the Southern rally. By consciously or unconsciously engaging in this stylistic practice, Trump seems to be attempting to enhance in-group connections with his Southern and/or working-class audience. In this respect, it is worth highlighting that Southern states are characterised by a high degree of ruralness and are among the poorest in the nation, as well as the most heavily Republican,³ which may be an important motivation for Trump to present a less elitist identity. Thus, through the reinforcement of linguistic links, Trump deploys a populist speech style and projects a masculine, tough and non-elitist public persona. In fact, Trump supporters often praise how he embodies a "tough-guy" and authentic persona by giving voice to and addressing "harsh truths" (Guo 2016, para n. 1-3), the projection of these qualities through language use frequently being achieved by using

³ Data retrieved from the United States Census Bureau official webpage and 270 to win official webpage.

working-class or non-mainstream linguistic variants. This inevitably contrasts with Trump's socio-economic and formal education background, as he is a billionaire who attended private and elitist education institutions in New York City and Philadelphia.

On the contrary, the effect of the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors mentioned above seems to fade when Trump operates in the contexts of Statement, Interview and even in Rally (North). In this sense, we identify a reduction in the requirement for Trump to project a non-elitist and relatable persona through language use. That is, engaging in stylistic variation by using non-mainstream variants ceases to operate as a determinant aspect for successfully performing in these three speech events.

On a different note, even though the prominent use of the non-mainstream variants of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping can also index an African American speech style (Wells 1982; W. F. Edwards 2004; Trudgill and Hannah 2008), we argue that due to Trump's political stance on immigration and ethnic identity aspects, it does not seem likely that he will be engaging in stylistic practices to reinforce in-group connections with his African American electorate.

5.3. Influence of Mainstream and Prestigious Conventions

Trump significantly alters his use of the non-mainstream variants of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping when operating in the contexts studied, though he always uses the mainstream form to a greater extent, the latter correlating with a General American speech style (Kretzschmar 2004; Trudgill and Hannah 2008). This firm adherence to diphthongal and rhotic realisations could be conditioned by the prestigious conventions linked to these variants, since they index a high degree of formality, formal education and socio-economic background (Kretzschmar 2004; Trudgill and Hannah 2008; Lippi-Green 2012). Consequently, the stigmatisation linked with the non-mainstream variants of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping may preclude Trump from making greater use of monophthongal and non-rhotic forms, especially in those contexts that are characterised by a high degree of formality and ceremonialism.

6. CONCLUSION

Our study has attempted to add further practical background to the analysis of persona management processes, stylistic practices and their subsequent transmission of social meaning in the political domain from a third-wave approach. Its implementation has emphasised Trump's agency when participating in communicative interactions, as he actively takes part in the combination and recombination of the meanings indexed by PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping when performing across different political contexts.

The results evidence that Trump does not create a fixed style across contexts; rather he engages in stylistic variation for interactional and political purposes. In this sense, we argue that cross-context stylistic variation can itself contribute to the creation of

a politician's public identity, and that the variability that characterises Trump's use of mainstream and non-mainstream forms should be considered as an ideological and dynamic presentation of his identity as speaker.

In addition, results suggest that the different meanings indexed by PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping, together with the context, format and audience of the communicative interaction at issue, strongly condition the sociolinguistic behaviour of Trump. More concretely, it has been observed that overall, Trump predominantly adheres to conventions pertaining to prestige, the mainstream, formality, formal education and social class which are indexed by the mainstream and prestigious forms of PRICE/PRIZE and R-Dropping that are characteristic of a General American English speech style. This sociolinguistic behaviour is exemplified in Trump's performance in the State of the Union Address, the most formal and ceremonial context studied here. However, he also engages in stylistic variation since he alters the use of mainstream and non-mainstream variants in the contexts studied. Specifically, Trump's most noticeable increase in his use of non-mainstream variants indexing an informal, working-class and Southern speech style, Southern culture and identity is observed when he operates in the South, a region that is characterised by a high degree of poverty, ruralness and strong Republican ideological adherence. Consequently, we argue that Trump's participation in stylistic practices is consciously or unconsciously aimed at him positioning himself in society, creating in-group connections with his audience and deploying a populist speech style.

Methodologically, the implementation of logistic regressions within a non-mixed effects model has proven to be useful in the provision of relevant insights about the predictability of Trump's speech style. This statistical analysis can be implemented in the detection of patterns of identity projection and stance-taking moves, subsequently enabling the identification of specific speech styles associated with particular communicative contexts.

Overall, this analysis has confirmed that the style of a speaker is characterised by the meaningful choices made about the linguistic resource to be used in a specific context and its corresponding social meaning. It has also emphasised the importance of language, and specifically, the indexical mutability of linguistic features, when it comes to shaping one's political identity. We conclude that style should be approached as a holistic and multilevel phenomenon that can be linguistically and socially interpreted, linguistic variation being a resource available to speakers for use in the construction of their public style and identity.

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- APPENDIX I. MASS MEDIA SOURCES
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