

Synthetic Personalization of Jacinda Ardern at the 2023 Parliament Farewell Speech: A Social-Semiotic Multimodal Study

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Abstract

Looking at how language functions differently when it is used by specific people at a certain time and agenda, this study aims to see how a specific political leader influences the audience by using certain words and gestures to engage with. The data were taken from Jacinda Ardern's final speech in April 2023 in the parliament on YouTube as she resigned from her position as New Zealand's Prime Minister. This study applied a descriptive-qualitative study by using qualitative library research and document analysis for the data collection. The data were analyzed using Fairclough's (2001) theory on Synthetic Personalization and Van Leeuwen's (2008) Social-semiotic Multimodal analysis. The findings show Jacinda Ardern used synthetic personalization to build intimacy, to engage with the audience, and to create a simulated personal relationship with the audience by telling her personal story, using specific vocabularies such as you, we, and our to build a deeper relationship with the audience resulting in the audience getting immersed during her speech and a mass standing ovation. Social-semiotic shortens the distance between speaker and audience by creating social interaction by showing gestures, eye distance, and gaze.

Keywords: synthetic personalization; social-semiotic, multimodality

INTRODUCTION

Our perceptions are derived from what is given to us in the most presentable way. The political context is one of many examples where the speakers show what the intended audience desires. Thus, public opinions are influenced by how political leaders make use of their image to support the intended meaning (Wong, 2016).

In a staged political context, the creation of a third party or audience is necessary. The audiences are there to define which side is influenced and which side is giving influence (Bös, 2007; Yoong & Yoong, 2020). Thus, synthetic personalization allows the audience to infer one mass audience and turn it as if it is a single audience (Fairclough, 2013; Grabowski, 2007). The use of synthetic personalization can build an intimacy, engagement, and connections to both the speaker and audience. It is also used to bring a feeling of 'just like us' to get people driven by what the speaker is intended.

Thus, social semiotic study includes social distance. In this sense, the distance refers to how close the audience and speaker are (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2018). By creating a certain distance, it does not mean that the speaker and audience are far away, rather it is used as a strategy to help them getting close because by finding the gap, the speaker can get through what the audience wants.

Some studies on synthetic personalization have been done by some (Chovanec, 2006; Matwick & Matwick, 2014; Page, 2012; Wong, 2016). Chovanec's (2006) study analyzes verbal interactions between readers and commentators in online reports. It shows that the strategy of synthetic personalization is used to reach an agreement with the audience. Matwick and Matwick (2014) try to combine synthetic personalization with storytelling to unveil the constructions of cooking shows. Page (2012) analyses the role of Twitter hashtags and branding in influencing Twitter audiences into certain trends. Wong (2016) analyses Obama's speech in a democratic national convention. However, this study is different from the previous studies because it tries to unveil certain ways to influence people in a political setting by combining synthetic personalization, multimodal analysis, and corpus as a tool for data analysis and to see how a woman leader uses her language to influence people.

This study aims to analyze how a political figure influences a mass audience by using specific words, gestures, and gaze. Moreover, the study was conducted by analyzing the speech of a political figure which its overall purpose is to see the audience's reactions. Using Fairclough (2001) and Van Leeuwen's (2008) combined to answer the following research questions:

1. How does synthetic personalization used by to influence people?
2. How does social semiotic multimodal analysis helps to strengthen the influence?

By using the framework of Fairclough (2001) and Van Leeuwen (2008), it is to be expected that the study would give a better understanding on how an audience can be driven to certain extend and to fulfill certain agenda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term synthetic personalization was first introduced by Fairclough in 1989 which was derived from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The term is widely used in communication study, thus, Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is used as an analysis of language and to combine it with other elements or field to achieve particular result on discourse (Kress, 1990; Weiss & Wodak, 2007; Wodak, 2004; Wodak & Fairclough, 2013). In synthetic personalization, Fairclough combined it with social interactions and he noted that the term synthetic personalization means as a way to handle *en masse* as an impression of treating a huge crowd as a single individual (Fairclough, 2013). Language acts as a power and by using certain language, we can embed a certain influence to people (Bourdieu, 1991).

Fairclough emphasized that synthetic personalization's role does not only involve influence but also a feeling of closeness or intimacy (Fairclough, 2013). Matwick and Matwick (2014) added that the use of it is to handle a big audience and treat them in a private direct manner. Thus, the strategy in applying synthetic personalization is by looking at the pronouns the speaker use (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2018). The portrayal of the actor or speaker is defined by the use of first-, second-, and third-person pronoun depending on what

agenda and how close they want the connection to be. The speakers have also include cultural background of the audience to make them relate to the topic (Özcan, 2016). Furthermore, to create an intimacy, they usually use hyponyms (Van Leeuwen, 2008b). the hyponyms include the mentioning of their family and relatives to get the audience involves in the story (Wong, 2016).

Social semiotic analyses that were used in this paper is from Van Leeuwen (2008). Social semiotic involves social interaction and social interaction involves distance, relation, interaction and using shot and angle to determine the interaction between speaker and audience (Halliday, 2014; Lemke, 2021; Van Leeuwen, 2008a). Social interactions involve discursive practices (Bakar, 2014; Michelson & Álvarez Valencia, 2016). The social interaction framework is explained in Figure 1.

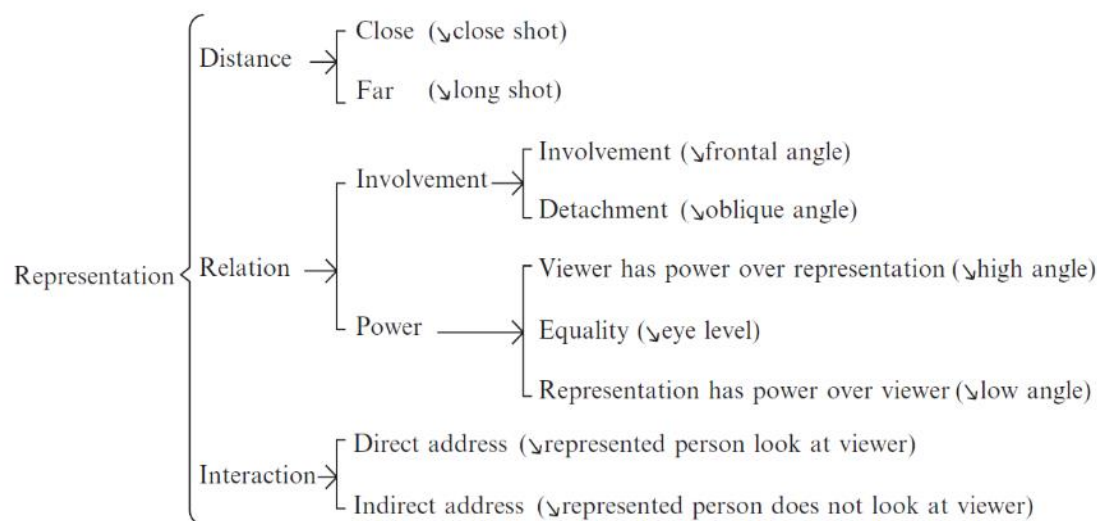


Figure 1. Social Interaction Framework by Van Leeuwen (2008)

Social distance refers to the degree of closeness from someone, can be our friends, family, colleagues, or even people we see in the streets. Thus, when social distance is captured in pictures of videos, there are some meaning that can be inferred: long shot and close up. Long shot means as if the people captured are strangers and close-up means the people who are captured is in the degree of 'oneness' or 'belonging' (Van Leeuwen, 2008a).

Thus, in social relation, Van Leeuwen proposed that there are two angles when we see a person: vertical and horizontal. Vertical angle is when it is shown from above, eye level, and below. Horizontal angle is when we see somebody from the side. Thus, those angles reflects power and connection (Van Leeuwen, 2008a).

Then, on social interaction in Figure 1 it involves distance, relation, and interaction which everything relates to one another from social distance, social relation, and social interaction. Thus, all social actors such as distance, relation, and interaction cannot be separated. They have to be there along with one another (Van Leeuwen, 2008a). This leads to three possible strategies for visually representing people as "others," as "not like us": the strategy of dissociation, which represents people as "not close to us," as "strangers"; the strategy of disempowerment, which represents people as "below us," (or any possible

adjective fits in the context); and the strategy of objectivation, which represents people as objects for our scrutiny, rather than the subjects address.

METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative design by applying qualitative library research with document analysis. Descriptive research methodology is used to systematically explain the current phenomena to answer the research questions (Silverman, 2020). The data were taken from Jacinda Ardern's valedictory speech in May 2023 and was obtained from NewsHub YouTube channel. The data consisted of vocabularies from the transcription of Jacinda Ardern's speech. The data were collected by doing selective viewing to heed the speaker's gestures. The data then were transcribed and organized on corpus to form concordances. The data analysis focused on the vocabulary and multimodal aspects of the speaker such as gestures and gaze. The data analysis was done by combining Fairclough's (2013) theory and Van Leeuwen's (2008) strategy on social semiotic multimodal analysis. The data was first transcribed and then analysed using synthetic personalization by looking at word and sentence level. Next, by applying Van Leeuwen's strategy, social semiotic multimodal analysis was done by looking at the gestures, gaze, and camera angle.

FINDINGS

The Influence of Synthetic Personalization

The data were categorized according to Fairclough's (2013) synthetic personalization by including the pronouns of you, your, we, and us. Some pronouns such as yours, yourself, yourselves, and ours cannot be found in the utterances and for that reason those pronouns are not written in the table 1.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Synthetic Pronouns.

Pronouns	Frequency	%
You	78	28
Your	100	35
We	68	24
Us	12	5
Our	23	8
Total	281	100

Thus, 'your' has the highest frequency with 100 hits (35%), 'you' comes next with 78 (28%), 'we' with 68 hits (24%), 'our' with 23 hits (8%), and 'us' placed the last with 12 hits (5%).

The use of the pronouns in Table 1 is no other than to create a manipulative ways in order to talk to a big audience so that they can feel the closeness and intimacy and creating an image of talking to them personally following Fairclough's (2013) strategy. The examples of Jacinda's utterances by using the pronouns you, your, we, us, and our are given in excerpt 1 to 5.

Excerpt 1

1. "and I've always believed this to be a place **you** came make a difference."
2. "And finally to this team of people around me. I have said it before and will say it again, I have never worked with better people. I know without a shadow of doubt that **you** are here for the right reasons."
3. "Every Tuesday at the end of caucus, I would read a letter of the week. Something from the large correspondence files that captured what was going on in people's lives and reminded us all why we were here. But **you** never really needed reminding."
4. "Most of **you** here know my story. I don't consider myself to have had anything in my life that made me especially extraordinary."
5. "I was a worrier. I anticipated that everything that could go wrong, would. Some might say, the worst possible character trait to have as a politician. Or the best, depending on how **you** cut it."
6. "While I convinced myself that **you** cannot be a worrier, and be in this place, **you** can. **You** can be that person, and be here."
7. "I cannot determine what will define my time in this place. But I do hope I have demonstrated something else entirely. That **you** can be anxious, sensitive, kind and wear your heart on your sleeve. **You** can be a mother, or not, an ex-Mormon, or not, a nerd, a crier, a hugger – **you** can be all of these things, and not only can **you** be here – **you** can lead."

In example 1, Jacinda was talking about her maiden speech and the topics that she had brought to the podiums. She is using the pronoun 'you' which is addressed to the audience to influence them to follow her steps. Thus, she also uses the pronoun 'you' to motivate the audience.

Excerpt 2

1. "That you can be anxious, sensitive, kind and wear **your** heart on **your** sleeve"
2. "I know you likewise made **your** decision with that same sense of responsibility, and while I have never known whether to curse you or thank you, I'm grateful for the faith you've always had in me."
3. "Mr Speaker, having sadly seen our nation in horrific moments of grief, I've concluded that countries don't move on from tragedy, rather they become part of **your** psyche."
4. "To all of the DPS team, thank you for everything. And to the VIP drivers – thank you for **your** company, and **your** kindness. I'd like to think of **your** newfound practise of keeping a car sick clean up kit in **your** vehicles as a homage to my family."
5. "To my family, thank you all for your patience, **your** love and support. And that goes especially to my wonderful mother, father and sister Louise, but also the Gayfords, Dussans, Cowans and Frasers. I love you all."
6. "I hand on heart believe you sacrificed as much as any of us for 5 years. You and **your** beautiful family, Jane, Magnolia and Saffron"
7. "Who has the biggest heart, but sharpest mind. **Your** dad would be so proud. Same to Zoe and Amelia – to us, you are family. Clare-Louise for moving **your** entire life to support me for the better part of a decade."

In example 2, she used 'your' to encourage the audiences to overcome their hardships by addressing the audience as second person pronoun, however, the use 'your' is to show

stance of belongings to whomever the speaker is talking to. She also used it to thank everyone she felt indebted to. In this case, Jacinda was trying to bring a closer sense to the audience and her by addressing them using second person pronoun and using possessive pronoun to show possessive determiner of the audience's stance. She also used it to close the distance from her and her audience.

Excerpt 3

1. "... it right. I didn't always get it right. But **we** were always motivated by the right things. Thirdly and.."
2. "It was the first of August and **we** were a mere 7 weeks out from an election when Andrew Little stood down as leader of the Labour party, and nominated me to take his place."
3. "When I came here 15 years ago **we** talked about climate change as if it was almost a hypothetical. Some didn't even give it that credit."
4. "In 2008 I sat in that lobby as the ETS was weakened and the yo-yo of climate policy continued. But in the intervening years **we** have seen first-hand the reality of our changing environment, from Northland, to the Coromandel, Tokomaru Bay to Buller."
5. "Now I know there is politics in almost everything. This chamber understands why more than anyone. But **we** also know when, and how to remove it. When crisis has landed in front of us, I have seen the best of this place. An absolute focus on the care of others, on preserving life and helping people when they need it most."
6. "There will always be policy differences. But beneath that **we** have what we need to make the progress **we** must."
7. "**We** owe it to the next generation, but **we** also owe it to ourselves."

In example 3, she used the pronoun 'we' which is a third person subject pronoun to recall the work that she had done with her coworkers and to address it together with her so that the listeners who were assumed to be her coworkers as well can feel the sense of belonging to her speech.

Excerpt 4

1. "... we would have a vaccine that might help **us** do that."
2. "Now I know there is politics in almost everything. This chamber understands why more than anyone. But we also know when, and how to remove it. When crisis has landed in front of **us**, I have seen the best of this place. An absolute focus on the care of others, on preserving life and helping people when they need it most."
3. "Climate change is a crisis. It is upon **us**. And so, one of the few things I will ask of this house on my departure – is that you please, take the politics out of climate change."
4. "We have the Zero Carbon Act, carbon budgets, an emissions reduction plan, and a Climate Commission to guide **us**."
5. "And I don't believe I have mentioned what was happening in the moments it was taken. We had brought together a group of politicians to travel to Christchurch and the Defence Force carried **us**. On the way down I had seen the front page of the paper and the image of a member of the Muslim community covered in blood in the aftermath of the attack."
6. "I did not know what to expect, but what came next was one of the most profound memories I have of that period. He thanked **us**. Here was someone who had been through the most horrific experience I could imagine, and he thanked New Zealand and expressed gratitude for his home."

7. "I feel honoured and grateful to continue work on the issue of radicalisation and violent extremism online. But the most significant task for all of **us** as a nation is to live up to the expectations that those who experienced it have of **us**."

For example 4, she was talking about the time when she was still a parliament member, as a prime minister to be exact, and she was retelling about the Covid-19 pandemic and how she and her team handled it. The use of 'us' is as an object is to place the audience as the one who receive the action so that the feeling of belonging can be build through how she includes people in her story.

Excerpt 5

1. "what was I believe the hardest part of **our** Covid journey"
2. "Mr Speaker, having sadly seen **our** nation in horrific moments of grief, I've concluded that countries don't move on from tragedy, rather they become part of your psyche. But the way these moments weave themselves into **our** being, will be determined by how we confront them."
3. "Dinah Okeby, who literally read every piece of correspondence that came **our** way and still maintained such a positive disposition."
4. "And not just domestically. I recall with some fondness visiting Europe to further **our** FTA aspirations. We met with what, for the purposes of this story I will describe simply as a leader within the European Union."
5. "At the beginning of **our** meeting, he greeted Raj as the one whose hair he had admired in the bios he was given."
6. "They were so uplifting that on occasion I would read them out at **our** small staff meetings."
7. "My sister and I were the first in **our** family to attend university. I was anxious about taking a student loan so I worked multiple jobs and entered speech competitions, or to be precise, my mother entered me into them, to try and earn a little extra money to put myself through university."

In example 5, she was talking about Covid-19 pandemic and the way she used 'our' in her speech is because the pandemic has affected everyone in every aspect of their life and it also has become everyone's problem ever since it was first emerged. Thus, the use of our is because it is something that everyone in the country and the world experience it together. She used the feeling of 'just like us' as a manipulation strategy to get the attention of the audience.

Thus, Jacinda also uses Māori as the opening and closing of her speech. Here are the examples:

Opening:

Te whare e tu nei

Te marae e takoto ana

Tena korua

E nga mate maha

Haere, haere, haere

Nga tangata whenua o tenei rohe, o Te Whanganui -a-tara, tena kotou

Tatou nga kanohi ora e hui mai ana

Tena kotou tena kotou, tena kotou katoa

Closing: *No reira tena kotou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.*

Maori is New Zealand's second language. Using Maori as the opening and closing of her speech is none other than to include the feeling of belonging and to 'local' so that the citizens who listened to her speech can feel a close link to her. Furthermore, she also used sign language interpreter which would help everyone to understand her speech better.

Social Semiotic Multimodal Discourse

Social semiotic analysis is done by analyzing gestures, gaze, angles, and shot of the speaker. The tabulation of social semiotic gestures and gaze along with the image as an example is given in Table 2. The social semiotic derived from Van Leeuwen (2008) which include social distance, social relation, and social interactions.

Table 2. Social Semiotic Gestures and Gaze Taken from Wong (2016)

Example 1
 A photograph of a woman speaking at a podium in a parliament chamber. She is wearing a white top and a fur stole. Several men in suits are seated at desks behind her. A sign language interpreter is shown in a green box on the right side of the image. The Newshub logo is visible in the bottom left corner, and a small 'hub.' logo is in the bottom right corner.
Speech: In 2008 I sat in that lobby as the ETS was weakened and the yo-yo of climate policy continued
Example 2



Speech: I started in the Labour Party as a volunteer delivering flyers, and that's where I will return. Happily.

Example 3



Speech: my mother entered me into them, to try and earn a little extra money to put myself through university

In Example 1, Jacinda Ardern used deictic gestures to point at the audience while saying the word 'I'. The angles captured was a long shot which imply the meaning of a

strangers. However, the use of it as an interaction to the viewers rely on the relation between 'I' and how she pointed the crowd as she said 'I'. She was trying to impose certain power by trying to position the audience as her.

In Example 2, Jacinda Ardern looked at the side while talking about the labour party where she worked before retiring from her position as New Zealand's Prime Minister. She proposed horizontal angle as what Van Leeuwen (2008) said that it is used to create power and connections between the speaker and the audience.

In example 3, She looked at the front and from a close angle. This applied vertical angle with eye level. She was trying to imply the meaning of 'the same with the others'. This is one of many strategies to get the audience pay more attention to us by gazing at various directions.

Hence, she used hyponyms and telling her family related stories to gain audience's influence

1. "I was 28 years old. **My family** were living overseas and I had only moved back to New Zealand a few months prior. If I'm honest, I was probably more than a little shocked to be here, a feeling that even after 15 years, never quite left me."
2. "I was a child of the 80s, born to the son of a drainlayer and the daughter of a farmer. **My parents** worked hard, really hard. "
3. "**My father** was a policeman, my mother ran the canteen at the local school. They also ran an orchard for a few years, all while working full-time."
4. "**My sister** and I were the first in our family to attend university. I was anxious about taking a student loan so I worked multiple jobs and entered speech competitions, or to be precise, **my mother** entered me into them, to try and earn a little extra money to put myself through university."
5. "**My dad** stopped watching the news for 5 years. Mind you, he comes from a long line of media protest. **My nana** used to turn the television off whenever Muldoon came on."
6. "**My mother** took a different approach. During Covid she took up the practice of sending me her own personal thought for the day."
7. "And to **my love** Clarke. Not many politicians have a partner, that when they say "I'm thinking of leaving politics" reply "I think you should stay." But that's who you are. You are fiercely loyal and always had my back, but you are also a fighter."

These findings are included in the hyponyms of 'family' which can bring people closer by bringing the feeling of 'fellow human' by Van Leeuwen (2008b). The 'family' includes family members such as father, mother, parents, sister, brother, husband, daughter, son, and any other pronoun for family. This was done to minimize social distance from the speaker and audience (Van Leeuwen, 2008b; Wong, 2016). Thus, to discuss better on the implications of the findings, the discussions of the findings are provided.

DISCUSSION

Derived from the findings, synthetic personalization is a strategy used to influence certain people in certain agenda. In this study, the use of it in staged political context is a good example of how people are easily influenced. The audience can be easily persuaded by the use of personal pronouns 'you, we, us, our' depending on the degree of closeness (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2018; Van Leeuwen, 2008b). The tendency to mention personal stories are

highly related to bring out the sense of belongings so that the audience relates to the speaker as what Fairclough (2008, 2013) said. Audience can easily be persuaded when we can find the right strategy which can bring them sympathy and interest to the story. Jacinda used her family stories and how she handled difficulties during her prime minister days. It is also one of many strategies to bring intimacy, fellowship, and engagement because people can relate to what she went through as Covid-19 was a pandemic that happened all over the world. This feeling of belonging can derive people to be mesmerized and the mass audience can be handled easily with this. The use of first- and second pronoun while telling her story are also a manipulative strategy to get her close in a 'synthetic' way as what Matwick and Matwick (2014) proposed.

Social semiotic analysis is done by analyzing the social representation which include distance, relation, and interaction (Van Leeuwen, 2008b). Gaze, gestures, and angles of shotting can influence audience perception. In the case of Jacinda, both long and close up shots are done. The purposes are for two things: 1. Making the audience feels closer with close-up shots, and 2. Making the audience to feel a 'distance' by attempting a long shot. Thus, to maintain social contact with audiences, the speaker has to relate with cultural background of the audience(Özcan, 2016), in which local language is chosen to open and close the speech.

The manipulative strategy done by Jacinda include the use of first- and second pronoun, telling her private story to get audience's attention, and by those strategies she was able to handle her speech perfectly and finished with a standing ovation. Those are the intended goal of the use social interactions and synthetic personalization and social semiotic as what Fairclough (2001) and Van Leeuwen (2008) proposed.

CONCLUSION

Synthetic personalization can be used not only as a tool to influence but also as a tool to frame certain agenda. By using synthetic personalization, people can tell which intended audience they are trying to attract and they are trying to influence. Within the study of synthetic personalization, one does not only require to use certain pronouns but they have to combine every pronoun to create a closer relation and to shorten the distance between the speaker and audience.

Social semiotic study can be done by looking at the angle and shot. Distance and gestures can also influence how the speaker want to connect with the audience. Combining social semiotic and synthetic personalization in the analysis can give us a clearer view of what the speaker intended to and what agenda does the speaker want to achieve.

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