

Cognition, Communication, Discourse, 2025, 31, 80-104

<https://periodicals.karazin.ua/cognitiondiscourse>

<https://doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2025-31-6>

Received October 26, 2025; revised November 22, 2025;

accepted November 24, 2025; published on-line December 25, 2025

## ONE MAN'S WAR: PERSON-MARKING AND GEOPOLITICAL POSITIONING IN VIKTOR ORBÁN'S SPEECHES (2022–2025)

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**Article citation:** Szabó, L.P., & Horváth, B. (2025). One man's war: Person-marking and geopolitical positioning in Viktor Orbán's speeches (2022–2025). *Cognition, Communication, Discourse*, 31, 80-104. <https://doi.org/10.26565/2218-2926-2025-31-6>

### Abstract

Following Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in 2022, the European Union and NATO largely reached a consensus on supporting Ukraine and imposing sanctions on Russia. However, Hungary's government opted for a different approach, consistently obstructing decision-making processes. This raises the question how Hungary's leaders positioned the country amid these disagreements during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. This paper explores the rhetoric of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the primary spokesperson for the Hungarian government, to unravel how he portrays his leadership and the various group dynamics involving Hungary and its people. Utilizing the experiential view of person-marking and corpus linguistic methods, we analyzed four of his annual speeches from 2022 to 2025, focusing on first-person singular and plural, as well as third-person plural references. The use of the first person indicates whether the speaker emphasizes their own viewpoint in their rhetoric. First- and third-person plural references shed light on different in-group and out-group dynamics. Our research indicates that the Prime Minister increasingly expressed his personal views in his addresses, while distancing Hungary from its usual alliances and crafting a narrative centered on "foreign adversaries." These trends illustrate how political figures can manipulate alliance structures in their discourse and contribute to democratic backslide by normalizing narratives of external threats.

**Keywords:** *person-marking, personal pronouns, political personalization, political rhetoric, Russo-Ukrainian war.*

### 1. Introduction

In the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the member states of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) condemned the invasion and almost unanimously imposed sanctions on Moscow, including restrictions on energy, transport, and services.<sup>1</sup> The Hungarian government, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, broke the ranks. Hungarian politicians denounced Russian aggression (Dudlák, 2025) and expressed their support for peace and Ukraine's territorial integrity (Schmidt & Glied, 2024); however, the Orbán government gained notoriety for blocking sanctions on Russia and hindering assistance to Ukraine



(Berkes, 2022; Coakley, 2022; Gavin & Vincour, 2025; Karjalainen, 2025; Özoflu & Arató, 2023). This raises the question of how Hungary's political leadership positions itself in relation to its allies amid ongoing tensions over Russia's war in Ukraine.

To reflect on this question, this paper examines PM Viktor Orbán's political speeches between 2022 and 2025. In particular, four annual addresses delivered by the Hungarian prime minister are under scrutiny: the annual State of the Nation address, the March 15 national holiday speech, the Băile Tușnad (Tusnádfürdő) summer camp speech, and the October 23 national commemoration speech. As the primary figure in Hungarian political discourse (Dudlák, 2025; Szilágyi & Bozóki, 2015), the prime minister has played a crucial role in articulating the government's position on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, attributing the disruption of the political status quo to his allies, particularly the EU and NATO (Sata, 2023). Orbán, a right-wing populist leader (Agoston, 2024; Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2018; Csehi, 2019; Dudlák, 2025; Hronešová & Kreiss, 2024; Lamour, 2024; Özoflu & Arató, 2023; Sata, 2023; Suuronen, 2025; Sükösd, 2022; Szabó & Lipiński, 2024; Toomey, 2020) has been at the forefront of political communication since his electoral success in 2010. Consequently, his individual perspective on the war and his understanding of group dynamics may also shape public discourse in Hungary (Krekó, 2019).

A politicians' personal perspective can be grasped through the concept of political personalization. The personalization of politics attests that the individual political actor's persona is put in the forefront of political discourse over collective entities like political parties (Szabó, 2021, 2022, 2024, 2025b). Although politicians are mentioning their political affiliations less frequently, substantial research indicates that they are increasingly referring to the entire nation (Szabó, 2021, 2022, 2024, 2025b; Horváth, 2024a, 2024b). As a result, personalized politics can give the impression that the politician is representing the whole nation, fostering a sense of agreement among citizens on a range of political issues, including foreign policy. Orbán frequently employs first-person plural references to suggest that he transcends the role of a mere party politician, positioning himself as a representative of the entire Hungarian nation and even supranational entities, such as the EU; furthermore, he explicitly equates his supporters with Hungarians (Szilágyi & Bozóki, 2015).

Populism also exploits the sentiment of national unity: populist political rhetoric perpetuates a dichotomy between the country's "people" and the "antagonists," who are perceived as acting contrary to the interests of the people (Tóth, 2020). In Hungarian populist rhetoric, the adversaries include the European Union, the LGBTQ community, and Hungarian-American investor and philanthropist György Soros (Sükösd, 2022). Thus, to fully grasp how contemporary geopolitical dynamics are represented in Viktor Orbán's rhetoric, our research must consider not only the "in-group," which refers to the groups with which Hungary is associated according to Prime Minister Orbán, but also the "out-group," which encompasses those groups to which the country does not belong and may even perceive as hostile. Accordingly, this paper explores PM Orbán's personal perspective, as well as the construction of the in-groups and out-groups through his strategic use of person-marking. The following research questions guide our paper.

- RQ1. How did the relative frequency of first-person singular, first-person plural, and third-person plural markers evolve in PM Orbán's speeches between 2022 and 2025?
- RQ2. Which in-groups were constructed via first-person plural markers in PM Orbán's speeches between 2022 and 2025?
- RQ3. Which out-groups were constructed via third-person plural markers in PM Orbán's speeches between 2022 and 2025?
- RQ4. How were Hungary's key allies, the EU and NATO, represented via person-marking in PM Orbán's speeches between 2022 and 2025?

Person-marking is a particularly revealing feature of political communication. The first-person singular (1PS) facilitates the articulation of individual perspectives and the assertion of authority. In

contrast, the first-person plural (1PP) denotes affiliation, whereas third-person plural (3PP) references serve to distance the referents from each other. Building upon these insights, we analyze how Prime Minister Orbán utilizes pronouns and person-marking to position himself and to construct in-groups and out-groups during Russia's war on Ukraine. By examining the distribution and contextual use of the first-person singular (1PS), first-person plural (1PP), and third-person plural (3PP) referents across Orbán's speeches from 2022 to 2025, we explore how he defines his own position (1PS and 1PP) and frames the country's relationship with supranational entities, including the EU and NATO (3PP). This analysis enables us to discern whom the prime minister includes within the "we," as well as whom he regards as distant, obstructive, and hostile, thereby illuminating the personalized and populist foundations of Hungary's geopolitical communication.

The structure of the paper is organized as follows. Following the Introduction, Section 2 discusses the significance of person-marking in political communication. Section 3 offers a concise overview of the political context relevant to the research. Section 4 delineates the corpus and methodologies employed, while Section 5 presents the results alongside their discussion. The final section, Section 6, concludes.

## 2. Persons and politics

Personal pronoun choice is always political: pronouns point to particular people, designate various groups and they express power relations (Pennycook, 1994). Hungarian frequently omits subject pronouns in sentences, instead conveying number and person through verb conjugation and verbal inflections (Magyari et al., 2022). For example, in the case of *mi döntöttünk az adókról* ("we have decided on taxes") the first-person plural pronoun *mi* "we" can be omitted and shares the same propositional content with the clause *döntöttünk az adókról*. Consequently, we interpret person-marking as being conveyed by both pronouns and through conjugations and inflections. Thus, this section examines the politics of pronouns and person-marking: how politicians articulate their own identities and negotiate in-groups and out-groups via person-marking.

The 1PS is a double-edged sword in politics. On the one hand, it enables the politician to express their personal involvement; on the other hand, the 1PS assigns responsibility to the individual politician, thereby holding them accountable for their statements (Beard, 2000; Maitland & Wilson, 1987; Wilson, 1990). Consequently, it is unsurprising that the first-person singular (1PS) is predominantly employed when political actors discuss their achievements or plans (Wilson, 1990). Example 12 demonstrates the use of the 1PS.

- (1) "Ezért azt javaslom Önöknek, magunknak, hogy 2025 legyen az áttörés éve." (State of the Nation, 2025).

[That is why I propose to you, and to us, that 2025 should be the year of breakthrough.]

The 1PP can have multiple referents, a feature that is frequently utilized by practitioners in political communication (Jobst, 2007, 2010). The literature distinguishes two uses of the 1PP: the inclusive and the exclusive one (Tátrai, 2011, 2017). The inclusive 1PP encompasses the speaker, the addressee, and potentially additional individuals within its reference, as seen in Example 2 (Tátrai, 2011, 2017).

- (2) "Mi, magyarok persze azt is megtanultuk, hogy a biztonság nem barátság, hanem erő kérdése." (State of the Nation, 2022).

[We Hungarians have also learned that security is not a matter of friendship, but of strength.]

In Example 2, the first-person plural pronoun "we" encompasses the Hungarian speaker, the audience, specifically Hungarians viewing his address, as well as Hungarians in general. When employed in an exclusive manner, the referent of the 1PP encompasses the speaker and a third party, while excluding the addressee. This exclusivity is apparent in Example 3.

- (3) “Amikor 2010-ben a leggyengébb volt Magyarország, és ismét ránk maradt a kormányzás, megfogadtuk, hogy eltántoríthatatlanok leszünk, bízni fogunk a minden akadályon átrepítő közös akaratban, mindig kiállunk Magyarorszáért, és soha, de soha nem fogjuk feladni egyetlen percre sem.” (Speech, March 15, 2022).

[When Hungary was at its weakest in 2010 and we were once again left to govern, we vowed to be unwavering, to trust in our shared determination to overcome every obstacle, to always stand up for Hungary, and to never, ever give up, not even for a moment.]

In Example 3, the prime minister outlines the commitments he and his administration made when they took control of the country's leadership in 2010. In this instance, the focus is on him and his government, rather than the audience or Hungarians as a whole.

Finally, 3PP references can be determined negatively as compared to first- and second-person person-marking as the referent of third-person pronouns does not include the speaker or the addressee (Laczko & Tátrai, 2012; Tátrai, 2011, 2017). While the use of first-person pronouns in politics signals inclusivity, third-person pronouns express the “out-group” identity by excluding the referents from the “in-group” designated by first-person pronouns (Pennycook, 1994). This dichotomy is frequently emphasized in political discourse: first-person references are typically associated with positive connotations, whereas groups referred to in the third-person are often perceived negatively (Wales, 1996). Example 4 demonstrates the tension between the 1PP and 3PP referents.

- (4) “A Brüsszelből érkező zsoldosokat sem először vetik be ellenünk, és mi tudjuk, hogyan kell szétkergetni őket.” (State of the Nation, 2022).

[This is hardly the first time mercenaries from Brussels have been deployed against us, and we know how to chase them away.]

In Example 4, the 1PP alludes to the Fidesz government, against which the European Union, metonymically represented by “Brussels,” dispatched “mercenaries” that must be expelled from the country. It needs to be added that the use of the 3PP does not automatically signal negativity but can be used in a more general sense too (Wales, 1996; Wilson, 1990). For example, in Example 5, PM Orbán talks about “patriots,” which is also the name of the “Patriots for Europe,” a (far-)right sovereigntist political group Orbán and his allies formed in the European Parliament.

- (5) “A nyugati világ patriótái erőre kaptak.” (Speech, March 15, 2025).

[Patriots in the Western world have gained strength.]

In Example 5, the prime minister mentions politicians who hold a similar worldview to his own, which means the 3PP is unlikely to convey a negative tone.

As the examples above demonstrate, pronominal referents can encompass various groups including the administration (Example 3), the nation (Example 2), as well as people of a broader region, such as Central Europe (Example 7). How, then, can we ascertain the relationship between the speaker and the referents of various groups? Person-marking belongs to the study of deixis, the analysis of words and phrases that refer to a person (she), a place (here), or time (now) within a discourse context. To conceptualize the relationship between speaker and referents, we employ the experiential view of deixis, as articulated by Marmaridou (2000).

“Experiential realism” holds the stance that the way we experience the world around us bears consequences on language use (Marmaridou, 2000). In this vein, person deixis can be interpreted as an act of “pointing out,” namely, it “involves the linguistic act of pointing to an entity in space, performed by an authorized speaker and directed to an unfocused addressee” (Marmaridou, 2000, p. 100). This “linguistic act” of pointing out is based on the physical act of a human being pointing out to someone or something in the presence of another human being (Marmaridou, 2000). Deixis is

generally egocentric<sup>4</sup>: the speaker relates the entities of the outside world to themselves (Levinson, 1983). Thus, the speaker determines the world relative their “I.” This conceptualization of deixis is licensed by the center-periphery image schema (Marmaridou, 2000). (Image schemas are conventionally written in small capital letters.) Image schemas are abstract conceptual representations of our perceptual experiences of the physical world (Johnson, 1987). The center-periphery image schema shows that humans observe the world from their perceptual and experiential center (center), observing entities (for example other humans and objects) from various distances (periphery) with certain entities being closer to them (physically, emotionally, etc.) than others (Johnson, 1987; Lakoff, 1987).

According to Rees (Rees, 1983, as cited in Jobst, 2007), personal pronouns can also be placed at varying distances from the speaker, based on how “close” they are conceptually to the speaker.

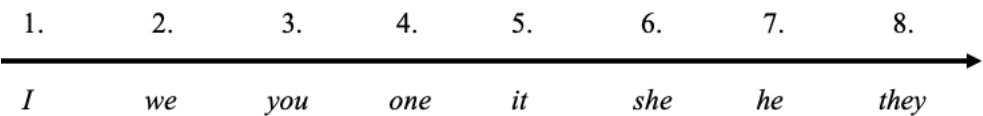


Figure 1. Distancing from the self („I”) via personal pronouns (Rees, 1983, cited by Jobst, 2007, p. 32).

The guiding principle of Figure 1 is that a speaker formulates their message from their subjective reference point (the “I”) and formulate their message relative to themselves (Wilson, 1990). However, the model requires certain modifications in the Hungarian language, as proposed by Horváth (2024b). In Hungarian, the pronouns marked with numbers 5, 6, and 7 can be combined because there is no distinction between grammatical genders, so the ranking in this case will be as follows: I, we, you, one (the general subject), it/she/he, they.

Szabó (2021, 2022, 2024, 2025b) introduced the radial model of deixis, as depicted in Figure 2 (adapted to Hungarian by Horváth, 2024b), building upon the framework established by Rees (1987) and the experiential, image-schematic perspective of deixis articulated by Marmaridou (2000).

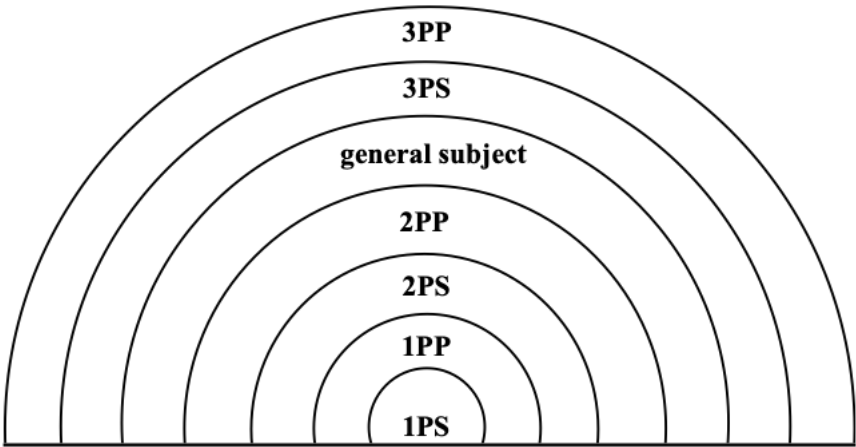


Figure 2. The relative distance from the speaker (based on Rees, 1983, cited by Jobst, 2007, p. 32, and Szabó, 2021, p. 65).

Figure 2 depicts the methodological framework of the study, illustrating how distance from the speaker is represented through concentric circles within the center-periphery image schema. The center-periphery schema consists of three structural components: entity, center, and periphery (Benczes & Kövecses, 2016). In this case, the entity is the individual identified by the pronominal references, the center indicates the first-person singular (1PS). The next pronoun, the 1PP represents

the group to which the speaker belongs and therefore, it is the closest to the speaker's experiential center. As we move towards more periphery, referents of personal pronouns are conceptually further from the center, with the 3PP representing the group farthest from the speaker. In Hungarian, unlike in Indo-European languages, the function of personal pronouns is often taken over by verbal affixes (suffixes/endings) or other grammatical devices (Magyari et al., 2022; Tolcsvai Nagy, 2017). Person-marking fulfills the same functions as personal pronouns, i.e., reference and antecedent identification (Heltai & Juhász, 2002), and thus achieves the same result as interpreting the radial model (for previous applications, see Horváth, 2024b, in press).

### 3. Viktor Orbán's (war) rhetoric

During the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Viktor Orbán, then a young political figure, delivered a significant address calling for democracy in 1989 in Hungary. This speech, that garnered him national popularity occurred at the reburial ceremony of Imre Nagy, the executed prime minister of the 1956 anti-Soviet Hungarian revolution; during this event, he called for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops and the announcement of free elections (Sükösd, 2022; Szilágyi & Bozóki, 2015). Since that time, delivering regular speeches has become a central communicative practice for PM Orbán to disseminate his perspectives on both domestic and international matters (Sükösd, 2022; Szilágyi & Bozóki, 2015). For example, he is a frequent participant at the Bálványos Free Summer University and Summer Camp in Băile Tușnad (Tusnádfürdő), an event that has been held regularly since the fall of the communist regime in Romania. At this venue, he has often articulated his ideas, including the advocacy for an "illiberal democracy" in 2014 (Karapetjana et al., 2023). In his speeches, Orbán has portrayed himself as the representative and protector of "true Hungarians," while characterizing his political adversaries as treacherous usurpers backed by foreign powers intent on undermining Hungary (Sata, 2023; Suuronen, 2025; Toomey, 2020; Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021). His addresses reinforce and reconstruct the dichotomy between the Hungarian people and various "enemies" of the people and incite crises and fears (Csehi, 2019; Sata, 2023).

While Orbán's speeches continue to be pivotal in establishing his political agenda, their content has altered considerably since 1989. Following his tenure in government from 1998 to 2002 and subsequent electoral defeat in the same year (Szilágyi & Bozóki, 2015), by 2010, his second administration demonstrated a significantly altered political strategy characterized by increasingly authoritarian tendencies and heightened nationalist beliefs (Bocskor, 2024; Özoflu & Arató, 2023; Toomey, 2020; Sata, 2023). As the nationalist-populist sentiment has grown, illiberal actions, such as violations of the rule of law and restrictions on freedoms, along with the erosion of checks and balances, and the control of the media have progressively increased in Hungary (Bocskor, 2024; Özoflu & Arató, 2023; Sata, 2023).

Similar tendencies characterize Hungarian international affairs, as the Orbán government has implemented a populist approach in its foreign policy, characterized by the politicization of decision-making processes, the expansion of international partnerships with authoritarian regimes (e.g., Russia), and a more confrontational approach towards traditional allies, such as the EU and NATO (Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021; see also Özoflu & Arató, 2023; Schmidt & Glied, 2024). Nonetheless, Orbán's sovereigntist agenda does not imply an intention for Hungary to withdraw from these alliances, resulting in a "role conflict" (Hettyey, 2022, p.260; Agoston, 2024; Lamour, 2024). This conflicting role is further evidenced by the Hungarian government's decision to strengthen its ties with Russia (citing energy security as the rationale), which has come at the expense of its relations with the European Union; this has led to Hungary being perceived as a "Trojan horse" within the EU (Özoflu & Arató, 2023, p.720; Bocskor, 2024; Fábíán, 2022)5.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the rift between the Hungarian government and its allies widened significantly, leading to concerns within the EU regarding Hungary's position on Ukraine (Özoflu & Arató, 2023). The origins of the strained relations between Hungary and Ukraine can be traced back to the mid-2010s, centered around the issue of Hungarian minority rights

(Schmidt & Glied, 2024, p.257; Toomey, 2020). Although the Hungarian government presented itself as an advocate for Ukraine's EU membership after Russia's annexation of Crimea (Bocskor, 2024), it obstructed NATO-Ukraine meetings and a joint EU resolution (Visnovitz & Jenne, 2021). Another oft-cited reason for the tension between Hungary and Ukraine is the Ukrainian comprehensive education reform of 2017 that restricted the use of minority languages in education (Özoflu & Arató, 2023; Szabó & Lipiński, 2024)<sup>6</sup>. After Russia's aggression in 2022, tensions remained high as Hungary declined to offer military assistance to Ukraine or allow its land to be used for transporting such aid directly to Ukraine (Lamour, 2024). As the conflict dragged on, Orbán held Ukraine responsible for its continuation and the resulting economic impact, asserting that neither party can achieve victory through military action (Schmidt & Glied, 2024).

The Hungarian government's attitude to Russia amidst the war in Ukraine has been neutral or even somewhat friendly, with no criticism towards President Putin (Dudlák, 2025). In February 2022, prior to the war, PM Orbán visited Russia on a so-called "peace mission,"<sup>7</sup> advocating for a peaceful resolution (Dudlák, 2025; Schmidt & Glied, 2024). Following the onset of the full-scale conflict, the Hungarian government adopted the terminology used by Russia, characterizing the invasion as a "special military operation" (Schmidt & Glied, 2024). Despite maintaining a cordial demeanor, all 19 sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia were adapted by Hungary until October 2025. However, the Prime Minister and Péter Szijjártó, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade often delayed or moderated these measures, expressing criticism and asserting that the sanctions against Russia were ineffective<sup>8</sup> (Bocskor, 2024; Fábián, 2022; Sata, 2023; Schmidt & Glied, 2024).

The discourse of government on international affairs plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, particularly since foreign policy does not typically occupy a central place in citizens' concerns (Krekó, 2019). Additionally, the Orbán administration maintains significant influence over Hungary's public media (Dudlák, 2025), which showed support for Russia at the onset of the war (Dudlák, 2025). It later adopted more pragmatic approaches by describing the situation as a "war in the neighborhood" to balance its narratives (Bocskor, 2024, p.144). Concerning PM Orbán's communication style regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war, Szabó and Lipiński (2024) observed that his online presence was characterized by a notable lack of empathy towards Ukraine. At the onset of the full-scale invasion, his Facebook posts indicated an awareness of the dire circumstances resulting from the conflict. (It needs to be added that at the beginning of the conflict, Orbán personally welcomed Ukrainian refugees at the border (Dudlák, 2025; Schmidt & Glied, 2024).) However, rather than expressing sympathy, he invoked emotions of sadness and pity. This governmental communication style may be attributed to the political leadership's pragmatic approach to foreign policy that is governed by national (economic) interest, leaving little space for moral considerations in decision-making (Dudlák, 2025; Fábián, 2022; Krekó, 2019; Lamour, 2024; Schmidt & Glied, 2024).

The communication strategy of the Orbán government concerning the war is also evident in public opinion surveys. According to the spring 2025 Standard Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2025), the Hungarian respondents agree with providing financial and humanitarian support to Ukraine (63%), and imposing economic sanctions on the Russian government, companies, and individuals (51%). However, a much lower ratio agrees with granting Ukraine a candidate status as a potential EU Member (34%) and financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine (40%). The results are corroborated by the survey of Policy Solutions, a Hungarian research institute reporting that solidarity towards Ukraine has decreased owing to the prolongation of the war as well as governmental war rhetoric (Kósa & Bíró-Nagy, 2025). As the Hungarian governmental communication has turned increasingly hostile about Ukraine, a visible decreasing trend of Hungarian humanitarian aid can be detected over the years, and the rejection of financial and military support is also broadly rejected (Kósa & Bíró-Nagy, 2025).

Notwithstanding governmental rhetoric, the attitude of the Hungarian populace towards Russia remained predominantly negative.<sup>10</sup> A nationally representative survey conducted in 2025 revealed

that the majority of Hungarians opposed closer ties with Russia (Bíró-Nagy & Molnár, 2025). Furthermore, in the same year, 60% of Hungarian respondents expressed the belief that Hungary aligns with the West, and a significant 79% continued to support the country's NATO membership (Bíró-Nagy & Molnár, 2025).

#### 4. Corpus and method

The corpus of this study comprises speeches delivered by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán over a three-year period, from 2022, the year marking the commencement of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, to the present, i.e., the end of 2025. Building on the know-how gained from his 1989 speech, Viktor Orbán has developed a series of four regular, seasonal speeches over the decades; each covers one season of the year: the State of the Nation addresses (winter), speeches on the March 15 and October 23 national holidays (spring and autumn), and speeches at the Kötöcske Civic Picnic (summer) (Sükösd, 2022). Accordingly, we examined these speeches with the exception of the Kötöcske Civic Picnic as this event is a closed strategic meeting from which information has long been leaked only (Sükösd, 2022). Moreover, from the period under review, only the most recent talk, from 2025, is available in its entirety. (Apart from the 2025 address, the most recent speech transcript from this event dates to 2015.) Thus, we have instead chosen to analyze the speeches of October 23 – a day of historical significance in Hungary, like March 15. The reasoning behind this is that these talks are of great interest to the Hungarian public, they are essentially addressed to the nation and occur annually. A total of 16 speeches were extracted from the Prime Minister's official website (<https://miniszterelnok.hu/>) and analyzed (N = 16), resulting in a combined transcript of 57,852 words.

The prominence of Viktor Orbán underscores the rationale for selecting this corpus as a key source of information pertaining to crisis communication within the Hungarian government (Bene et al., 2020). Orbán's speeches are disseminated through various channels, including audiovisual media and written formats, allowing them to reach a broad audience. Furthermore, news portals consistently cover his remarks, further amplifying the potential audience and ensuring that this content can be accessed by millions.

Our research investigates the degree of personalization from a linguistic perspective by analyzing personal pronouns across various cases, including subject, object, partitive, and possessive cases. In Hungarian, in addition to personal pronouns, number and person are more frequently indicated by verb person suffixes and possessive suffixes (Tolcsvai Nagy, 2017); therefore, the paper also deliberately examines these person markers. The first-person singular refers to the individual's more prominent role and personalization, while the first-person plural indicates group identity (Urban, 1986). Furthermore, in the context of political personalization, how politicians view not only the "in-group" but the "out-group" or, more specifically, the third-person is altered (Szabó, 2024). Wales (1996, p. 61) notes that while the 1PP is presented positively, the referents of the 3PP are framed negatively. The 3PP clearly indicate who the 'other' is, as it prototypically excludes both the speaker and the addressee(s).

The research employs corpus linguistic methods to investigate the phenomenon of political personalization within the Hungarian political discourse in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The paper employed a cross-sectional research design utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and the analysis was carried out in the following steps. First, the speeches delivered by the Prime Minister during the specified time frame were collected, and then the texts were read (cf. Proctor & I-Wen Su, 2011). Subsequently, the authors manually built the corpus and analyzed the transcripts by searching for person markers corresponding to the first-person singular (1PS), first-person plural (1PP), and third-person plural (3PP) – these expressions are summarized in Table 1.



**Table 1.**

**The 1PS, 1PP, and 3PP forms of personal pronouns, verb person suffixes, and possessive suffixes in the Hungarian language.**

|     | <i>Personal pronouns</i>   | <i>Verb person suffixes</i>                 | <i>Possessive suffixes</i>                    |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 1PS | én, engem, engemet, rajtam, bennem, nálam, rám, belém, hozzám, rólam, belőlem, tőlem, nekem, velem, értem, énengem, énengemet, énrajam, énbennem, énnálam, énrám, énbelém, énhozzám, énrólam, énbelőlem, éntőlem, énnekem, énvelem, énértem            | -k,<br>-m                                   | -m, -om, -am,<br>-em, -öm, -im,<br>-aim, -eim |
| 1PP | mi, minket, rajtunk, bennünk, bennünket, nálunk, ránk, belénk, hozzánk, rólunk, belőlünk, tőlünk, nekünk, velünk, értünk, mirajtunk, mibennünk, mibennünket, minálunk, miránk, mibelénk, mihozzánk, mirólunk, mibelőlünk, mitőlünk, mivelünk, miértünk | -nk, -unk, -ünk<br>-uk, -juk,<br>-jük, -zük | -nk, -unk, -ünk,<br>-ink,<br>-aink, -eink     |
| 3PP | ők, őket, rajtuk, bennük, náluk, rájuk, beléjük, hozzájuk, róluk, belőlük, tőlük, nekik, velük, értük, őrajtuk, őbennük, őnáluk, őrájuk, őbeléjük, őhozzájuk, őróluk, őbelőlük, őtőlük, őnekik, ővelük, őértük   | -nak, -nek<br>-ik, -ják                     | -uk, -ük, -juk,<br>-jük, -ik, -aik,<br>-eik   |

The numerical values of 1PS, 1PP, and 3PP were summed. This study takes a qualitative approach to examining the use and meaning of first-person plural (1PP) references in political discourse. While also focusing on their quantitative distribution, the analysis explores how different forms of “we” express varying degrees of collective identity. In earlier research, first-person plural (1PP) references were typically classified into groups such as 1PP<sub>Family</sub>, 1PP<sub>Party</sub>, 1PP<sub>Nation</sub>, 1PP<sub>Nations</sub>, 1PP<sub>EU</sub>, and 1PP<sub>Humanity</sub> (Urban, 1986; Beard, 2000; Horváth, 2024a, 2024b; Szabó, 2021, 2025b; Proctor & I-Wen Su, 2011). It is possible to establish additional, war-related alliance system categories, such as 1PP<sub>NATO</sub>, to reflect the geopolitical context; the current study aims to develop further subcategories. For this purpose, a qualitative, bottom-up approach was employed to explore the meanings and contextual nuances of 1PP usage in political discourse; therefore, the categories were not predetermined but were developed during the manual analysis process. In addition, a qualitative method is employed to analyze third-person plural (3PP) references, focusing on determining the specific groups to whom the “they” referred. Although a qualitative, traditional pen-and-paper approach was employed in this part of the method for identifying categories in the speeches, the classifications have also been quantified. In further qualitative analyses, we focused specifically on those that addressed the topic of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

The following analytical steps were adopted. Sentences containing 1PS, 1PP, and 3PP person markers were manually collected from the transcripts of the speeches and analyzed on a sentence-by-sentence basis. The person markers within each sentence were placed separately in the appropriate category in the database. If there was an anaphoric or cataphoric reference within the sentence, the category was selected on that basis (Bazzanella, 2002; Jobst, 2007). In instances where it was unclear to whom the person marker referred, reliance was placed on the broader textual context for clarification (Bazzanella, 2002), as in Examples 6–7.

- (6) “Ebből fakadóan az igazi feladat a számunkra, hogy a háború fényénél megpróbáljuk újra megérteni a Nyugatot.” (Băile Tușnad speech, 2024).

[For this reason, our real task is to try to understand the West anew in the light of war.]

Based on Example 6 alone it is not evident which group is determined by the referent that would need to understand the “West,” which can also have multiple referents (see Szabó, 2025a). However, the broader contextual reading unlocks the group designated in Example 6, as evidenced by Example 7.

- (7) “Ebből fakadóan az igazi feladat a számunkra, hogy a háború fényénél megpróbáljuk újra megérteni a Nyugatot. Ugyanis mi, közép-európaiak a Nyugatot irracionálisnak látjuk.” (Báile Tuşnad speech, 2024).

[For this reason, our real task is to try to understand the West anew in the light of war. For we Central Europeans see the West as irrational.]

While the first sentence in Example 7 allows for multiple interpretations of the marked person, the second sentence makes it clear that the first-person “we” refers to Central European people.

Furthermore, in Hungarian, a person can be marked multiple times in the same phrase, for example, *a mi háborúnk* [we + our war] contains both the personal pronoun *mi* [we] and the possessive suffix *-nk* [our]. In such cases, the sentences were recorded only once in the research database to avoid distorting the results; thus, personal pronouns were not considered as separate hits but were recorded together with verb conjugations and verbal inflections.

Finally, in accordance with corpus linguistic conventions, the number of occurrences was normalized to 1,000 words (Gries, 2010), and the results were recorded in a Microsoft Excel file.

Certain hits were excluded from the analysis, as outlined below. Three of the personal pronouns presented in Table 1 – *értem* “for me/I understand,” *értünk* “for us/we understand,” and *mi* “we/what” – may serve not only as personal pronouns but also as verbs or as pronouns that replace nouns (Horváth, 2024b). The first meaning indicated in English is that the terms function as personal pronouns, while the second meaning refers to the non-personal pronoun form. We filtered these from the corpus by examining the context to ensure the results would not be distorted. Quotations not originating from the Prime Minister were also excluded from the analysis.

## 5. Results and discussion

The results show that in the Hungarian PM’s communication between 2022 and 2025, first-person plural references were the most frequent, followed by third-person plural and first-person singular 1PP, followed by 3PP with 30%, while the 1PS accounts for 7%. The normalized frequency (per 1,000 words) of the analyzed person markers based on the annual totals is summarized in Figure 3.

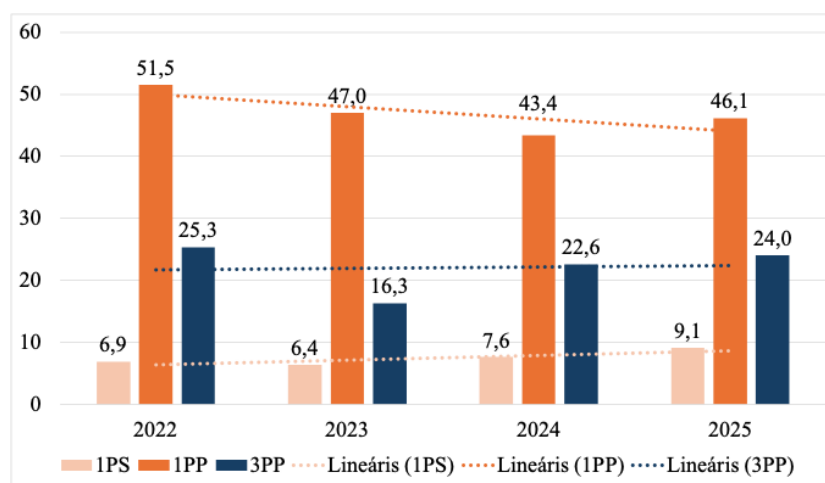


Figure 3. The normalized frequency (per 1,000 words) of 1PS, 1PP, and 3PP person markers in the analyzed speeches from 2022 to 2025, based on the annual totals.

Over time, there is an upward trend in the results for 1PS and 3PP, and a downward trend in the data for 1PP person markers, as shown in Figure 3. The extent of change is lower in the case of the previously mentioned markers (i.e., 1PS and 3PP); however, the results of this study indicate a more

significant decrease in the case of 1PP. The data reveal that, for Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, communication in the first-person is increasingly shifting towards singular, rather than group dynamics, as time passes. Additionally, references to third persons are playing an increasingly important role in his communication. These findings are consistent with the notion that since 2010, Hungary has emerged as a stronghold of populist governance, marked by the characterization of the nation as a homogeneous internal group that must fight against some kind of “external enemy” (Juhász et al., 2015).

Standard deviation is high among 1PS ( $\sigma = 4.5605$ ) and 3PP ( $\sigma = 12.0888$ ) person markers because the data varies significantly relative to its average and mean. In contrast, 1PP ( $\sigma = 13.3459$ ) exhibits a moderate standard deviation, indicating noticeable variability, but not extreme. The frequency normalized to a thousand words ranged from 0 to 15.4 for 1PS statements, from 33.2 to 88.8 for 1PP references, and from 4.3 to 45.9 for 3PP statements. Their simple arithmetic means are, in the same order: 5.4, 5.1, and 24.6. The distribution of the person markers among the analyzed speeches is shown in Figure 4.

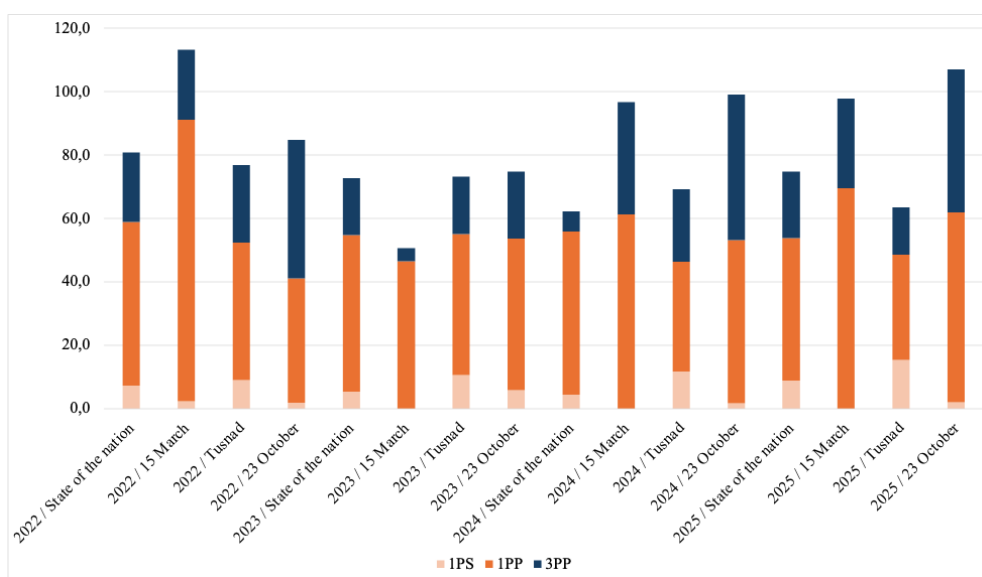


Figure 4. The normalized frequency (per 1,000 words) of 1PS, 1PP, and 3PP person markers in the analyzed speeches between 2022 and 2025.

As seen in Figure 4, the first-person singular occurs much more frequently in the Băile Tuşnad (Tusnádfürdő) speeches because they are more personal in nature than an average prime ministerial address, thus more personalized, while in other speeches, 1PS references occur less frequently – for example, in the speeches of March 15, there were zero hits in the last three of the four years, but even in 2022, the hits were only 2.3 normalized to 1,000 words. This trend can presumably be explained by the fact that the PM communicates less personally in a commemorative speech than, for example, in a lecture at a summer camp.

Furthermore, by calculating the proportional distribution ratios, we found that 1PP was the most common in almost all speeches, followed by 3PP and then 1PS. The order of frequency differed in only one case, namely in the speech of October 23, 2022, where 3PP was the most common, followed by 1PP, and finally 1PS.

The remainder of this paper presents the more specific meaning of person markers, specifically, who the Hungarian Prime Minister was referring to when he used them. Based on Szabó (2021, 2022, 2024, 2025b) and Horváth (2024b), several subcategories of 1PP have been identified in earlier research, typically classified as 1PP<sub>Family</sub>, 1PP<sub>Party</sub>, 1PP<sub>Nation</sub>, 1PP<sub>Nations</sub>, 1PP<sub>EU</sub>, and 1PP<sub>Humanity</sub>. In line with this approach, the categories shown in Figure 5 were created, and the following results are shown.

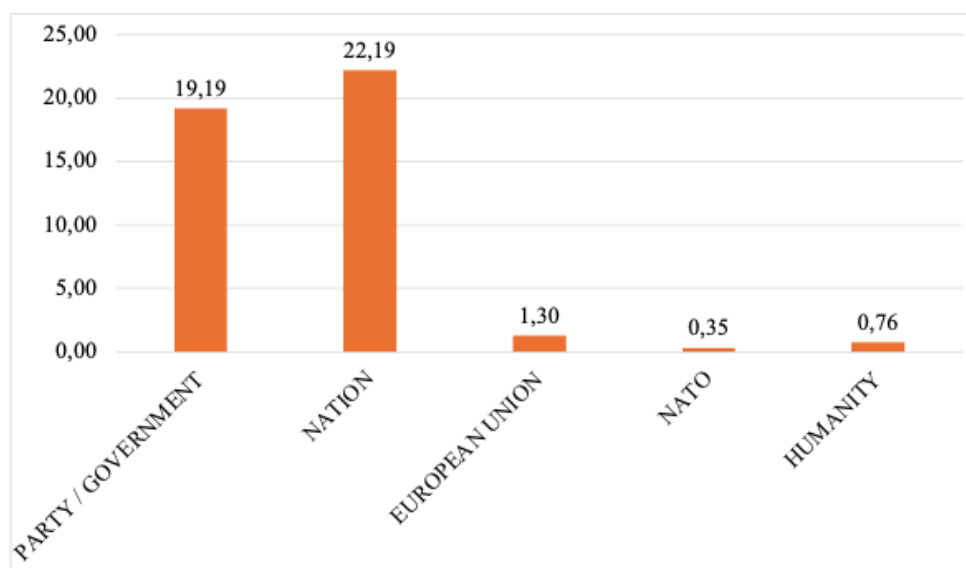


Figure 5. The normalized frequency of 1PP person markers (per 1,000 words) by categories, referring to party/government, nation, EU, NATO, and humanity.

As can be seen from the data, PM Orbán most often used first-person plural references when speaking on behalf of the nation (normalized hits = 22.19), which is in line with our expectations, given the fact that since 2010, the ruling party has referred to itself as “national,”<sup>11</sup> which necessarily involves the use of first-person plural person markers referring to the nation. Reference to the nation is seen in Example 8.

- (8) “*Mi, akik ma itt összejöttünk, különböző emberek vagyunk, de egy dolog közös bennünk: magyarok vagyunk, akiknek közös szenvedélye Magyarország.*” (State of the Nation, 2022).  
[Those of us gathered here today are all different people, but we have one thing in common: we are Hungarians who share a passion for Hungary.]

This is followed in order by references to the party and/or government (normalized hits = 19.19), demonstrated by Example (9).

- (9) “*Nehéz év ide vagy oda, tavaly is sikerült közelebb hoznunk magunkhoz a külhoni magyarokat, elvégre nemzeti kormány volnánk.*” (State of the Nation, 2024).  
[Despite the difficult year, last year we managed to bring Hungarians outside the homeland closer to us; after all, we are supposed to be a national government.]

In line with Horváth’s (2024b) research on Hungarian political communication during the coronavirus pandemic, the other subcategories lag far behind the nation, party, and government: the European Union (Example 10; normalized hits = 1.30), the NATO military alliance (Example 10; normalized hits = 0.35), and humanity (Example 11; normalized hits = 0.76), followed by other markers, for example joint statements on behalf of Hungary and other nations, Central Europe, Europe as a continent, or “the West” and “the East.”

- (10) “*NATO- és európai uniós tagok vagyunk, és közben kiegyensúlyozott politikai viszonyt és gazdasági kapcsolatokat ápolunk Oroszországgal.*” (State of the Nation, 2022).  
[We are members of NATO and the European Union, while maintaining balanced political relations and economic ties with Russia.]

(11) “*Amiről beszélek, és amivel szemben állunk, az valójában egy világrendszer-váltás.*” (*Báile Tuşnad speech, 2024*).

[What I am talking about, and what we are facing, is in fact a change in the world order.]

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate how the occurrences of first-person plural categories evolved over the examined period. The normalized frequencies across the years generally show comparable levels. However, a notable trend emerges: in line with the personalization of politics, 1PP person markers referring to the party/government (1PP<sub>Party/government</sub>) decrease. However, references to the the nation (1PP<sub>Nation</sub>) exhibit an unexpected decreasing trajectory. The decline in 1PP<sub>Nation</sub> is particularly surprising, as previous research (Horváth, 2024a, 2024b) characterized the Hungarian government’s communication, including that of the Prime Minister, as showing that the usage of these person markers is getting more frequent. In the present corpus, a contrary trend has emerged; the declining trend in references to the nation is also noteworthy and surprising, as the ruling party still refers to itself as “national.”

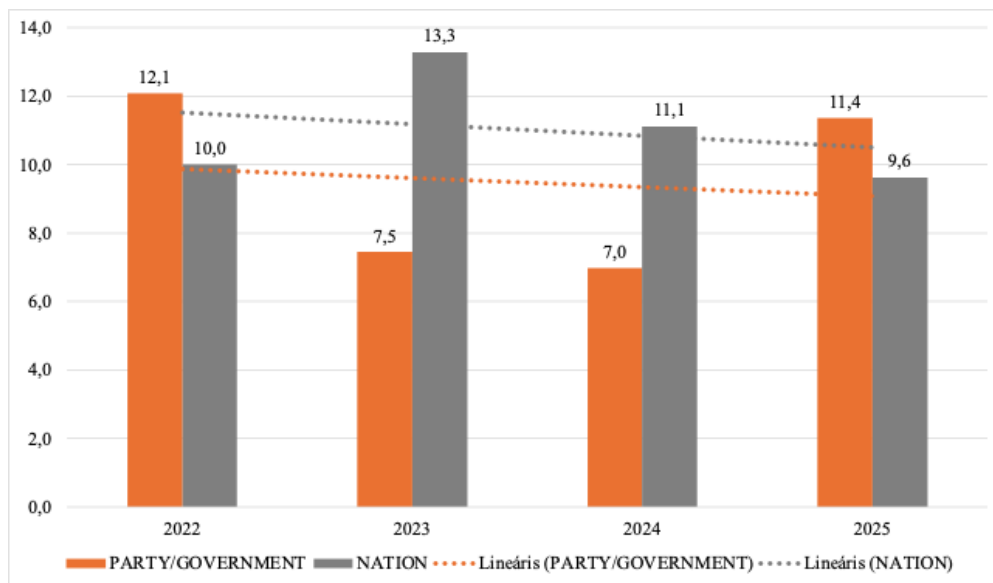


Figure 6. The normalized frequency of 1PP person markers (per 1,000 words) by categories, referring to party/government, and nation, aggregated by year.

References to the European Union (1PP<sub>EU</sub>) show a significant decline. The frequency dropped sharply from 1.3 per thousand words in 2022 to 0.4 in 2023 and 0.3 in 2024, with a slight recovery to 0.5 in 2025, suggesting that PM Orbán increasingly avoids speaking on behalf or as a member of the European Union (i.e., using 1PP forms to represent the EU). This decrease contrasts with the findings of Horváth (2024b), where an increase in these references occurred during the first three waves of the coronavirus pandemic, when Hungary sought financial and political support from the 27-member bloc. Rather, the Prime Minister currently tends to refer to the EU using the third-person plural (3PP) category (see Figure 9).

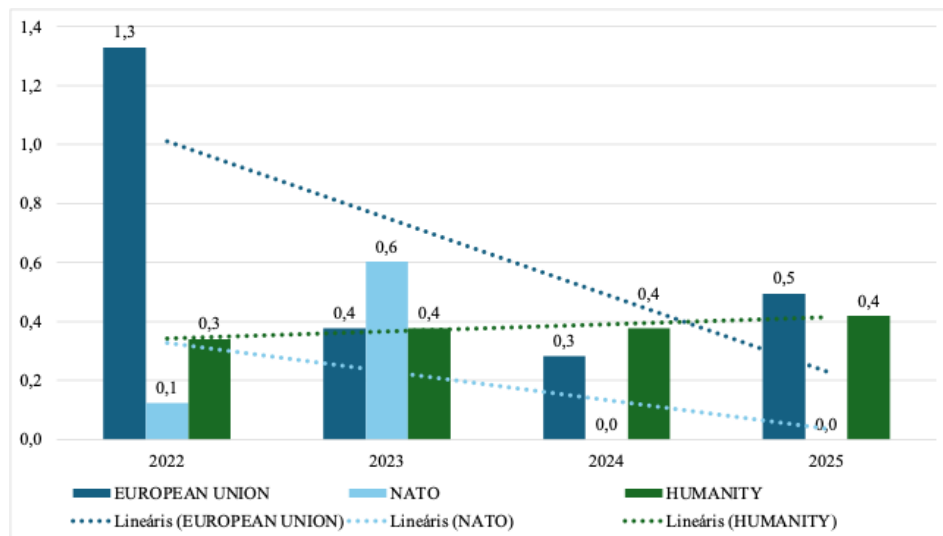


Figure 7. The normalized frequency of 1PP person markers (per 1,000 words) by categories, referring to EU, NATO, and humanity, aggregated by year.

The NATO military alliance, as a category (1PP<sub>NATO</sub>), appeared with initial enthusiasm in 2022 and 2023, likely attributable to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, this category did not appear even once in the speeches analyzed for 2024 and 2025, indicating a shift in the focus of Hungarian prime ministerial communication.

Conversely, 1PP nominations referring to humanity unexpectedly increased over the studied period. This upward trend is noteworthy because government communication did not frequently employ this meaning of 1PP even during the global coronavirus pandemic. This emerging pattern is in line with Viktor Orbán's ambition to position himself globally among illiberal leaders, as evidenced by his English-language account on X that was registered in 2022 (Sonnevend et al., 2024).

Figure 8 presents the categories in a manner that distinguishes the results for each individual speech, rather than displaying them in an aggregated format. The relatively high fluctuation suggests that the overall intensity of in-group identification is highly context-dependent, potentially reflecting the political importance or external challenges faced at the time of the speech.

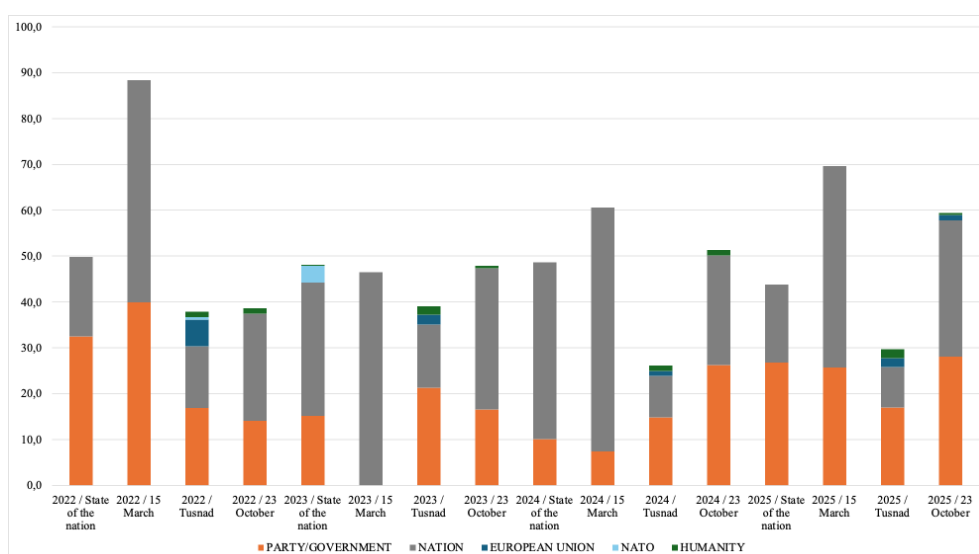


Figure 8. The normalized frequency of 1PP person marker categories (per 1,000 words) in the analyzed speeches.

A closer examination of the data reveals that rhetorical goals tailored to each occasion influence the preferred in-group identification. Speeches delivered on national holidays (March 15 and October 23) and the State of the Nation address tend to feature a high total volume of 1PP markers, with 1PP<sub>Nation</sub> often being highly prominent, particularly in the March 15 speeches; for example, in 2023, all the person markers were those related to the nation. While the Băile Tușnad (Tusnádfürdő) summer camp speeches, traditionally political and strategic in nature, also maintain high total usage but exhibit greater internal variability. Conversely, 1PP<sub>Party/government</sub> consistently forms a robust base across all four types of speeches, often taking up a relatively larger proportion in some October 23 and State of the Nation speeches, suggesting a more direct focus on governmental action and party ideology in these settings.

Analyzing the data reveals a clear shift from referencing institutional alliances to a broader, global 1PP identification. References to key Western institutional structures – i.e., in this case 1PP<sub>EU</sub> and 1PP<sub>NATO</sub> – are characterized by their scarce, low-level appearance, followed by a near-total disappearance in subsequent years. NATO was strictly confined to the early 2022 and 2023 speeches, appearing in the 2022 Băile Tușnad speech and the 2023 State of the Nation address, reflecting the immediate geopolitical concerns following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Similarly, references to the European Union were scarce, appearing more visibly in every analyzed year's Băile Tușnad speeches, as well as last year's October 23 speech.

Subsequently, the 1PP<sub>Humanity</sub> exhibits a distinct and growing trend; while remaining low in absolute frequency, this global identification appears consistently in the later speeches of 2024 and 2025. The emerging usage across high-profile platforms signals a deliberate, steady increase in its normalized frequency, irrespective of the specific speech type. PM Orbán's communication is moving away from identifying with institutionalized European structures and is instead deploying a broader, transnational “we,” i.e., humanity. The data support the interpretation that the Hungarian Prime Minister's communication is strategically moving away from identifying with institutionalized European structures and is instead deploying a broader, global “we,” i.e., humanity, to frame issues, possibly to contextualize domestic and regional challenges within a perceived worldwide threat matrix, thereby maintaining a focus on danger while circumventing traditional political alliances.

The results of the third-person plural person markers are presented in the continuation. Figure 9 illustrates the frequency of different external groups (out-groups) referred to using 3PP in PM Orbán's speeches. When finalizing the 3PP referent groups, only categories that occurred at least 10 times ( $\geq 10$ ) in the corpus of the present study were considered; hence, those with fewer than 10 hits were excluded from further quantitative analysis and included in the “other” category.

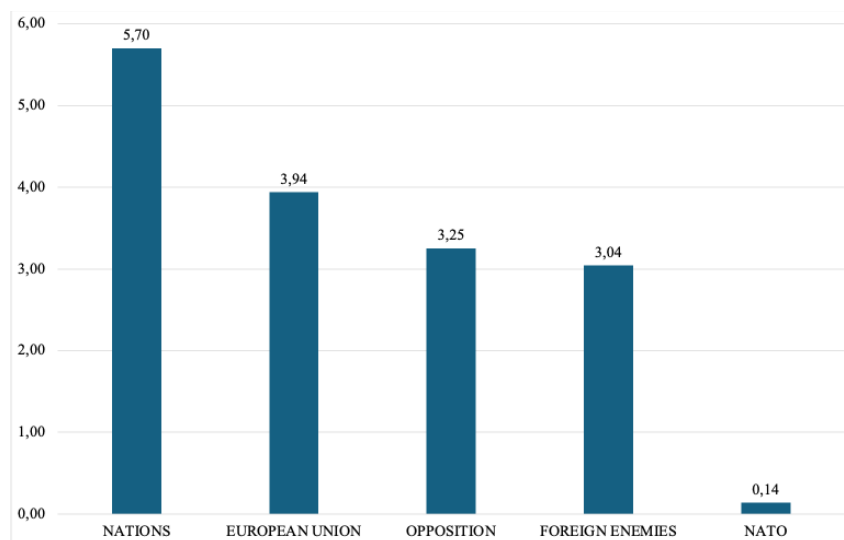


Figure 9. The normalized frequency of 3PP person markers (per 1,000 words) by referent.

The group referring to nations (3PP<sub>Nations</sub>) shows the highest overall frequency, registering 5.70 occurrences per thousand words, suggesting that other nations constitute the most frequent external referent when PM Orbán employs 3PP markers. This category does not necessarily encompass EU and NATO members, as seen in Example 12.

- (12) “*A szomszédaink biztosak lehetnek abban, ha bajba kerülnek, a magyarokra mindig számíthatnak.*” (State of the Nation, 2024).

[Our neighbors can be sure that if they get into trouble, they can always count on the Hungarians.]

The European Union (3PP<sub>EU</sub>; Example 13) follows as the second most frequent category at 3.94. While the domestic opposition group (3PP<sub>Opposition</sub>; Example 14) is the third most frequent, with 3.25. Foreign enemies (3PP<sub>Foreign enemies</sub>; Example 15) are cited with a frequency of 3.04, placing them fourth. While the NATO alliance (3PP<sub>NATO</sub>; Example 13) exhibits a significantly lower frequency of only 0.14 per 1,000 words.

- (13) “*Na, most abban a veszélyes helyzetben vannak, vagyunk, hogy úgy kell valahogyan segíteniük de facto részes félként az ukránokat, hogy a moszkvai hatalom ezt ne érezze úgy, Moszkva szemében ez ne váljon egy olyan helyzetté, amikor mi, a NATO és az Európai Unió formális hadviselő felekké válunk.*” (Băile Tușnad speech, 2022).

[Well, now they are, we, are in a dangerous situation where they have to help the Ukrainians as a de facto party to the conflict in such a way that the authorities in Moscow do not feel that, in Moscow’s eyes, this is becoming a situation where we, NATO and the European Union, are becoming formal parties to the conflict.]

- (14) “*Sohase felejtsük el, hogy a mi igazi ellenfelünk nem a magyarországi ellenzék, hanem az ő gazdájuk.*” (State of the Nation, 2025).

[Let us never forget that our real enemy is not the Hungarian opposition, but their master.]

- (15) “*Összefogás nélkül idegenek uralkodnának rajtunk, előbb-utóbb kiforgatnának mindenükből, és adósrabszolga sorba juttatnának.*” (Speech, October 23, 2024).

[Without unity, strangers would rule over us; sooner or later, they would take everything we have and turn us into bonded laborers.]

Figure 10 shows how the occurrences of third-person plural categories evolved between 2022 and 2025 by year. The frequency of 3PP<sub>Nations</sub> dips slightly from 2022 to 2023 by 0.1 occurrences per thousand words, but then sharply increases to its peak in 2024 (normalized hits = 8.1) before projecting a significant drop in 2025 (normalized hits = 3.0). Despite the prominent spike in 2024, the overall trendline shows a gradual decline in the normalized usage of 3PP for this group.

While 3PP person markers referring to the European Union (3PP<sub>EU</sub>), the linear trendline clearly indicates an increasing tendency, which is consistent with the fact that the number of statements made on behalf of the European Union decreased in the case of 1PP references in our research corpus (see Figure 7). All this may also point to a trend whereby Hungarian government communication tends to deflect responsibility, blaming external actors, such as “Brussels” (Horváth, in press).



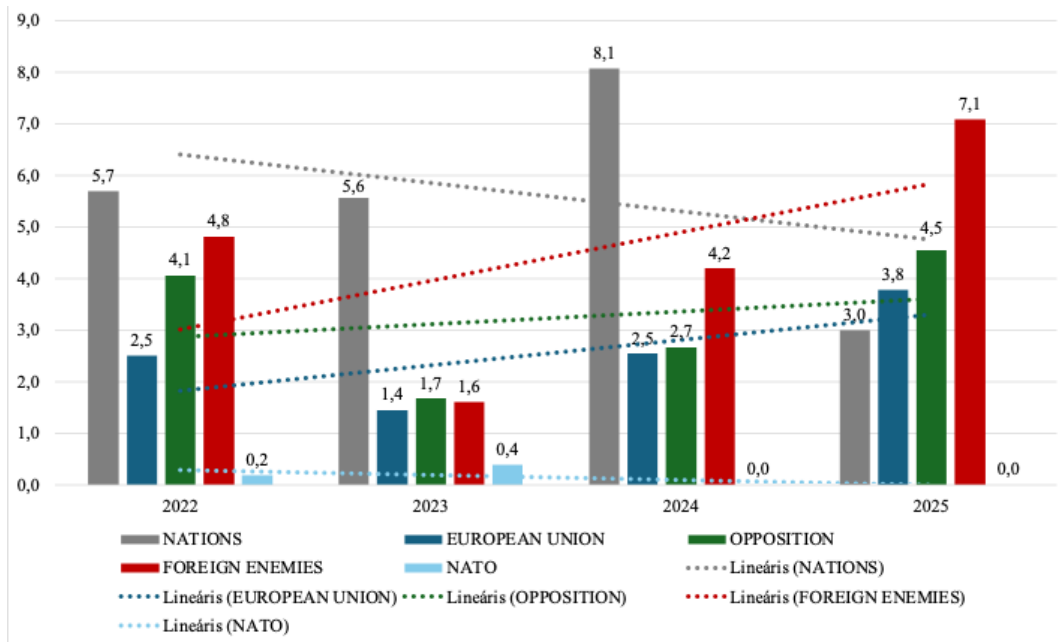


Figure 10. The normalized frequency of 3PP person markers (per 1,000 words) by categories, referring to nations, EU, opposition, foreign enemies, and NATO, aggregated by year.

The frequency for the opposition exhibits a relatively stable but slightly increasing pattern over the four-year period. In 2022 and 2025, the frequency of the 3PP<sub>Opposition</sub> category was higher, while in 2023 and 2024 it was lower, with normalized frequencies of 4.1, 1.7, 2.7, and 4.5, respectively. Based on this, we can assume that the PM is more inclined to refer to the opposition using the third-person during election years or in the campaign leading up to them.

Foreign enemies are also frequently mentioned in the Hungarian Prime Minister's communication, in line with populist rhetoric (Juhász et al., 2015). The 3PP<sub>Foreign enemies</sub> category shows the strongest upward trend. This includes statements in which, for example, liberals or "the West" are referred to as enemies in the third-person. Nevertheless, the exact referents of the 3PP<sub>Foreign enemies</sub> often remain vague, as seen in Example 15, allowing the PM to construct the omnipresent enemies of the nation.

Furthermore, the results of 3PP<sub>NATO</sub> align with those of 1PP<sub>NATO</sub>, as in both cases, it appears that although the occurrences are low, references to NATO in a linguistic sense were observed in 2022 and 2023, while in 2024 and 2025, the hits were solely zero.

Data-driven analyses can offer insights into the frequency and distribution of person-marking; however, to thoroughly investigate the subtleties of person references and their influence on political discourse, we must delve into their qualitative analysis (Szabó, 2022, 2025). While corpus-based data can reveal the patterns of references PM Orbán made to different groups and whether he perceived Hungary as part of these, qualitative interpretations can illuminate their discursive construction. In the context of Russia's war on Ukraine, understanding the Hungarian leadership's stance towards its allied partners is crucial, given the ongoing obstructions of measures against Russian aggression (see Section 3). Therefore, the following examines how Hungary's two key allies, the EU and NATO, were referenced in the corpus.

In his references to the European Union, PM Orbán regularly voices his criticism, as shown in Example 16.

- (16) "*E remek stratégia következtében azonban úgy áll a helyzet, hogy ma egy olyan kocsiban ülünk, amelynek mind a négy kereke defektet kapott.*" (Băile Tușnad speech, 2022).  
[However, as a result of this brilliant strategy, we now find ourselves sitting in a car with all four tires flat.]

Example (16) represents the European Union metaphorically, as a dysfunctional car with four flat tires. Although the European Union's intricate institutional framework might be challenging for the audience to understand, flat tires can effectively illustrate the PM's perspective on the EU. When referring to the NATO by means of 1PP person markers, the Hungarian Prime Minister also voiced his concerns. However, he employed a less demeaning language, citing what could have been done to prevent the war, as demonstrated by Example (17).

(17) *“Adhattunk volna garanciát, hogy Ukrajnát nem vesszük fel a NATO-ba, de az ellenkezőjét tettük, és megerősítettük a korábbi, 2008-as döntésünket, hogy fel fogjuk venni őket.”* (State of the Nation, 2023).

[We could have given a guarantee that we would not admit Ukraine to NATO, but we did the opposite and confirmed our earlier decision from 2008 that we would admit them.]

As seen in Example 17, the Prime Minister spoke on behalf of the whole alliance in elaborating on what the NATO could have done. This indicates that he sees Hungary as a member of this alliance. However, he also draws attention to the consequences of being part of this group in Example 18.

(18) *“Ugyanakkor, miután NATO-tagok vagyunk, és ki akarunk maradni ebből a háborúból, kényessé vált a helyzetünk, mert a NATO és az Európai Unió úgy döntött, hogy bár nem válnak harcoló félle, de fegyvert szállítanak, és súlyos gazdasági szankciókat vetnek ki, és [...] részesévé váltak ennek a konfliktusnak.”* (Báile Tuşnad speech, 2022).

[At the same time, as we are NATO members and want to stay out of this war, our position has become delicate because NATO and the European Union have decided that, although they will not become combatants, they will supply weapons and impose severe economic sanctions, and [...] they have become involved in this conflict.]

In the case of Example 18, it is noteworthy that the speech explicitly acknowledges Hungary's NATO membership. However, when he discusses Ukraine's military support and Russia's sanctioning, the Prime Minister switched to 3PP references, e.g., “they will supply weapons,” “they have become involved in this conflict”. Thus, it appears that the Hungarian government wishes not to take any part in the war, while the NATO and EU do contribute to it as external entities. This aligns with patterns of responsibility attribution in Hungary, which suggests that responsibility is primarily attributed to external actors, such as “Brussels,” Western Europe, and opposition parties by using 3PP person markers – especially in times of crisis, and when addressing issues that are uncomfortable for the government (Horváth, in press).

The government's distance from the policies implemented by its allies is also evident in Example 19, where the PM refers to the EU's support of Ukraine as “warmongering policy.”

(19) *“Brüsszel azt is sérelmezi, hogy háborúpárti politikának nevezzük azt, amit ők csinálnak.”* (Báile Tuşnad speech, 2024).

[Brussels also deplores the fact that we call what they are doing a warmongering policy.]

It is noteworthy that in Example (19), the European Union is referred to as “Brussels” via the CAPITAL FOR GOVERNMENT metonymy in the corpus. This strategy conceptualizes the EU as a person, rather than abstract entity, hence making it more accessible to the citizens (Benczes & Szabó, 2020). This way of understanding the EU allows politicians to stir strong emotions against it, similar to the feelings one might have towards an individual (Charteris-Black, 2011). However, it is not only people in the metaphorical sense that the PM made mention of in his speeches: he drew a contrast between the policymakers of the EU, labelled as “Brusselites” and ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine in Example 20.

(20) “*Brüsszeliták még nem adták életüket ebben a háborúban, de magyarok már adták.*” (State of the Nation, 2023).

[Brusselites have not yet lost their lives in this war, but Hungarians already have.]

Finally, not only international, but domestic politics also came to the forefront in the examined speeches. In Example 21, the PM also noted that the EU wishes to intervene in the 2026 Hungarian parliamentary election.

(21) “*Ezért Brüsszelben bejelentették, hogy meg fognak szabadulni Magyarország nemzeti kormányától. Azt is bejelentették, hogy egy brüsszeli bábkormányt akarnak az ország nyakába ültetni.*” (Speech, October 23, 2024).

[That is why Brussels announced that it would get rid of Hungary’s national government. It also announced that it wanted to impose a Brussels puppet government on the country.]

Example 21 illustrates that, according to the speech, the European Union oversteps its role by interfering in Hungary’s national elections. In response to the rising opposition against the Orbán government, particularly the Tisza Party, which gained popularity in 2024, the Prime Minister sought to depict his domestic adversary as an ally of the European Union.<sup>12</sup>

## 6. Conclusions

The rhetoric employed by the Hungarian government has been characterized by conflictual language (Benczes & Szabó, 2020). Viktor Orbán has declared a war on COVID-19 (Horváth, 2024b; Szabó & Béni, 2021; Szabó & Szabó, 2022), on LGBTQ and gender-rights (Gera, 2023), and recently issued a call to arms against the European Union (Szabó et al., 2025). However, on 24 February 2022, Russia initiated a genuine, full-scale war against Ukraine, necessitating unprecedented unity within the EU and NATO. Due to its amicable relations with the Russian leadership, the Hungarian government has persistently disrupted this unity, navigating a delicate balance between the EU, NATO, and its Eastern partners (Schmidt & Glied, 2024). The Fidesz-led government’s increasingly critical and confrontational stance towards its allies has primarily manifested in its communication strategies (Schmidt & Glied, 2024). Through the lens of governmental communication, shaped by senior officials, particularly PM Orbán, Russia’s war on Ukraine is primarily framed by citing Hungarian national security concerns and national economic interests, which are constructed upon Eurosceptic tones and nationalist beliefs (Dudlák, 2025; Özoflu & Arató, 2023).

Owing to his influence on Hungarian public discourse, this paper examined annual addresses delivered by Viktor Orbán, who can be considered as the key communicator of the Hungarian government. By examining the use of person-marking in the Prime Minister’s rhetoric, we identified how the tendencies in using first-person singular and first- and third-person plural forms reflect the PM’s perceived role and the group dynamics within his remarks. Over time, a noticeable increase in 1PS references highlights the personalization of politics, where the focus shifts to the individual personas of politicians. The predominant in-groups included references to the Fidesz party/government (1PP<sub>Party/government</sub>), the nation (1PP<sub>Nation</sub>), the European Union (1PP<sub>EU</sub>), NATO (1PP<sub>NATO</sub>), and the whole of humanity (1PP<sub>Humanity</sub>). In line with the Hungarian government’s self-definition as a “national government,” the 1PP<sub>Nation</sub> references outnumber other in-groups. Nevertheless, the 1PP<sub>Nation</sub> exhibits an unexpected decreasing trajectory, while more general references show an increasing trend (1PP<sub>Humanity</sub>). With regards to Hungary’s key strategic partners, first-person references to the European Union (1PP<sub>EU</sub>) and NATO (1PP<sub>NATO</sub>) exhibit a significant decline; at the same time, third-person references to the EU increased (3PP<sub>EU</sub>), marking Hungary’s drift away from allies in the wake of intensifying and prolonged conflicts between the Hungarian government and its partners. Furthermore, we delineated the 3PP<sub>Foreign enemies</sub> references, encompassing Hungary’s external “adversaries.” Nevertheless, the exact denotata of this category remains ambiguous.

Although data-driven results can highlight the various groups that the PM discursively constructed and their occurrence over the year, the discursive construction of these groups can be fully explored by a more nuanced qualitative examination. Given the Orbán governments dubious relationship with the NATO and EU in the context of the war, we focused on how the Prime Minister represented these two organizations in his speeches. While he openly acknowledged that Hungary is (still) a member of these alliances with 1PP references, he also voiced his criticism. In the case of policies the Hungarian government opposed, the addresses relied on 3PP, designating the NATO and the EU as the out-group. This rhetorical strategy implies the conceptual distance between Hungary and its closest allied partners.

This study acknowledges several limitations. Primarily, our examination of four annual speeches does not fully capture the comprehensive scope of Viktor Orbán's or the Hungarian government's communication strategies. For instance, an analysis of social media platforms could potentially uncover a broader range of political communicative strategies. Additionally, our analysis was solely focused on person-marking, which constitutes only one aspect of the diverse array of communicative strategies utilized in political rhetoric. Due to the size of the corpus and the specific features of the methodology, the present study could not quantitatively separate the statements in the speeches by topic. In the future, it would be worthwhile to analyze the sample with other corpus linguistic methods, for example by metaphoric and metonymic language usage, to gain a broader understanding not just on the explicit, but the implicit meaning of the Hungarian prime ministerial communication during a war-time period. Finally, it is important to note that political leadership positioning is not merely a linguistic issue; it can be examined from many other aspects, but this study sought to highlight the pragmatic side of the phenomenon under investigation.

In sum, our primary objective was to illustrate how references to individuals reflect political realities, including the use of personalized language and geopolitical strategies through the construction of in-groups and out-groups.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> EU sanctions against Russia <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/>
- <sup>2</sup> Examples referenced in this article are derived from the speeches analyzed: the annual State of the Nation address, the March 15 national holiday speech, the Băile Tușnad (Tusnádfürdő) summer camp speech, and the October 23 national commemoration speech.
- <sup>3</sup> All translations from Hungarian are the authors' own. Initial drafts were prepared using DeepL and subsequently reviewed and corrected by the authors.
- <sup>4</sup> See Szabó (2025b) for a concise overview of non-egocentric perspectives.
- <sup>5</sup> Hungary's diversification of its relations towards the East is a part of its "Eastern Opening" strategy. For a more detailed discussion, see Greiling (2023).
- <sup>6</sup> Note that in 2025, Ukraine submitted a draft education law to Hungary, which partially addresses Budapest's demands concerning language policy in schools (Bandouil, 2025).
- <sup>7</sup> In July 2024, Prime Minister Orbán undertook another unsuccessful "peace mission" to Ukraine and Russia, meeting with Ukrainian President Zelensky, followed by a visit to Russian President Putin three days later. For more details, see Rácz (2024b).
- <sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the sanctions imposed on Russia, see Rácz et al. (2023).
- <sup>9</sup> However, Krekó (2019) noted that Hungary adopted a more favorable stance towards Russia compared to Western nations.
- <sup>10</sup> An explanation of the elevated ratio of first-person references is provided by Magyari et al. (2022). They suggest that the frequent use of first-person plural pronouns in everyday language serves as a linguistic indicator of hubristic personality traits. This is often observed in successful politicians, leading to an overconfidence that can result in poor judgment on certain matters or even unethical actions (Magyari et al., 2022).
- <sup>11</sup> Az Országgyűlés 1/2010. (VI. 16.) OGY politikai nyilatkozata a Nemzeti Együttműködésről.

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<sup>12</sup> For further information regarding the Tisza Party, refer to Rácz (2024a).

### Declaration of competing interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest or funding for this research.

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## ОДНА ЛЮДИНА ТА ЇЇ ВІЙНА: МАРКУВАННЯ ОСОБИ І ГЕОПОЛІТИЧНЕ ПОЗИЦІОНУВАННЯ У ВИСТУПАХ ВІКТОРА ОРБАНА (2022–2025)

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Рукопис надійшов 26.10.2025; отримано після доопрацювання 22.11.2025; прийнято до друку 24.11.2025;  
опубліковано онлайн 25.12.2025

### Анотація

Після повномасштабного вторгнення Росії в Україну у 2022 році Європейський Союз і НАТО загалом досягли консенсусу щодо підтримки України та запровадження санкцій проти Росії. Втім уряд Угорщини обрав інший підхід, послідовно перешкоджаючи процесам ухвалення рішень. Це порушує питання про те, як угорські лідери позиціювали країну на тлі цих розбіжностей під час російсько-українського конфлікту. У статті досліджено риторику прем'єр-міністра Віктора Орбана, основного речника уряду Угорщини, з метою з'ясувати, як він репрезентує власне лідерство та різні групові динаміки, пов'язані з Угорщиною та її народом. Використовуючи експерієнціальний підхід до маркування особи та методи корпусної лінгвістики, ми проаналізували чотири його щорічні виступи за 2022–2025 роки, зосереджуючись на словах першої особи однини й множини, а також на третій особі множини. Використання першої особи вказує на те, наскільки промовець акцентує власну точку зору в риториці. Посилання на першу й третю особу множини дозволяють виявити різні внутрішньогрупові й міжгрупові відмінності. Наше дослідження свідчить, що прем'єр-міністр дедалі частіше висловлював власні погляди у своїх зверненнях, водночас дистанціюючи Угорщину від її звичних союзників і формуючи наратив, зосереджений на «зовнішніх супротивниках». Ці тенденції демонструють, як політичні діячі можуть маніпулювати структурою альянсів у своєму дискурсі та сприяти відкату від демократії, нормалізуючи наративи про зовнішні загрози.

**Ключові слова:** *маркування особи, особові займенники, політична персоналізація, політична риторика, російсько-українська війна.*

### Декларація про конфлікт інтересів

Автори заявляють про відсутність будь-якого конфлікту інтересів щодо статті.